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**11.4 Public health, amenity and safety update and actions taken in North Richmond and Abbotsford**

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose

This report has been prepared in response to the Council resolution dated 10 September 2019 requesting that Officers bring forward a report the 8 October Council Meeting outlining:

- actions taken to date by Council on addressing the many amenity issues raised by residents and traders in the North Richmond/Abbotsford precinct;
- further actions which could be taken and any timeline for these; and
- interim measures which Council could undertake in place of the requested Taskforce, to provide a forum where resident issues can be raised and addressed, and which could inform the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative when it is finally established.

### Key Issues

An active street-based drug market, principally in the trade and consumption of illicit heroin, has existed in and around Victoria Street for well over two decades. The impacts of this trade for the community are manifold.

To reduce the harms from heroin use, the Victorian Government established a trial Medically Supervised Injection Room (MSIR) located at the site of North Richmond Community Health, with a transitional facility becoming operational in mid-2018 and a larger purpose built facility completed and operating by mid-2019.

Many members of the North Richmond and Abbotsford community advocated to the Victorian Government for a trial of an MSIR. However, the public health, amenity and safety of North Richmond and Abbotsford (the precinct) is a contested issue. While expressing dissatisfaction with safety and amenity in the area, the majority of the community continue to display compassion and support for people who inject drugs.

There is a considerable number of initiatives within the precinct to promote public health, safety and amenity, some of which pre-date the trial of MSIR and others of which are new. This includes a suite of responses from stakeholders servicing the space including but not limited to Council, Victoria Police and the Victorian Government and its agencies and commissioned services.

Due to the complexity of these issues, and the variety of stakeholders in the space, a coordinated and planned approach to achieving and maximising outcomes for our community is considered the best way forward.

Progressing further actions or interim measures will require community support and ownership, thoughtful consultation and engagement with local businesses, community and other stakeholders as will thorough consideration of likely costs, benefits and risks of each option.

### Financial Implications

Funding has been allocated to those existing initiatives outlined within this report. With respect to potential new initiatives listed within the options section, there are financial and human resources that would need to be allocated to support implementation. If Council directs that new initiatives to be undertaken, resources will have to be redirected from existing initiatives. Resources can also be allocated to initiatives through the 2020–21 budget.

## **PROPOSAL**

This report provides a holistic account of all current and imminent initiatives, by Council and all other front line agencies, to promote community health, wellbeing, amenity and safety. Recently, Council significantly increased the resources allocated to ameliorate drug impacts and promote the amenity of the precinct. Given this, the second option provided is for Council to advance the needs of our community, vigorously engage with this initiative, and be instrumental in helping to shape its terms, objectives and implementation.

Within the options, an interim measure to provide a forum where resident issues can be raised and addressed has been included. Option one is to facilitate a time-limited Community Reference Group (discontinued within three months of the commencement of the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative at Richmond Housing Estate).

The Victorian Government has made a three-year commitment to the Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative. The place manager has been appointed and is already connecting with frontline agencies and meeting with community groups, residents, traders and others. Given this, the second option provided is for Council to advance the needs of our community, vigorously engage with this initiative, and to be instrumental in helping to shape its terms, objectives and implementation.

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**11.4 Public health, amenity and safety update and actions taken in North Richmond and Abbotsford**

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Reference: D19/165196

Authoriser: Director Community Wellbeing

[Help](#)**Purpose**

1. This report has been prepared in response to the Council resolution dated 10 September 2019 requesting that Officers bring forward a report the 8 October Council Meeting outlining:
  - (a) actions taken to date by Council on addressing the many amenity issues raised by residents and traders in the North Richmond/Abbotsford precinct;
  - (b) further actions which could be taken and any timeline for these; and
  - (c) interim measures which Council could undertake in place of the requested Taskforce, to provide a forum where resident issues can be raised and addressed, and which could inform the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative when it is finally established.

**Background**

2. An active street-based drug market has existed in and around Victoria Street for well over two decades. It developed when law enforcement activity pushed the street trade in illicit drugs, particularly heroin, from Russell Street in the CBD to other areas of Melbourne, including the City of Yarra, initially relocating to Smith Street in Fitzroy and Collingwood before becoming entrenched in North Richmond and southern Abbotsford (the precinct).
3. People come to this area from all over Melbourne to purchase and use (in-situ) illicit drugs, principally heroin. Drug-related activity and impacts have been long standing concerns for the local community and include open dealing, public injecting, overdoses, inappropriately discarded syringes and associated waste and crimes to fund drug purchases.
4. In October 2017, the Victorian Government announced a two-year trial of a Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) at North Richmond Community Health (NRCH).
5. In mid-2018, a transitional MSIR became operational in a refurbished space within the existing NRCH building.
6. A new purpose built facility opened in mid-2019 on the NRCH site, this new MSIR:
  - (a) Operates at effectively double the capacity of the transitional facility;
  - (b) Has extended operating hours (current) from 7:00am to 9:00pm weekdays and 8:00am to 7:00pm weekends; and
  - (c) Relocates the Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) internally instead of within the NRCH building.
7. There are a number of initiatives that have been undertaken within the precinct of North Richmond and Abbotsford (the precinct) to promote public health, safety and amenity, both prior and subsequent to the trial of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR). These are outlined in this report.
8. Council officers have been monitoring public health and amenity impacts since the opening of the MSIR for both people who inject drugs (PWID) and the local community. There is, unfortunately, limited published data available to date. Council officers and other stakeholders are awaiting the release of data by the Victorian Government and its agencies on ambulance attendance, crime statistics at the smaller geography (i.e. below suburb level) and related information. It has been reported in the media and anecdotally that ambulance attendances have reduced. The Victorian Government has stated that the independent

evaluation, through which all aspects of the trial will be assessed, is currently underway, with findings reported in 2020.

9. Senior officers have met with the evaluation panel and given comprehensive feedback on the impacts of the MSIR, across a range of domains including health, amenity, safety, community engagement and working relationships.

#### MSIR Legislative Context

10. The legislation enabling the MSIR is the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Act 2017* ('The Act'). It prescribes that the MSIR is to be:
  - (a) Established for an initial two-year period and an option to extend the trial beyond 29 June 2020 for a further three years, but only once; and
  - (b) That the permitted site (location) of the MSIR is the land described in Vol. 09195 Fol. 045 (i.e. North Richmond Community Health, 23 Lennox Street, Richmond).
11. That objectives of the trial are recorded in Part IIA of the Act, which are:
  - (a) to reduce the number of avoidable deaths and the harm caused by overdoses of drugs of dependence;
  - (b) to deliver more effective health services for clients of the licensed medically supervised injecting centre by providing a gateway to health and social assistance which includes drug treatment, rehabilitation support, health care, mental health treatment and support and counselling;
  - (c) to reduce attendance by ambulance services, paramedic services and emergency services and attendances at hospitals due to overdoses of drugs of dependence;
  - (d) to reduce the number of discarded needles and syringes in public places and the incidence of injecting of drugs of dependence in public places in the vicinity of the licensed medically supervised injecting centre;
  - (e) to improve the amenity of the neighbourhood for residents and businesses in the vicinity of the licensed medically supervised injecting centre; and
  - (f) to assist in reducing the spread of blood-borne diseases in respect of clients of the licensed medically supervised injecting centre including, but not limited to, HIV and hepatitis C.
12. The trial of the MSIR is the responsibility of the Victorian Government. The Victorian Government independently selected the location for the facility. The registered proprietor of the land is the Secretary to the Department of Human Services. In relation to planning permits and building approvals, for both the transitional and purpose built facility, Council was not the responsible authority. The Victorian Government has exclusively resourced the construction and operations of the facility. The Victorian Government commissions and directs the provision of health and social services and law enforcement activities.

#### MSIR Evaluation

13. Under the legislation, the Minister for Mental Health must arrange for an independent review to be conducted. A Medically Supervised Injecting Room Review Panel has been appointed by the Minister for Mental Health to conduct the review.
14. The Victorian Government has stated that the independent panel is currently undertaking a review of the MSIR and their report is to be tabled before each house of the Parliament in 2020. The panel is being chaired by Professor Margaret Hamilton AO, alongside fellow panel members Associate Professor Alex Cockram and Mr John Ryan. After considering the evidence collected by the panel during the trial, a decision will be made on whether the MSIR should continue.

15. The Victorian Government has stated that under the Terms of Reference, the Panel will oversee the conduct of a review as outlined in the Act, including:
  - (a) the operation and use of the licensed medically supervised injecting room;
  - (b) the extent to which the object outlined in Part IIA of the Act has been advanced during the period of the medically supervised injecting room licence; and
  - (c) how Part IIA and any regulations made for the purposes of this Part of the Act have operated and whether they require amendment.
16. The Victorian Government has stated that the responsibilities of the Panel are to:
  - (a) develop, with the Department of Health and Human Services, the review scope, structure (including any preliminary or interim reports) and data and evidence collection requirements;
  - (b) review data and evidence to closely monitor the objects of the Act;
  - (c) provide the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services with a draft copy of the review, to inform a decision on whether the trial should be extended; and
  - (d) provide an endorsed review to the Minister for Mental Health prior to the completion of the two year trial, meeting the requirements outlined above.
17. The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services may extend the trial by amending the licence (held by NRCH) to change the day specified and publish a notice in the Government Gazette. The trial may be extended for a maximum period of three years beyond June 29 2020.

#### MSIR Operational Update

18. In addition to the supervised injecting facilities, the newly completed MSIR has expanded spaces for consulting. Services currently being delivered include:
  - (a) Legal services;
  - (b) Two oral health clinics;
  - (c) Occupational health and mental health nursing staff from St Vincent's Health;
  - (d) A blood borne virus coordinator providing responsive pathology and treatment;
  - (e) Treatment for drug dependence from UnitingCare ReGen; and
  - (f) Launch Housing providing a trial of in-reach services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
19. In relation to outcomes for clients of the MSIR, the Victorian Government has recently provided (September 2019) the following update to Council officers:
  - (a) More than 3,400 clients have registered to use the facility;
  - (b) Staff are supervising approximately 300 injections each day (in the purpose-built facility);
  - (c) Staff have responded to more than 1,800 overdoses;
  - (d) Co-location of the MSIR at North Richmond Community Health Centre has made it easier to connect PWID to vital health and social support services;
  - (e) Approximately one quarter of clients have indicated they would like assistance to access drug treatment, while over a third would like support to access treatment for hepatitis C; and
  - (f) Other health and social support services, including primary health, oral health and legal services are also being well used. Many clients have also been referred to housing and mental health care providers to address co-occurring and complex needs.

Precinct economic development

20. A pilot program has involved working in close partnership with business/property owners on Victoria Street to improve shopfronts. To maximise program impact, the pilot has centred on the area between Church and Lennox Streets on the southern side of Victoria Street. Four shops participating in the pilot had shopfronts upgraded in July 2018.
21. It was envisaged that this program will run over a three-year period. The program will be evaluated to inform the implementation of a further roll out over the additional two-year period. Implementation for year two of the project commenced in September 2018.
22. The Economic Development unit will complete the third year of the shopfront refresh program. This year there will be an additional three shops that will receive a facelift, taking the total number of shops to 12 across the three years. In addition, up to five awning 'shade banners' will be replaced in the same area.
23. All traders who have been part of the three-year program will be invited to provide feedback at an upcoming consultation which will provide valuable insight into the success of the program.
24. Council is committed to supporting the Victoria Street Business Association to become an effective traders association and to promote Victoria Street as a visitor destination.
25. In late 2018 a campaign developed by Council's Economic Development and Communications units was launched to promote and support Victoria Street. The campaign was titled *Rediscover Victoria Street* and is ongoing.

Richmond Retail Revitalisation Project

26. The Victorian Government initiated the Richmond Retail Revitalisation Project (RRRP). Its stated purpose is to: 'bring together key stakeholders to identify and discuss the issues affecting the Victoria Street and Bridge Road precincts and identify short- and long-term actions that may be undertaken to improve the economic, environmental, social and cultural health of the precincts.'
27. Delegates to a series of round tables included members of the Victorian parliament, Yarra City Councillors, representatives of local community institutions and organisations (NRCH, Richmond West Primary School), business and trader representatives, Victoria Police, and officers from across Council, state government and its agencies selected on the basis of subject or content matter expertise.
28. A report synthesising the deliberations and recommendations of the RRRP is expected later in the year.

Precinct amenity

29. Council maintains its principal role as promoting public health and amenity pursuant to the *Local Government Act 1989*. To this end, Council has undertaken a number of initiatives both prior to and since the opening of the MSIR in mid-2018. These are discussed in detail below.
30. A number of enhancements have been made to Council's syringe management services and associated cleansing activities.
31. Council has intensified programs in relation to public amenity, including maintenance and repair of street furniture and signage, graffiti and poster removal from its assets, and road and footpath cleansing.
32. Operations in this precinct have centred upon, but are not limited to, the area bounded by Victoria Street, Lennox Street and Butler Park.

Streetscape improvements

33. A key project within the Victoria Street Streetscape Masterplan was the upgrade of the Lennox Street/Nicholson Street intersections. The Nicholson Street corner was completed in October 2018 and includes new seating, paving, lighting, plantings, and improvements for

cyclists and pedestrians. These upgrades were partly funded by a grant from the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DoJCS) as part of the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund (PSIF).

34. A condition of the PSIF grant was to undertake an evaluation of the work's impact upon public amenity and community safety. The evaluation involves pre and post observational studies, street intercept surveys and analysis of various data sets. As part of the evaluation the following are to be considered:
  - (a) an increase in the number and diversity of people visiting, accessing and utilising the space;
  - (b) a reduction in criminal offences recorded across the different crime categories;
  - (c) decreases in drug activity;
  - (d) increases in perceptions of safety; and
  - (e) positive feedback from the community.
35. Evaluation of the upgrades funded by the PSIF are currently underway and are expected to be submitted to the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DoJCS) by October 2019.
36. Another Public Safety Infrastructure Fund grant application has recently been submitted to DoJCS regarding community safety improvements to the Victoria Street precinct under the PSIF Grant program. The Grant seeks funding for additional infrastructure in the Victoria Street Precinct spanning automated smart lighting, optimisation of syringe bin capacities via sensory technology, and graffiti sensory technology. Council will be notified by DoJCS on the outcome of this application in November 2019.
37. Council has approved capital works funding in 2019–20 to upgrade furniture, plantings, signage, tactiles and some pavement treatments along the full length of Victoria Street.

#### *Enhanced procedures and practices for syringe management services*

38. Council now directly manages all requests for syringe management services in the City. People can lodge service request by calling 9205 5555 or from the website by personal computer or telephone at <https://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/services/cleaning-and-maintenance/syringe-disposal>.
39. All customer service requests are recorded in Council's customer relationship management system (CRM) from there they are directed to Council's Waste Management and Cleansing team who assign the request to either Council cleansing crews or the contractor InnerSpace (coHealth). Council officers, and now InnerSpace, receive and complete request electronically via tablets with cellular functionality. Council can monitor drug-use impacts in real time which enables the effective triaging of incidents (syringes, related waste/damage).
40. Innerspace continues to manage syringe disposal units across the municipality and proactively collects discarded needles/syringes from streets, footpaths and other public spaces. Innerspace also provides outreach services to PWID and education and engagement with the broader community.
41. Council is also preparing for the trial deployment of smart sensors in syringe disposal units to monitor real-time capacity data to enhance responsiveness and service delivery.

#### *Cleansing services*

42. In mid-2019, resourcing of cleansing services in the precinct doubled, comprising street sweeping and a two-person cleansing crew doing daily foot patrols, in some areas in north Richmond/southern Abbotsford as many as three times per day (see Fig. 1 overleaf).

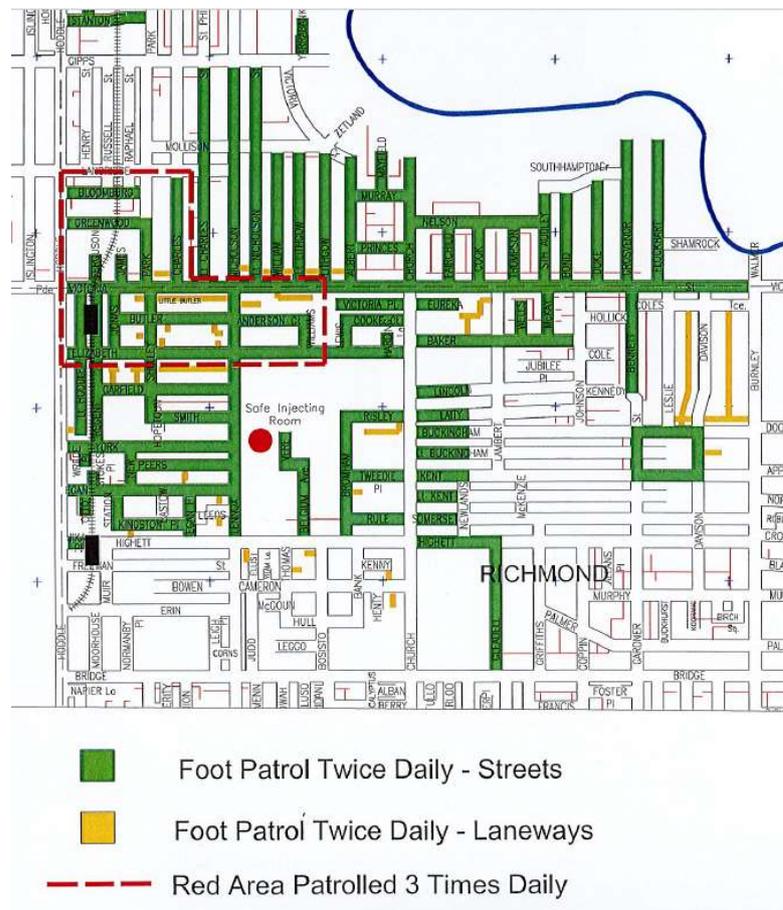


Fig. 1: Foot patrols – cleansing services

Community sentiment, dialogue and engagement

- 43. It is acknowledged that there are on-going public health, wellbeing, amenity and safety concerns impacting residents of North Richmond and southern Abbotsford.
- 44. There are, however, inherent limitations to these channels and forums in terms of public participation and the facilitation of dialogue.
- 45. The North Richmond/Abbotsford community is made up of a variety of stakeholders holding different functions: those sharing the space, those servicing the space and those talking (i.e. dialogue) in the space (see Fig. 2 below).

Sharing the space		Servicing the space			Talking in the space	
Traders	Private tenants	AmbulanceVictoria	North Richmond Community Health	CoHealth	VicGov (Local Reference Group, Gateway Group, et.al)	Residents for Victoria Street Drug Solutions
Estate tenants	People who inject drugs (PWID)	YSAS	Salvation Army Richmond Community Support Services	Brotherhood of St Laurence Work and Learning Programs	Victoria Street Business Association	Richmond Estate Safety Committee
Persons dealing	Visitors	Yarra City Council	Yarra Trams	DHHS Housing @ Richmond Place	MRAC	Print & Broadcast Media
		VicTrack	VicRoads	Metro Trains		
		Wilson Security (Estates)	VicPol	MFB		

Fig. 2 – Stakeholders in the community

Correspondence with Council

- 46. As of 2019, it is estimated that in the area of North Richmond and southern Abbotsford there are approximately 5,000 households with an estimated resident population of around 12,000 persons. (see Fig.3 below)



Fig. 3 – Locality measured for estimated households and population

- 47. Through its role in maintaining public amenity and as a community advocate, Council collects and tracks its own data. Council’s customer relationship management (CRM) system enables tracking of the volume and nature of community inquires and complaints.
- 48. For the calendar year of 2018, Council received a total of 36 formal inquiries/complaints on the topic of drug use impacts. As of September 2019, Council has received more than 50 such inquiries/complaints. It is noted that there are also additional, informal queries in the form of emails and phone calls on an on-going basis.
- 49. Officers also recently undertook a detailed assessment of customer feedback specifically related to the North Richmond and southern Abbotsford areas, for the period 2017–19. The search parameters were aligned to the key issues highlighted in the 2019 Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey. Results from this assessment once again highlighted drugs and related issues as being of greatest concern (51.5% of calls). These locations also featured heavily, with 51% of calls received during this time related to general amenity, liveability and neighbourhood decline of these two areas. (see Fig. 4 below)

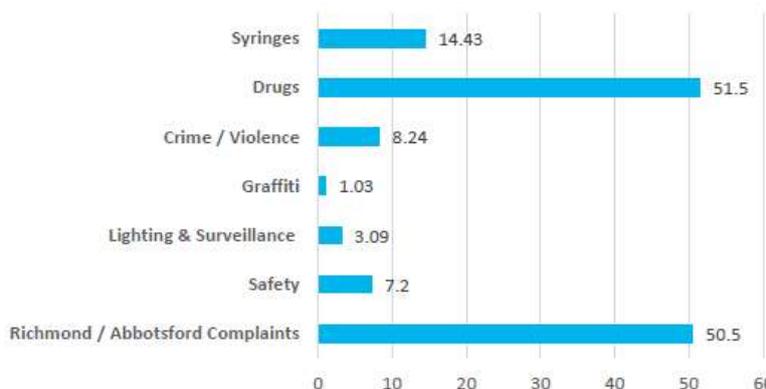


Fig. 4: Oracle Customer Feedback 2017 – 2019

- 50. Throughout various communications, the following impacts of the street-based drug trade/ consumption include but are not limited to the following:
  - (a) discarded needles;
  - (b) drug-related litter;
  - (c) human waste;
  - (d) witnessing drug dealing, consumption (public injecting) and overdose or other health emergency;

- (e) crimes against property and concern for crimes against the person (assault or robbery);
- (f) behaviours of concern and perceptions of safety; and
- (g) impact on commercial conditions (sales).

*Other communications channels and inter-agency forums*

51. There are a number of channels through which the community can report their concerns, and receive information and advice and there are also a number of forums through which issues are considered and responses generated by various agencies. These channels and forums include:
- (a) NRCH have a Media and Communications Manager and are engaging both proactively and reactively;
  - (b) DHHS are fielding enquiries through [aod.enquiries@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:aod.enquiries@dhhs.vic.gov.au) and on (03) 9096 7183; and
  - (c) Council continues to respond to inquiries through phone and electronic means (Oracle), our social media (direct messages and posts) and through the website, and officers have been taking and making phone calls whenever they can (people don't always provide their numbers) and have met people in person.
52. All of the information coming in through these different organisations is being shared and considered at the various inter-organisational forums and will help inform practice on the ground.
53. Ongoing inter-agency meetings are held weekly and include the agencies abovementioned, as well as Launch (HomeGround) and Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS). This is not an open group (although the existence of the group is not confidential), because many sensitive matters of funding and departmental negotiations and operational matters are discussed and it would not be appropriate for the community to participate in these discussions.
54. The Gateway Group – social and health agencies operating locally convened by DHHS NEMA – continues to meet regularly.
55. Also meeting monthly is the MSIR Local Community Reference Group, which includes residents (from both within the estate and outside), local school principals and traders, along with agencies and government. Community members are raising their concerns and ideas in-session and also out of session.

*North Richmond community drop-in information session*

56. In July 2019, the Victorian Government delivered the North Richmond community drop-in information session. The session was held on Thursday 25 July 2019 and saw approximately 330 people attend over the course of five hours. Representation spanned from the Department of Health and Human Services (Drug Policy and Reform, Social Landlord Framework, Office of Housing), Victoria Police, North Richmond Community Health and the City of Yarra, all of which actively engaged with attendees. The Victorian Government has stated that the objectives for the session were to:
- (a) Share information about what is being done and planned in the local area to address concerns about drug use and the Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR);
  - (b) Provide an opportunity for the local community to share their concerns about drug use and the MSIR, and to feel that their concerns are being heard and understood;
  - (c) Encourage the local community to identify solutions to address their concerns;
  - (d) Better understand the concerns of the local community and the opportunities to address them; and
  - (e) Promote the collaboration of local agencies working together to address the concerns about drug use and the MSIR.

57. The session attracted a mix of local residents – residents from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, residents of both private and public residences, Victoria Street traders, parents of young children (including students of West Richmond Primary School) and residents of a range of ages.
58. The Vietnamese community were the largest culturally and linguistically diverse group in attendance and included Victoria Street traders, long-term residents and mothers who live in the housing estate.
59. Attendees were typically reasonable and measured in their responses. Many, while describing their negative experiences, displayed compassion and support for people who inject drugs.
60. The majority of attendees, including those who were dissatisfied with safety and amenity in the area, appeared to value the opportunity to discuss their views.

#### *Community action groups*

61. Since the opening of MSIR there have been a number of community-initiated public meetings on the subject of public health, safety and amenity in the precinct, while new resident community groups have also emerged, joining pre-existing groups in public debate and dialogue.
62. The (M)SIR (R)esident (A)ction (C)ommittee, or MRAC was established in 2019. Their website states the following in response to the MSIR and the precinct:
  - (a) *MRAC represents a strong coordinated voice for residents of the Richmond and Abbotsford area directly impacted by the current location and operating model of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR), currently the only such facility in the whole of Victoria. Specifically, we seek to urgently address the significant detrimental impacts currently being experienced within the surrounding community;*
  - (b) *We are supportive of the MSIR as a progressive response to the issues associated with drug use and addiction in Victoria. We are, however, fundamentally opposed to the current trial location, as a result of the significant physical and psychological risks inherent in it being immediately adjacent to a primary school, community health centre, high density public housing, residential neighbourhood and significant (iconic) retail/dining precinct. It is the worsening detrimental impacts and ongoing risks to the local community that we are committed to addressing;*
  - (c) *These risks emerge from two key issues associated with what goes on around the MSIR, being the lack of active policing in the surrounding area (so as not to dissuade users from accessing the MSIR) and the release of drug affected individuals (including ice users) en masse into the surrounding community post using the MSIR; and*
  - (d) *We are sincerely requesting the Victorian Government to mitigate these extreme risks by relocating the MSIR to a more appropriate site, away from these incompatible land uses.*

Source: <https://mracgroup.com>

63. Recently, MRAC launched campaign: 'It's Not Ok - Kids And Drugs Don't Mix', related specifically to the location of the MSIR adjacent to Richmond West Primary School.
64. Victoria Street Drug Solutions is another group regularly participating in community dialogue in the precinct.
65. Officers have met with members of the MRAC executive on a number of occasions and have committed to on-going dialogue to further understand and respond to concerns raised.
66. Their website states the following:
  - (a) *We are residents for Victoria Street drug solutions Inc. – a group of residents from the Victoria Street precinct. We are directly and personally affected by the high levels of public drug taking and illicit drug dealing within our neighbourhood and welcome the opening of the north Richmond MSIC; and*

- (b) *We welcome your support in ensuring that during the two year trial of this facility that facts about our MSIC are heard and widely shared.*

Source: <https://www.vicstreetdrugsolutions.org>

67. Their aims are recorded as follows:

- (a) *To provide a representative voice for residents of North Richmond and Abbotsford – highlighting the impacts of public drug dealing, using and overdosing on the community;*
- (b) *To educate the community on the benefits and facts about medically supervised injecting centres, especially their role in saving lives; and*
- (c) *To heal and reimagine the Victoria Street precinct creating a safer precinct with greater amenity and appeal for all who live, work and visit our neighbourhood.*

Source: <https://www.vicstreetdrugsolutions.org>

68. The Victoria Street Business Association Inc. remain important stakeholders within the precinct.

69. While their website does not offer a formal position on the MSIR or drug-related issues, evidence obtained by Council officers in the way of meetings, phone calls and the Victorian Government's July drop-in information session identify common concerns related specifically to detrimental public amenity and safety impacts on the viability of business on Victoria Street.

#### *Views expressed in other forums*

70. A number of opinions, ideas and solutions have been expressed by private citizens, commentators and others through public meetings, social and traditional media. In no particular order these include:

- (a) Move the location of the MSIR away from a sensitive land use (school);
- (b) Close the MSIR or don't extend the trial;
- (c) Provide additional MSIRs in other parts of Greater Melbourne;
- (d) Reduce criminal activity by providing better alternatives (i.e. than methadone or buprenorphine) to manage opioid dependence such as prescribing hydromorphone (an opioid painkiller) or diacetylmorphine (medical heroin);
- (e) Fund capital projects for urban renewal;
- (f) Additional law enforcement and police presence;
- (g) Additional affordable housing and mental health support services;
- (h) Revisit eligibility criteria to use the MSIR (currently excluding people with court orders or bail/parole conditions prohibiting drug use);
- (i) Additional outreach to support drug-affected people and to provide de-escalation support to complex behaviours exhibited in the community;
- (j) More private security services around the MSIR, Richmond West Primary School and Victoria Street;
- (k) More PSOs on public transport (trains and trams on Victoria Street) and have PSOs patrol beyond public transport hubs;
- (l) Social infrastructure investment in the precinct;
- (m) Increased cleansing and public amenity response to improve cleanliness;
- (n) Provision of more CCTV including overlooking laneways;
- (o) Council-funded private CCTV or security devices on private properties in the precinct;
- (p) Revitalisation of Victoria Street;

- (q) More information and transparency from authorities providing updates on the MSIR progress;
- (r) More face-to-face engagement opportunities;
- (s) Youth workers and activities between youth and Police;
- (t) Establishment of a Youth hub; and
- (u) Additional avenues for school community to voice concerns about MSIR.

#### Council and community education and engagement

71. A variety of Council officers recently participated in the community stakeholder workshop drop-in at the Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House hosted by the Victorian Government, fostering face-to-face interactions with as many as 300 community members. This has been discussed earlier in the report at paragraphs 55–59.
72. Council officers continue to participate and contribute to a number of stakeholder groups including but not limited to the following:
  - (a) The MSIR Local Reference Group (established by the Victorian Government to facilitate dialogue with key local stakeholders and provide information on the operation of the facility);
  - (b) The Yarra Local Safety Reference Group, a quarterly committee convened by Council officers to coordinate a whole of community partnership response to community safety issues in the City of Yarra;
  - (c) Council officers participate in and contribute to monthly Richmond Safety Committee meetings, convened by DHHS at the Richmond Housing Estate; and
  - (d) Council officers participate and contribute to monthly Community Partnerships meetings convened by Victoria Police at Richmond Police Station.
73. Council officers have recently published a new 'community safety and wellbeing' page on the Council website, including information on the MSIR, Drug Help Locally (see below), syringe management services, closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV) and Rediscover Victoria Street.

#### *Drug Help Locally (Victoria Street Community Protocols)*

74. In 2012, Council, in partnership with several agencies, developed the *Protocol for the Management of Illicit Drug Use Issues in Yarra*. The protocol provided guidance on who to contact for a range of matters including but not limited to the removal of syringes, public injecting and threats to personal safety.
75. As a result of the MSIR being introduced, a functional review of the protocol was undertaken by officers from Council and DHHS, with support from front line agencies. This review included a thematic analysis of health and safety data from customer relations management systems and recent community consultations, interviews with staff from front line agencies. An interim factsheet was published in time for the opening of the MSIR – titled *Community health, safety and wellbeing in Richmond - Information for local residents, traders and visitors*.
76. In the lead up to the opening of the purpose-built MSIR, new educational resources were produced by Council to inform and empower the community on current protocols for the management of drug-related issues locally (social/health services, law enforcement and amenity). This involved further consultation with the local frontline agencies and testing and refining the resources through external and internal market research.
77. These new resources, known as *Drug Help Locally*, supersede both the 2012 protocols and interim factsheet of 2018 (See Attachment 1). The hard copy distribution strategy included a letterbox drop approximately 5,000 households, Estate residents and traders in the Victoria Street precinct (North Richmond/southern Abbotsford), and reactive and proactive delivery of the materials throughout the precinct including to frontline agencies, the Richmond Housing

Estate, Victoria Police, Victoria Street Traders and the local primary and secondary schools. These resources are available for proactive and reactive distribution in electronic and hard copy.

#### Council and community development

##### *Outreach barbeques*

78. Council supported a series of outreach barbeques conducted at Butler Park to facilitate connections between people who are opiate-dependent and supportive agencies. This series has recently concluded with new options in consideration.

##### *Youth Hub*

79. Officers are continuing to work with representatives from DHHS to establish the Richmond Youth Hub. Council has signed a Funding DEED which acknowledges Council's financial contribution and interests in establishing a Youth Hub at 110 Elizabeth St. On 10 September, young people from the Drum program participated in a focus group with the DHHS appointed architect to inform the design of the Richmond Youth Hub. Officers from Family, Youth and Children's Services have also had some initial discussions with DHHS to establish a working relationship with the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative including the opportunity to temporarily activate the space at 110 Elizabeth St with activities stemming from the Social Landlord program.
80. A separate report will be presented to Council in November 2019 which addresses a further NoM (13 August) seeking to establish and fund a 'Youth Employment officer' at the Richmond Estate, as well as some directions for future funding of youth programs on the Richmond and Collingwood Estates.
81. The contribution of content by MSIR Resident's Action Committee (MRAC), Victoria Street Drug Solutions, the media and other community groups remains a key information-source and influence on community sentiment and open dialogue continues with all members of the community.
82. Officers across Council continue negotiations with State authorities to seek additional funding for community development opportunities and safety and amenity improvements for the Victoria Street precinct.

##### *Council community grants*

83. Council continues to provide opportunities for cultural celebrations in the locality, including the Lunar Festival which is funded through the Celebrate Yarra Triennial Funding Grant. The Victoria Street Traders Association received an annual grant of \$7,000 in 2018 for strategic development and planning purposes and a small grant of \$1,000 through the small project grants program for the Moon Lantern festival.
84. In 2018, the Annual Community Grants program funded 42 projects situated in the Richmond and Abbotsford suburbs.
85. The recommendations of the 2019 Annual Community Grants program will be reported to Council in October 2019 where 150 of the 267 applications have been recommended. It is noted that 44 of the 150 recommended applications are situated in the Richmond and Abbotsford suburbs.
86. Council continues their funding contribution to the Yarra Drug and Health Forum including Council officer participation and contribution to monthly meetings.
87. Council has issued several other community grants to organisations that contribute to the local community, including to those who provide services to vulnerable groups.

Victorian Government initiatives*North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative*

88. The Department of Health and Human Services is implementing the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative which will help the local community to work with governments and service partners to identify and address their issues and concerns and build on what is good about the area.
89. The Initiative will support a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable neighbourhood where residents have the opportunity to learn, work, be connected and have a say in their community. It will also encourage community engagement to make the neighbourhood a safe and better place for all to live, socialise, and play.
90. The dedicated team based in North Richmond will work with residents of the housing estate and the neighbouring community, together with government, service partners and traders to design and deliver a community-led Action Plan. The initiative place manager commenced on Wednesday 25 September 2019.

*Health, amenity and safety*

91. The Victorian Government has increased the availability of needle and syringe disposal bins and introduced more frequent sweeps to remove needles on its own assets (within buildings and throughout the estate road and footpath network).
92. It has also increased the security presence on the North Richmond housing estate and improved lighting and installed a new school gate at Richmond West Primary School to better mark the boundaries of the school.
93. Through funded service providers, it has increased the resourcing of alcohol and other drug outreach teams to provide help on the street and have also commenced implementation of the *Outreach Coordination Project* to better support people with complex health and social needs
94. As reported earlier within this report, the Victorian Government is resourcing additional social and health services within the MSIR.

*Community engagement*

95. Further to the information provided earlier on North Richmond community drop-in information session on 25 July 2019, the Victorian Government reports that attendees sought the government and partner agencies to:
  - (a) ensure the community is clean and safe for everyone;
  - (b) help address long-standing health and social issues in the area including drug-related harm, including putting more outreach workers on the streets,
  - (c) improve security, particularly on Lennox and Elizabeth Streets and at local train stations and tram stops,
  - (d) support traders and other local businesses to enhance the vibrancy of the community; and
  - (e) communicate better to enable community members to continue to have a say in activity planning and implementation.
96. There are plans for more drop-in sessions for community members to have their say.

*Economic development and training and employment*

97. As reported earlier in this report, the Victorian Government has initiated the *Richmond Retail Revitalisation Project* working group, focusing on Victoria Street and Bridge Road.
98. The Victorian Government have extended the *Hope for the Future* employment program to provide housing estate residents with a holistic case management service and linkages with National Training Providers.

### Victoria Police initiatives

99. Victoria Police have stated the following:
- (a) *Victoria Police continues to provide a visible presence throughout the City of Yarra, including North Richmond and vicinity of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room. This includes regular proactive police patrols and ongoing enforcement activity to hold drug traffickers and dealers to account, as well as intelligence-led operations in high risk community locations. Tasking of Transit police and Protective Services Officers (PSOs) to the North Richmond Railway Station and tram lines on Victoria Street also continues in response to community concern about safety in and around public transport in the area;*
  - (b) *The Yarra Tasking Team, based out of the Richmond Police Complex, which has been in operation since July 2019 has made numerous arrests for street level drug trafficking in and around the North Richmond precinct. This team plays a key role in Victoria Police's covert response to illicit drug trafficking and aims to ensure that Victoria Street and the surrounding area is seen as a hostile environment for drug traffickers to operate; and*
  - (c) *The Yarra Bicycle Patrol, based out of the Richmond Police complex, also commenced in July 2019. Their objective is to provide a highly visible and agile response to traffic, crime and public order issues across the City of Yarra, which is a major thoroughfare for cycling commuter traffic in inner Melbourne. The team patrols around the DHHS Richmond Housing Estate, Richmond West Primary School and Victoria Street on a daily basis. The Yarra Bicycle Patrol will also be deployed for public events within the City of Yarra in order to manage traffic and operate in parklands and other areas inaccessible to police vehicles.*
100. Victoria Police also have Eyewatch Yarra <https://www.facebook.com/eyewatchyarra/> and members of the community are encouraged to phone the Local Area Command to discuss non-emergency matters.
101. Victoria Police have also recently undertaken Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) analysis through their Crime Prevention team and will be working with agencies to implement recommendations as they come to fruition.

### **External Consultation**

102. Council obtained information regarding key initiatives in the precinct from a number of external agencies comprising government, Victoria Police and community organisations.

### **Internal Consultation (One Yarra)**

103. Council obtained information regarding key initiatives in the precinct from a number of internal departments including Economic Development, City Works and Community Partnerships.

### **Financial Implications**

104. Funding has been allocated to those existing initiatives outlined within this report.
105. As there are new initiatives listed within the options section, there are no financial or human resources already allocated. If Council directs that one or more of these options are to be undertaken resources will have to be redirected. Alternatively, resources could be allocated through the 2020–21 budget.

### **Economic Implications**

106. Shopping strips across Greater Melbourne are being negatively impacted by changing commercial conditions driven by online shopping, more dining at home, reduced discretionary household spending and other factors.
107. Council is endeavouring to promote the Victoria Street Precinct as a dining and retail destination through its economic development initiatives and street scaping, maintenance and cleansing.

### Sustainability Implications

108. There are no sustainability implications identified in this this report.

### Social Implications

109. For people who inject drugs (PWID), drug use brings with it the risk of overdose, deleterious effects on physical and mental health (potentially exacerbating pre-existing conditions), being the victim (or perpetrator of crime) and the associated criminal sanctions, and affronts to personal dignity resulting from the judgement of others.

110. For the broader community there are negative impacts to neighbourhood amenity and community wellbeing from discarded syringes and associated waste, crimes against the property and concern for crimes against the person, and distress from observing drug dealing, consumption and overdose or other health emergency.

111. Council recognises that drug use and dependence results from the complex interplay of psychological, biological and social factors which cannot simply be eradicated and supports a harm minimisation approach which includes: reducing demand, reducing supply and reducing harm to individuals, and the broader population, by employing practical and proven public health measures to limit the negative consequences accompanying drug use.

112. The ongoing and new initiatives listed within this report by the Victorian Government and its agencies, Council, and the community, are designed to ameliorate the negative impacts of drug use for PWID and promote public health and community wellbeing for the precinct.

### Human Rights Implications

113. Council recognises the importance of a more compassionate, evidence-based approach to drug use and dependence and related issues.

114. In Australia's obligations as a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is acknowledged that we agreed as a nation that everyone has the right to life and everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and of their family, including housing, medical care and necessary social services.

115. These principles apply to our entire community and underlie all of our responses.

### Communications with CALD Communities Implications

116. The community of North Richmond and southern Abbotsford is culturally diverse and vibrant, with one-in-two residents speaking a language other than English and one-in-five residents having cultural ties to South East Asia.

117. There are no issues with specific implications identified for CALD communities within this report.

### Council Plan, Strategy and Policy Implications

#### *Council Plan*

118. The Council Plan 2017–2021 identifies higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse, and lower perceptions of safety in some parts of Yarra as key issues. It notes that the drug trade and associated health behaviours and outcomes affect the community from both a community safety perspective and a health and wellbeing perspective. Relevant strategies include:

(a) *promote a community that is inclusive, resilient, connected and enjoys strong mental and physical health and wellbeing; and*

(b) *assist to reduce the harms from alcohol and drugs on individuals and the community in partnership with state agencies and key service providers.*

119. The Council Plan also includes actions to:

(a) *work with local partners and agencies to increase health and education, community partnerships and harm minimisation from the abuse of drugs and alcohol.*

### *Community Infrastructure Plan*

120. Council plays a direct role in the planning and delivery of community infrastructure and an indirect role by coordinating other providers in this space. This includes the provision of flexible and well-designed community infrastructure that addresses community needs and will contribute to generating the best outcomes for our community.
121. Council's vision for community infrastructure planning is: *To identify current and future needs so that Council can deliver and influence the provision of quality, flexible and responsive community infrastructure to support a prosperous, liveable and sustainable City of Yarra.*
122. Council's three goals of community infrastructure planning are to:
- (a) *build and support a safe, healthy and cohesive community;*
  - (b) *create a sustainable city with responsive and flexible community infrastructure; and*
  - (c) *embed a holistic approach in planning and delivery.*
123. The Community Infrastructure Plan notes an opportunity *to achieve good public space (or public realm) outcomes through forming partnerships between Council, community, businesses, service authorities and developers. Building strong relationships with key stakeholders will support public space improvements and emerging public spaces. For example, encourage improvements of shopfronts, encourage building design to support public places and curate legal street art where relevant.*

### **Legal Implications**

124. The responsibilities Councils have in terms of public health and amenity are prescribed under the *Local Government Act (1989)* and *Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008)*.

### **Other Issues**

125. Not applicable.

### **Options**

#### Option 1

126. Facilitate a time-limited Community Reference Group (discontinued within three months of the commencement of the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative at Richmond Housing Estate):
- (a) This option would seek to provide a neutral, inclusive platform for all of the community to come together and participate in a dialogue on the public health, wellbeing, amenity and safety issues they are encountering;
  - (b) Council's responsibility would be framed to facilitate the meetings and 'broker' the issues raised, to assist in determining commonalities in themes or locations which require more support throughout the precinct, and provide a data-collection forum to gather information to assist core operational requirements;
  - (c) Officers would make every effort to action issues raised, while it is likely that some will fall outside the remit of Council authority. Council would also report important findings to responsible stakeholders including any actions raised;
  - (d) Resourcing implications include the following as a minimum:
    - (i) Chairing of meetings by Councillor(s);
    - (ii) Council officer(s) secretariat support including:
      - Convening agendas and speakers;
      - Sourcing a suitable location to hold the forum;
      - Organising duration, frequency and timing of meetings;
    - (iii) How actions raised will be actioned, informed and distributed;
  - (e) Other considerations include the following as a minimum:

- (i) Whether it is an open or closed forum;
  - (ii) Frequency of meetings, terms of reference, communications plan and membership;
  - (iii) The capacity of other stakeholders (such as DHHS, VicPol, DET, NRCH, etc.) to effectively participate in a further forum;
  - (iv) Security or OHS implications;
  - (v) The participation, contribution and cooperation of key stakeholders, particularly those servicing the space;
  - (vi) Frustration and/or risk of 'over consultation' with members of the community who may feel that issues have been raised consistently without resolution to a 'satisfactory' level. E.g. moving the location of MSIR;
  - (vii) Replicating or undermining the work of North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative as the project commences with the same objectives;
  - (viii) Time required to establish this forum and associated logistics; and
  - (ix) Consideration of any unintended conflicts with the work underway with the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative;
- (f) Further analysis of the viability and suitability of this option is strongly recommended including liaison with the Victorian Government's North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative, MRAC, Victoria Street Drug Solutions and Victoria Street Business Association, as a minimum; and
- (g) It is expected that pursuing this option directly with the community will still take some time to organise / commence and will impact officer's capacity to deliver on other priorities.

Option 2

127. Given the very recent commencement of the Place Manager for the Victorian Government's North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative, officers could continue to work with local stakeholders to support their establishment of an appropriate and representative community engagement committee (or similar), focusing on ensuring on-going community dialogue on wider precinct amenity and safety. This would include but not be limited to:
- (a) Establish a collaborative and proactive relationship with the new Place Manager of the Victorian Government's Social Landlord project at Richmond Housing Estate, who commenced in the role in a full-time capacity in September 2019;
  - (b) Report back to Council before the end of 2019 with an update on community sentiment, any new actions undertaken in the interim period by stakeholders servicing the space and an update on progress of the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative; and
  - (c) Resourcing implications would be minimal – it is anticipated that this option can be achieved at no financial cost (officer time only), through existing budgets (at low cost and with officer time) and actioned immediately.

**Conclusion**

128. Council's current resources are at capacity in an attempt to deliver additional services to the area in relation to public health, wellbeing, amenity and safety responses.
129. Progressing either of these options or other opportunities will, by necessity, require thorough consideration of likely costs, benefits and risks (including resourcing implications).
130. Furthermore, progressing further actions or interim measures will require community support and ownership, thoughtful consultation and engagement with local businesses, community and other stakeholders.

131. Consideration will need to be given to the frequency of any future initiatives and the length of time that initiatives are in place, and the extent to which future initiatives operated by the Victorian Government may duplicate or contradict the intention of such engagement. To have a substantial impact on the precinct, and to support the physical and social infrastructure investments, longer-term, strategic initiatives could be required.
132. Due to the magnitude of the issue at hand, and the variety of stakeholders in the space, a coordinated and planned approach to achieving and maximising outcomes for our community is considered the best way forward.
133. Given the commencement of the new Place Manager of the North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative, officers suggest that, regardless of the gaps to date, pursuing a unilateral approach to engagement at this time is not recommended due to the objectives of the project, likely duplication and that the project scope geographically is the estates and the surrounding area.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That Council:
  - (a) note the existing, on-going and upcoming initiatives in place to address public health, wellbeing, amenity and safety in the north Richmond / southern Abbotsford precinct from a wide variety of stakeholders;
  - (b) note that progressing any of the listed options (or other) opportunities will require a systematic assessment of costs, benefits, risks and impacts, including consideration of community support and ownership;
  - (c) Endorse option 2 and authorise officers to work with the Place Manager of North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative Social Landlord and other stakeholders to establish a representative community engagement committee or similar; and
  - (d) seek a further report from officers before the end of 2019 providing an update on progress of initiatives in the precinct including in relation to the Victorian Government's North Richmond Community Capacity Building Initiative.

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## **Attachments**

- 1 CoY - Drug use issues in your local area - A4 Poster - September 2019