

Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and Action Plan

(October 2012 – October 2017)

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The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Indigenous heritage of this country and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Wilam Clan as the traditional custodians of this place.

“The Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and Action Plan provides a roadmap to foster a culturally appropriate and inclusive workplace, where Aboriginal people choose Council as an employer because they feel welcomed, valued and respected and where there are opportunities for skill and career development in a supportive environment”.

Introduction and Background

The Case for Action

There is a strong social and business case for organisations, including the City of Whittlesea, to take a strategic and sustainable approach to improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Aboriginal) people.

National research shows that Aboriginal people sit at the low end of all social indicators including employment, education, health and housing and that this fundamentally impacts on their ability to live fulfilling, healthy and productive lives. It is now clearly understood that employment is critical to reducing the social, economic and health gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, with employment supporting the economic independence and autonomy of Aboriginal people which in turn helps address long term disadvantage.

However, the rate of Aboriginal Australians' participation in the workforce is lower, and the unemployment rate higher, than for non-Aboriginal Australians. The City of Whittlesea fares worse, with Aboriginal people in our municipality having a lower labour force participation rate than their counterparts in the wider metropolitan area and non-Aboriginal people, both in and beyond the City of Whittlesea.

The multiple barriers to employment that can exist for Aboriginal people help explain this, including experiences of discrimination in the past (for example in education) and present (when looking for a job and in the workplace*), lower levels of educational attainment, higher rates of ill-health and disability, lower rates of transition from unemployment to employment and lower rates of job retention.

The case for improving the attraction, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people is further strengthened when we consider the overall decline in the working age population and an Aboriginal population that is growing at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population. Given this, there is a need to plan for and achieve a skilled, diverse and dedicated workforce which utilises the unique skills and perspectives of Aboriginal Australians.

At a local level, an increased number of Aboriginal staff will result in our increased capacity to deliver culturally appropriate services to our local, and growing, Aboriginal community, with staff sharing their knowledge and understanding of the specific community needs and aspirations of our Aboriginal residents.

Improved workforce participation for Aboriginal people will also support the realisation of three of our six Future Directions within the 'Shaping Our Future

Whittlesea 2025 Strategic Community Plan’, specifically Inclusive and Engaged Community, Growing our Economy and Health and Wellbeing.

Importantly, it will also assist our organisation to play its role in ‘Closing the Gap’ and overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage through helping to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians by 2018.

Our Journey

The City of Whittlesea has long recognised that we have a key role to play in improving the employment outcomes for Aboriginal people, commencing with our participation in the Indigenous Employment Feasibility Study (along with the Cities of Yarra and Darebin) in 2008. The study and, more recently, the staff consultation as part of the development of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), identified a high level of interest and enthusiasm among City of Whittlesea staff to proactively employ more Aboriginal people across Council (*as at July 2012 we currently employ four Aboriginal people*) through the development and implementation of an Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy.

Furthermore, our growing Aboriginal community (having increased in size by 33% between 2006 and 2011, taking the number to 1124 or 0.73% of the population¹⁰) wants us to show leadership and take brave and bold steps to support Aboriginal people’s right to self-determination. Providing pathways to long-term job opportunities at Council is key to achieving this.

Since the feasibility study, we have been on a journey and our understanding of the benefits of implementing a meaningful and successful Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy, and the multi-faceted approach needed, has matured. The Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) Project has raised our awareness of the impact of racism on Aboriginal people and what Council can do to foster a fair, welcoming and inclusive workplace and community. This, along with the recent development of Council’s first RAP, means the time is now right to progress our efforts.

The Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and Action Plan provides a roadmap to foster a culturally appropriate and inclusive workplace, where Aboriginal people choose Council as an employer because they feel welcomed and valued, are treated fairly and with respect and where there are opportunities for skill and career development in a supportive environment.

Our Employment Target

Our target is to increase the proportion of Aboriginal people employed at Council to 1.5% by October 2017, with 70% of these positions being permanent and with a retention rate above 80%.

Based on current numbers of staff, this target equates to 15 staff members.

Setting a target, and monitoring against this target, is important. However, we will be focused on achieving positive outcomes for individuals, rather than being solely numbers driven.

Key Learnings Informing Our Approach

Being careful not to re-invent the wheel, we have looked for learnings from others who have gone before us. Through reviewing strategies, toolkits and issues papers, as well as other Aboriginal employment initiatives, we have gathered intelligence on what is required in order to support improved employment outcomes for Aboriginal people and achieve real results for Council and the local Aboriginal community.

Key findings that have informed our Strategy and Action Plan include the need for:

- A whole of organisation approach with ongoing commitment and involvement from the highest level
- Building organisational cultural competence through cultural awareness/competency training and addressing/preventing racism
- Supporting non-Aboriginal staff to understand the need for a specific strategy
- Committing adequate and effective financial and human resources over the long term to ensure sustainability and success, with successful Aboriginal employment programs strongly linked with having an Aboriginal Employment Officer within Human Resources
- Reviewing and enhancing recruitment processes so they do not disadvantage Aboriginal candidates
- Multiple and complementary support mechanisms to improve retention (such as mentoring programs and flexible work arrangements to allow people to meet their work, family and/or community obligations)
- Providing a range of avenues to long-term and permanent positions, such as traineeships, scholarships, casual employment and direct recruitment
- Setting realistic, non-tokenistic employment targets that are clearly communicated, monitored and reported on

- Working in partnership with the Aboriginal community and organisations

The Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy Discussion Paper (Appendix 1) provides further information on the key learnings identified through our information gathering phase.

Stakeholder Consultation

A stakeholder engagement and consultation phase which built on the earlier findings of the Feasibility Study and happened in parallel with the RAP consultations confirmed Council's readiness for a proactive and coordinated approach to increasing Aboriginal workforce participation. In addition, the consultation phase determined what support is available (internally and externally) and what mutually beneficial partnerships can be developed initially, with more partnerships and opportunities to be explored as the Strategy is implemented and gains momentum.

The stakeholder phase involved meetings, emails, conversations and presentations, as outlined below:

Internally

- Collaboration with the Human Resources Department, particularly the Human Resources Manager and Team Leader Recruitment, throughout the development of the Strategy and Action Plan
- Meetings, communication and distribution of the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy Discussion Paper to the RAP Project Management Group and former Aboriginal Employment Steering Group, including our Aboriginal Liaison Officer
- Meetings and communications with the consultant supporting the development of the Reconciliation Action Plan
- Meeting with the LEAD Project Senior Management Team (CEO; Director Community Services; Director Governance and Economic Development; Human Resources Manager; Community Cultural Development Manager) to gain feedback on the Discussion Paper and discuss resourcing the strategy
- Presentation to the Managers Meeting (30 May) and distribution of the Discussion Paper to this group
- Meetings/communications with Manager, Family Services; Manager, Infrastructure; Team Leader Urban Works; Manager, Aged and Disability; Home and Community Care Aboriginal Liaison Officer; Team Leader Home

Support; to develop and sign-off specific Aboriginal employment actions within the Action Plan

- Presenting on the development of the Strategy and Action Plan as part of the Valuing Diversity Special Staff Lunch, reaching 230 staff
- Communications and feedback on the draft Strategy and Action Plan sought from members of the RAP Project Management Group

Externally

- Participating in the Municipal Association of Victoria's Aboriginal Employment Program Think Tank session and communications with the MAV Policy Officer
- Discussing the development of the Strategy at the LEAD Racism Aboriginal Community Meeting and a Whittlesea Reconciliation Group meeting
- Meeting and communications with NMIT Koorie Services Centre
- Meeting and communications with RMIT Hume Whittlesea Workplace Learning Program staff
- Conversation with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) Indigenous Employment Program staff
- Meetings and communications with SKILLED Group National Indigenous Program Manager and Business Development Manager and Hoban Recruitment

Through the staff and community consultation undertaken as part of the development of Council's RAP, the development of the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy was strongly raised. Feedback again confirmed that employment was a priority area that needed more focus, attention and leadership from Council.

Staff consultation – key findings regarding employment

- A primary focus of the consultations was how Council could improve the employment of Aboriginal people
- Consultations identified meaningful employment opportunities as something Council could contribute to and that employment strategies needed to offer something more than a small number of traineeships and/or apprenticeships
- Building the internal capacity of the organisation was seen as a key outcome if Council was really to enhance its ability to achieve the best possible opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Key areas raised included:

- A comprehensive cultural awareness program tailored and mandatory for all levels of the organisation
- An employment strategy that ensures recruitment, retention and employment pathways are meaningful and culturally sensitive to Aboriginal people's needs and aspirations – this includes ensuring appropriate supports for Aboriginal employees are in place
- Dedicating the appropriate resources (financial and non-financial) to the levels of commitment and ensuring levels of commitment are secured at all levels of the organisation

Community consultations – key findings regarding employment

- The community wanted to see an employment strategy where there is a designated worker/staff member at a high level of the organisation that drives the outcomes including initiatives that enhance outcomes by getting Aboriginal people in the community ready to fill the positions
- The community raised that although there were clauses in the construction contract for the Bubup Wilam Early Learning Centre (regarding the employment of Aboriginal people) the clauses were never enforced through penalties and therefore there was little in the way of employment for Aboriginal people

As outlined in Action Area 4 of the Action Plan, we recognise that there is a need to develop an ongoing relationship with the local Aboriginal community where we work together to ensure this Strategy meets the community's needs. Developing a governance structure where we are held accountable to the community will be an important aspect of this. As part of Council's RAP, overarching mechanisms will be developed to support Council to engage, consult and partner with the Aboriginal community. It is hoped that these mechanisms will also support a partnership approach to the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and Action Plan.

Our Strategic Approach

To enable us to reach our Aboriginal employment target, a strategic phased approach is recommended.

The phased approach outlined below allows us to harness our enthusiasm and take practical steps to increase Aboriginal employment now, in partnership with more experienced organisations, while at the same time building our capacity and know-how, to ensure our approach achieves positive outcomes and is sustainable.

Phase 1: Getting started - Building our cultural competence, targeted initiatives & external support (October 2012 to September 2013)

- Build our internal cultural competency and skills in attracting, recruiting and retaining Aboriginal staff members
- Engage and partner with agencies and organisations (such as NMIT, RMIT and DEEWR Indigenous Employment panel member) who can support us and who we can learn from
- Undertake a number of targeted recruitment initiatives with Departments that are ready (e.g. Infrastructure, Aged and Disability, Family Services)

Phase 2: Taking it further - Expanding our Aboriginal employment program with internal skills and expertise (October 2013 to September 2015)

- Recruit a specific position within Human Resources (Aboriginal Employment Officer) to oversee and support the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan
- Expand our initiatives, based on our increased internal capacity and skills
- Share experiences and successes across the organisation to engage more Departments and identify more opportunities for Aboriginal employment

Phase 3: Maintaining the momentum (October 2015 – October 2017)

- Maintain the momentum internally
- Explore advocating and supporting our local business community to increase Aboriginal employment opportunities

Our Four Priority Action Areas

Based on the research of what is needed and what works to increase Aboriginal workforce participation, and informed by our phased approach, it is recommended that actions focus on four key areas, with objectives aligned to these, as follows.

Action Area 1: Workforce environment and cultural competency

Objective: To foster a supportive and culturally inclusive work environment for Aboriginal employees, free from race-based discrimination (hidden and obvious), where all staff demonstrate a high degree of cultural awareness and competency and where Aboriginal staff feel welcomed, valued and respected.

Action Area 2: Attraction, Recruitment & Selection

Objective: To proactively attract and recruit Aboriginal people through providing culturally appropriate and flexible recruitment and selection processes, offering a range of avenues to long-term and permanent positions (targeted recruitment, general recruitment, casual positions, scholarships, traineeships) across a range of qualification and organisational levels.

Action Area 3: Retention and Career Development

Objective: To enhance support mechanisms and career development opportunities to retain and develop Aboriginal employees, with flexible working arrangements enabling Aboriginal employees to meet their family, community and cultural obligations.

Action Area 4: Resources, Governance & Reporting

Objective: To effectively resource the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure its success and sustainability and be accountable to the local Aboriginal community using sound governance, adequate monitoring and transparent reporting.

Resourcing the Strategy and Action Plan

Implementing an effective, meaningful and sustainable Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy requires adequate financial and human resources. To achieve our Aboriginal employment aspirations, there is a need to, as our Mission states, 'strategically resource our organisation to support our community'.

The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government's Closing the Gap Through Place-based Employment, Local Government Indigenous Employment Program, Green Paper 2010, states:

"Project after project, limited funding has been allocated for Indigenous initiatives. Adequate and effective resources must be committed over the long term to ensure sustainability and success. Providing adequate resources often equates to committing to five to ten year funding horizons for projects – not one to two years. The experience of those who have been involved in Indigenous employment programs, including those in councils, is often one of frustration when inadequate funding has brought about a premature end to the project."

Monitoring and Measuring Our Success

Success against the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy will be measured against:

- Number of Aboriginal employees placed into permanent positions
- Number of Aboriginal employees placed into apprenticeships or traineeships
- Number of Aboriginal employees placed into labour hire positions
- Retention rates - loss of 20% will lead to a review of strategy/actions
- Increased cultural awareness and competency amongst non-Aboriginal staff members
- Strong and mutually beneficial relationship developed and maintained with the local Aboriginal community
- Positive feedback from Aboriginal staff members, Aboriginal community members and Aboriginal agencies/organisations

Progress against the Action Plan and data on the make-up of our workforce will be reviewed quarterly, to check our efforts are having a positive impact and progress is being made against our Aboriginal employment targets.

A mid project review will also be conducted to plan for sustaining the focus on Aboriginal employment (e.g. reviewing the Aboriginal Employment Officer position, developing a proposal for ongoing funding and developing an Action Plan for another 5 years).

The Action Plan

Action Area 1: Workforce environment and cultural competency

Objective: *To foster a supportive and culturally inclusive work environment for Aboriginal employees, free from race-based discrimination (hidden and obvious), where all staff demonstrate a high degree of cultural awareness and competency and where Aboriginal staff feel welcomed, valued and respected.*

Internal staff communications

Action: Develop and implement communications and education activities to support our staff to understand the rationale for Council's focus on Aboriginal employment.

Communications to highlight the link to other Council policies/commitments (e.g. diversity, reconciliation etc) and be endorsed and championed by the CEO and senior management.

Timeline: October 2012

Measurable outcomes:

- Increased staff understanding and support for the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy
- Communications activities developed and implemented

Aboriginal Cross Cultural Training for Council staff

Action:

- Deliver Aboriginal Cross Cultural Training to our staff to increase cultural awareness and competency through improving understanding of Aboriginal culture and the historical and contemporary issues that may affect Aboriginal staff members and community members.

Timeline: October/November 2012

Face-to-face training for Directors, Managers and Team Leaders

Measurable outcomes:

- Number of Council staff trained

Action:

- Training to be delivered by a reputable and experienced training provider and tailored to the local area.

Timeline: Online training for remaining staff 2012

Measurable outcome:

- Improved awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture and historical and contemporary issues

Action:

- As a priority, face-to-face training to be delivered to Directors, Managers and Team Leaders and those who work directly with Aboriginal people within Council and in the community. Options for online training to be explored, to enable the majority of staff to be reached. Consideration to be given to whether the training is compulsory or voluntary.

Timeline: Face-to-face training delivered every six months to reach new staff members

Measurable outcomes:

- Increase in positive attitudes and behaviours towards Aboriginal people

Aboriginal Cross Cultural Training for Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre staff

Action:

- Explore delivering Aboriginal Cross Cultural Training to priority TRAC staff (e.g. senior management).

Timeline: October 2012

Measurable outcomes:

- Number of TRAC staff trained
- Improved awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture and historical and contemporary issues
- Increase in positive attitudes and behaviours towards Aboriginal people

Staff induction

Action:

- Expand information in new staff induction processes (online and face-to-face) to promote and raise awareness of the City of Whittlesea's commitment to being a fair, welcoming and inclusive workplace and community for Aboriginal people.

Timeline: September 2012

Measurable outcomes:

- Specific mention of Council's commitment to Aboriginal employees and community, including mention of Reconciliation Action Plan and Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy.

Staff participation in culturally significant times of the year

Action:

- Promote stronger staff understanding of and involvement in Council's National Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week events.

Timeline: In lead up to National Sorry Day (26 May) and Reconciliation Week (27 May – 3 June)

Measurable outcomes:

- Number of staff involved in Aboriginal culturally significant times of the year and increased awareness/ understanding of the significance of these days/weeks.

Action Area 2: Attraction, Recruitment & Selection Action

Objective: *To proactively attract and recruit Aboriginal people through providing culturally appropriate and flexible recruitment and selection processes, offering a range of avenues to long-term and permanent positions (targeted recruitment, general recruitment, casual positions, scholarships, traineeships,) across a range of qualification and organisational levels.*

Human Resources staff capacity building

Action:

- Provide external mentoring and/or a secondment opportunity for Team Leader Recruitment, to enable greater understanding and skills development in culturally appropriate and flexible recruitment and selection processes, to aid review and enhancement of our own policies and processes.

Timeline: November 2012

Measurable outcomes:

- Improved understanding and skills in culturally appropriate and flexible recruitment and selection processes.
- More culturally appropriate and flexible recruitment and selection processes implemented

Action:

- Provide Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission training for key Human Resources' staff to support them to understand and use the 'Special Measures' Clause within the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.

Timeline: November 2012

Measurable outcomes:

- Improved understanding of the 'Special Measures' clause and how to use it
- 'Designated' and 'Identified' positions advertised

Review of recruitment and selection processes

Action: Review and enhance recruitment and selection processes so they are culturally appropriate and flexible in order to increase the quality and number of

Aboriginal people applying for and being successful in securing positions. Review to explore:

- Using the 'Special Measures' Clause within the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to have Identified and Designated positions for Aboriginal people
- Shortening position descriptions and use of plain language
- Minimising selection criteria
- Including realistic minimum requirements of jobs within position descriptions
- Reviewing selection processes, including having less formal interviews
- Promoting jobs through Aboriginal local networks (e.g. Local Indigenous Network, Whittlesea Reconciliation Group) and Aboriginal-specific media (radio and press)
- Developing a greater focus on personal communication and the opportunity to demonstrate skills and abilities, through recruitment strategies
- Including statement - 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people strongly encouraged to apply' – in position descriptions, online job advertisements and identified print job advertisements

Changes to be communicated to Managers/ Supervisors for implementation.

Timeline:

- Interim review of recruitment and selection processes in November/December 2012
- Comprehensive review of recruitment and selection processes commencing - August 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- Shorter position descriptions, written in plain language, with between 4 and 6 key selection criteria, with realistic job requirements
- Less formal recruitment/selection processes
- Weekly job e-newsletter distributed to local Aboriginal agencies and networks
- Jobs advertised through Aboriginal-specific media (radio and press)

Stakeholder communications

Action: Develop and implement communications activities to communicate Council's focus on proactively attracting, recruiting and retaining Aboriginal people to key

stakeholders - local Aboriginal community members and groups (Whittlesea Reconciliation Group, Local Indigenous Network, Bubup Wilam), Job Networks and local agencies/groups, schools, Universities.

Communications activities to support the development of a partnership approach to increasing workforce participation for Aboriginal people across Council and improve understanding of Council's role and functions and what career opportunities exist in local government.

Activities may include:

- Tailored letter from CEO to key stakeholders (local Aboriginal peak and local Aboriginal community groups, agencies and networks; local schools, universities and TAFEs etc) to promote Council's focus on increasing Aboriginal workforce participation, specifying targets and key actions
- Meetings between Council staff and key community groups/agencies/Job Networks
- Weekly 'job vacancies' email to Aboriginal peak and local groups and Job Networks
- Regular informal reporting on progress against strategy/action plan through Aboriginal staff members' involvement on Local Indigenous Network, Whittlesea Reconciliation Group, Bubup Wilam etc

Timeline: From August 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- Communications activities developed and implemented to reach key stakeholders, e.g. Aboriginal peak and community groups, community members, schools, Universities, Job Networks etc
- Community engaged and consulted on an ongoing basis

Infrastructure Department Aboriginal employment pilot

Action: Develop and implement a pilot to employ Aboriginal people into entry level labour hire (full-time, casual) positions at Council's Infrastructure Department, e.g. Manual Litter positions. Pilot to include:

- Aboriginal Cross Cultural Training for selected Infrastructure Maintenance Unit supervisory staff.
- Buddy system for new recruits

Providing assistance for career development (e.g. moving into permanent positions)

Timeline: February/March 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- Aboriginal Cross Cultural Training provided to Depot Staff
- Buddy system implemented for new recruits
- 2-3 new Aboriginal staff members recruited within 12 months of the completion of the Aboriginal Cross Cultural Training program
- 2 new recruits moving into permanent positions
- Retention rates of new recruits

Aged and Disability Department and NMIT partnership

Action: Partner with NMIT (Koorie Services Centre and Certificate III in Home and Community Care and Aged Care) to support Aboriginal students completing the dual certificate to complete work placements and secure employment at Council after course completion. Partnership to include:

- Council Aged and Disability staff attending Cultural Awareness Training delivered by NMIT Koori Services Centre
- Council staff (including Manager, Aged and Disability) addressing NMIT Koorie students as guest speakers during course

Timeline: September 2012 – January 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- Cultural Awareness Training delivered to Home and Community Care and administrative staff (including those to become student ‘buddies’) and increased awareness and understanding
- Positive relationship developed and maintained between Council staff and students

Action: Work placements at Council supported by a buddy, etc.

Timeline: September 2012 – January 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- 2-3 students undertake work placements at Council, supported by a buddy
- 2-3 students gain employment with Council (Home Support Workers within HACC, positions supporting Aboriginal-specific Planned Activity Group)

Maternal and Child Health Scholarships

Action: Develop Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health university scholarship program (or potentially use scholarship to assist a general nurse to study Midwifery and Maternal and Child Health).

Timeline: 2012/2013 financial year

Program to be implemented in 2012/13 financial year and then reviewed to determine if there are positions available for Maternal and Child Health nurses at Council

Measurable outcomes:

- Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health university scholarship program developed
- 1 Aboriginal scholarship provided and/or 1 Aboriginal nurse practitioner recruited within Maternal and Child Health Department in 2012/13 financial year

Work experience placements

Action: Partner with RMIT University via the Hume Whittlesea Workplace Learning Program, and the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, to provide work experience placements for Aboriginal students across Council. Students to be placed in Departments where staff have undertaken Cross Cultural Training and have the capacity to provide adequate support.

Partnership to include opportunities to strengthen relationship between Council and local schools.

Partnership to be guided by the Koorie Education Transition Pathways Network 'Principles of Working Together' which has been developed under the auspices of the Northern Metropolitan Region Wannik Implementation Plan

Timeline: From February 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- Partnership between Council and Hume Whittlesea Workplace Learning Program formalised
- Aboriginal-specific student work experience placement program developed and implemented
- 2 Aboriginal student work experience placements across Council per annum

Traineeships

Action: Develop and implement Aboriginal traineeship opportunities across the organisation. Traineeship program to be supported by DEEWR Indigenous Employment panel member (recruitment agency). Trainees to be supported to secure ongoing employment (either at Council or through the Indigenous Employment panel member).

Timeline: From February 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- Aboriginal-specific traineeship opportunities developed and implemented
- 1 Aboriginal traineeship (adult) across Council per annum
- Number of trainees progressing into paid work within Council

Social procurement

Action: Progress the identification and implementation of Aboriginal employment opportunities (such as traineeships, casual employment, etc) through the new social procurement clause in Council's contracts and tenders.

Timeline: From September 2012

Measurable outcomes: Number of Aboriginal people employed through the social procurement clause in Council's contracts and tenders.

Action Area 3: Retention and Career Development

Objective: *To enhance support mechanisms and career development opportunities to retain and develop our Aboriginal employees, with flexible working arrangements enabling Aboriginal employees to meet their family, community and cultural obligations.*

Mentoring/buddy program

Action: Develop mentoring/buddy program for new and existing Aboriginal employees, with staff providing mentoring to receive formal training.

Timeline: Support to mentor new Aboriginal staff members to be provided by DEEWR Indigenous Employment panel member (recruitment agency) October 2012 – October 2013

Measurable outcomes: DEEWR Indigenous Employment panel member (recruitment agency) provides mentoring to new staff recruited through them.

Action: Explore Aboriginal Affairs Victoria's Wayaperri Program which offers mentoring training or explore partnering with an external organisation that can provide mentoring pro bono.

Explore strengthening the current Aboriginal Officers Network group to support new recruits (e.g. being a buddy in the first two weeks of a new recruit starting and inviting them to join the network).

Timeline: Internally driven mentoring program to be developed and implemented from August 2013.

Measurable outcomes:

- Staff mentors/buddies identified and trained
- New and existing Aboriginal staff have the opportunity to have a mentor and feel supported through mentor/buddy program Aboriginal Officers Network group supporting new recruits through being a buddy and joining the network

Cultural leave policy

Action: Develop an organisational cultural leave policy to allow Aboriginal staff members (and all staff) to meet their work, family and/or community obligations. Promote need for policy and how to implement the policy to Directors, Managers and Team Leaders. Promote existence of policy to all staff.

Timeline: December 2012

Measurable outcomes: Cultural leave policy developed.

Action: Use evidence to support the need for flexible working arrangements, e.g. Aboriginal employees are more than twice as likely as other employees to have carer responsibilities and 38% of Aboriginal employees have cultural and/or community obligations that involve responsibilities out of the workforce.

Timeline: December 2012

Measurable outcomes: All staff aware of policy and Directors, Managers and Team Leaders implementing the policy correctly.

Career development

Action: Provide assistance to current and new Aboriginal employees to expand their employment opportunities and career progression, through Performance Development Planning and reviews, identifying training opportunities and individual support from Human Resources. Consider opportunities for secondments and acting in other roles/more senior roles.

Timeline: From August 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- Performance Development Planning used as an opportunity to proactively discuss career aspirations and training needs
- Human Resources providing individual support to Aboriginal staff

Work Ready Project (Aboriginal focus)

Action: Expand the Work Ready Project (currently with a focus on newly arrived adults from migrant and refugee backgrounds) to include Aboriginal adults looking for work experience/return to work opportunities.

Timeline: From August 2013

Measurable outcomes:

- Work Ready Project expanded

- 3 Aboriginal adults participating in Work Ready Project per annum (from commencement of expanded project)
- 2 participants secure casual or permanent positions (full-time or part-time) within Council or in other organisations

Action Area 4: Resources, Governance & Reporting

Objective: *To effectively resource the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure its success and sustainability and be accountable to the local Aboriginal community using sound governance, adequate monitoring and transparent reporting.*

External support - DEEWR Indigenous Employment panel

Action: Engage the services of a DEEWR Indigenous Employment Program panel member in the interim to support Council to reach our Aboriginal employment target and aims, such as providing advice on policy and practice changes, sourcing candidates for casual and permanent positions and traineeships, providing mentoring to new Aboriginal staff members.

Timeline: October 2012 – October 2013

Measurable outcomes: Indigenous Employment Program panel member engaged.

Action: Indigenous Employment Program panel member to work closely with Council to build our skills and expertise in Aboriginal employment, with the contract being phased out following the recruitment of an Aboriginal Employment Officer (position dependent on funding) to oversee the implementation of the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy (see below).

Timeline: October 2012 – October 2013

Measurable outcomes: Council supported to implement strategy/action plan and achieve Aboriginal employment targets and objectives.

Aboriginal Employment Officer

Action: Recruit an Aboriginal Employment Officer, within the Human Resources Unit, to oversee the implementation of the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and support Council to reach our target and aims.

Timeline: Aboriginal Employment Officer was recruited by December 2013.

Measurable outcomes:

- New budget initiative for Aboriginal Employment Officer successful

- Aboriginal Employment Officer recruited with Human Resources Department, for November 2013

DEEWR Indigenous Employment Program (IEP)

Action: Explore (further) becoming a DEEWR IEP employer, entering into a contract with DEEWR where the Department and Council agree an employment target and Council receives financial and non-financial support as targets are achieved.

Decision to enter into a contract with DEEWR to be determined once it is known whether the new budget initiative for the Aboriginal Employment Officer is successful and there is a dedicated resource to progress the implementation of the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy.

Timeline: August 2013

Measurable outcomes: Contract entered into with DEEWR, (once the level of resourcing for the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy is determined).

Governance structure

Action: Develop a governance structure, e.g. Internal Steering Committee and external Aboriginal Community Governance Group, to monitor progress against actions and enable an ongoing relationship/partnership with the Aboriginal community to be achieved. Governance structure to involve transparent reporting against actions to the Aboriginal community or group.

Synergies with Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) governance structure to be explored, so as not to duplicate processes.

Opportunities to develop relationships and involve organisations that specialise in Aboriginal employment to be explored.

Interim structure, for example the RAP governance structure or Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) Project governance structure, to oversee implementation of Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy.

Timeline: From August 2013

Measurable outcomes: Governance structure set-up and overseeing implementation of Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy.

Monitoring & reporting

Action: Review data on make-up of Council workforce quarterly to monitor progress against Aboriginal employment targets and provide progress reports through governance structure.

Timeline: In line with LEAD Internal Working Group meetings, LEAD Senior Management Team meetings, or RAP governance meetings.

Measurable outcomes:

- Reports prepared and provided to LEAD, RAP or Internal Steering Group / Aboriginal Community Governance Group at quarterly meetings
- Strong and mutually beneficial relationship developed and maintained with the local Aboriginal Community Governance Group

Appendix

Project:	Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) Project
Last updated:	30 May, 2012
Prepared by:	Yasmin Standfield, LEAD Project Manager
Topic:	Discussion Paper – Development of Council’s Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy

1. Purpose of discussion paper

The following Discussion Paper has been developed to outline the work undertaken to date to develop Council’s Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and key learnings to date.

It outlines important factors that need to be considered by senior management upfront in order to develop and implement a meaningful, effective and sustainable strategy that delivers real results for Council and the local Aboriginal community.

The discussion paper covers:

- **The *phased approach*** to the development of the City of Whittlesea’s Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy
- **The *key learnings*** identified to date from a review of relevant documents (strategies, toolkits, issues papers)
- **The *business case/rationale*** for Council developing an Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and working to increase the employment (and support and retention) of Aboriginal people
- **The *challenges*** that need to be considered upfront, *including the resources* that are likely to be needed to make the program effective and sustainable

2. Strategic approach

The following four-phased approach is being implemented to develop the Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy:

- **Phase one:** Information gathering (document review) *March/April*
- **Phase two:** Stakeholder engagement and consultation (Internal and External) *May/June*
- **Phase three:** Write up, review, approval and adoption of strategy *July/August*
- **Phase four:** Implementation of strategy (*outside the scope of LEAD's involvement*) *TBC*

3. Learnings from information gathering phase

Factors that are known to support successful and sustainable Aboriginal employment strategies are outlined below. These factors need to be considered by the City of Whittlesea in the development of its strategy.

It is proposed that the following points are communicated to key staff through the internal consultation phase, included and addressed in the final Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy (and Implementation Plan), where appropriate.

The key learnings below are based on a review of the information contained in the:

- Indigenous Employment Feasibility Study for the City of Whittlesea, December 2008, prepared by Paul Nixon of Employment Training Organisation
- Municipal Association of Victoria Aboriginal Broker Program Think Tank session and review of supporting documents
- Karreeta Yirramboi: An Employer Toolkit to grow Aboriginal Employment in your organisation, developed by the Victorian Government's State Services Authority
- Increasing Indigenous Employment Rates (Closing the Gap Clearinghouse) Issues Paper
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Employing Indigenous Australians Strategy
- Australian Government's Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011–2018

- The Municipal Association of Victoria report, May 2012, Pathways to better employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in Victorian local government
- Information on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) Indigenous Employment Program
- Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government's Closing the Gap Through Place-based Employment, Local Government Indigenous Employment Program, Green Paper 2010

What works:

A whole of organisation approach with ongoing commitment and involvement from the highest level

- A whole of organisation approach, with a commitment from the highest level (e.g. CEO, senior management and Councillors)
- A strategic and long-term approach that links with the organisation's strategic plans (e.g. Community Plan and Corporate Plan) and is supported/underpinned by a broader policy agenda
- Realistic, non-tokenistic employment targets that are clearly communicated, monitored and reported on. *A number of organisations set targets that are consistent with either their local demographics or Australia-wide demographics (e.g. a 2% target if Aboriginal people make up 2% of the local community)*
- A steering committee with senior representation to oversee the strategy development and implementation.

Dedicated resources for long term funding

- Backing up the stated commitment by providing adequate and effective financial and human resources over the long term to ensure sustainability and success.
- The success of Aboriginal employment participation is strongly linked to having an Aboriginal Employment Officer (or similar) position within HR.

Supporting current staff to understand the need for a specific strategy, building cultural competence and addressing racism

- Having a strong and well communicated business case that provides a specific rationale for the focus on Aboriginal employment and that is consistent with and links to other Council policies on diversity, reconciliation

etc. The business case for action needs to be endorsed and championed by the CEO and senior management

- Supporting communications and education to support staff to understand the rationale and justification behind the strategy (*to address common misconceptions that this is 'unfair' and gives preferential treatment to Aboriginal people*)
- A focus on building the organisations' (and staff) cultural competency through cultural awareness/competency training for everyone – but specifically for managers and supervisors and those who work directly with Aboriginal people.

HR processes that support the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people

- Providing a range of avenues to long-term and permanent positions, such as traineeships, scholarships, casual employment and direct recruitment. There is general consensus that traineeships should be used as a catalyst, but not relied solely upon, as traineeships are most useful if there is a pathway to permanent employment
- Reviewing and enhancing recruitment processes (and using alternative or non-standard recruitment approaches) so they do not disadvantage Aboriginal candidates. *Examples include advertising on Aboriginal radio and television; recruitment strategies that focus on personal communication and the opportunity to demonstrate skills and abilities; maximum 1 or 2 page position descriptions - where appropriate – and written in plain language with maximum 6 selection criteria; less formal interview processes such as community Elders involved in interviews, allowing a support person to attend the interview, interviews held at Aboriginal community organisations or facilities - where appropriate, etc)*
- Pre-employment training built into the recruitment process for Aboriginal traineeships (potentially through a partnership with local training and TAFE providers) and/or providing transition to employment training that prepares people for working in Local Government
- Multiple and complementary support/policy mechanisms to improve retention, such as mentoring programs utilising trained mentors and flexible work arrangements to allow people to meet their work, family and/or community obligations. Aboriginal employees are more than twice as likely as other employees to have carer responsibilities and 38% of Aboriginal employees have cultural and/or community obligations that involve responsibilities out of the workforce

- Using the ‘Special Measures’ Clause within the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to have Identified and Designated positions for Aboriginal people. **Identified jobs** are those where the main functions involve working with Aboriginal people and communities. As anyone can apply for identified jobs, organisations can advertise and fill these roles without having to seek any external endorsement. **A designated job** is one where the incumbent must be an Aboriginal person. Designated roles can be created where: the outcomes of the job impact on the Victorian Aboriginal community, or it is considered a useful way of attracting and recruiting Aboriginal people to certain mainstream job opportunities. Until recently all designated jobs had to be approved by VCAT. In these cases an exemption from the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 was always required. However, the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 has made it easier for organisations to create designated positions. The change is intended to enable organisations to address and eliminate systemic discrimination more easily. If an organisation is considering creating a new designated role, they can contact the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission for general information about the EO Act, including the operation of the special measures provision (section 12). If the position is a special measure, no further action on the part of the organisation is needed. If not, an exemption from the EO Act may be required by applying to VCAT. An organisation should seek independent advice about whether a particular position constitutes a special measure for the purposes of the EO Act.

Working in partnership with the Aboriginal community and organisations

- Close engagement and consultation with the local Aboriginal community
- Leveraging networks with the Aboriginal community, Job Networks and local agencies/groups to improve understanding of Council’s role and functions and what career opportunities exist in Local Government
- Developing relationships with organisations that specialise in Aboriginal employment.

4. The business case / rationale for action

There is a strong rationale and business case for organisations, including the City of Whittlesea, to take a strategic and sustainable approach to improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Employment a critical part of the solution

- Employment is critical to reducing the social, economic and health gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
- National research shows that Aboriginal people sit at the low end of all social indicators including employment, education, health and housing and that this fundamentally impacts on Aboriginal people's ability to live fulfilling, healthy and productive lives
- Employment supports the economic independence and autonomy of Aboriginal people which helps address long term disadvantage
- However, the rate of Aboriginal Australians' participation in the workforce is lower, and the unemployment rate higher, than for non-Aboriginal Australians
- Aboriginal Australians are nearly four times more likely to be unemployed and tend to remain unemployed for longer. They are also more likely to be employed part-time and a greater proportion are not in the labour force (35.5% of working age Aboriginal Australians compared to 21.7% of the non-Aboriginal working age population)
- On average Aboriginal Australians earn just over half as much as non-Aboriginal Australians (median income of \$400 per week compared to median income of \$608 per week)

Multiple barriers/challenges to employment a critical part of the problem

- Important factors in explaining lower rates of employment for Aboriginal people include:
 - Experiences of discrimination in the past (for instance, in education) may put individuals at a disadvantage in the present (for instance, when seeking employment). The impact of historical discrimination on Aboriginal Australians is particularly pronounced
 - Lower levels of educational attainment, with Aboriginal Australians just over half as likely to finish Year 12 when compared to non-Aboriginal Australians. Aboriginal Australians aged 20–24 attend university at about one-fifth the rate of their non-Aboriginal peers
 - Higher rates of ill-health and disability among Aboriginal people

- Higher rates of arrest among Aboriginal people
- Facing discrimination when looking for a job and in the workplace
- Relying disproportionately on friends and relatives as a source of information about jobs (*and if there are fewer employed members within their networks, this approach is less effective*)
- Lower rates of transition from unemployment to employment and lower rates of job retention (*lower job retention may be due to Aboriginal people being more likely to be employed in casual jobs and seasonal work and people leaving jobs when they are not provided with flexibility in order to meet family and cultural obligations*).

A strong Federal and State policy platform

- The Closing the Gap Prime Minister’s Report 2010 called for a national and integrated response from Federal, State and Local Government to overcome Aboriginal disadvantage. For example, the report set a target to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians by 2018
- The Australian Government’s Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011–2018 provides a high-level policy framework and describes the major actions the Australian Government is taking to achieve its goal of improving the personal and economic well-being of Aboriginal Australians – including a strong focus on employment. The strategy calls for a partnership approach across all levels of government and the public and non-profit sectors. A goal is to have 2.6% of public sector employees (nationally) being Aboriginal Australians by 2015
- The Victorian Government’s “Victoria Works for Indigenous Jobseekers” initiative aims to increase Aboriginal employment outcomes in Victoria. As part of this, the Municipal Association of Victoria is currently participating with the Victorian Government’s Aboriginal Employment Broker Program being undertaken by the Indigenous Economic Development Unit from the Department of Business and Innovation.

A strong local level commitment at the City of Whittlesea

Improved employment outcomes for Aboriginal people at Council supports the City of Whittlesea to:

- Further act upon its commitment towards reconciliation, as stated through Council's adoption and support of the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation and the Australian Local Government Association Commitment to Indigenous Australians (11 July, 2000)
- Realise three of our six Future Directions within the 'Shaping Our Future Whittlesea 2025 Strategic Community Plan', specifically Inclusive and engaged community, Growing our economy and Health and wellbeing
- Achieve our Vision of 'Creating vibrant self-sustaining communities together'
- Live our organisational Value of 'Valuing Diversity'
- Meet our positive duty or obligation to address disadvantage by preventing discrimination
- Plan for and achieve a skilled, diverse and dedicated local workforce which utilises the unique skills and perspectives of Aboriginal Australians
- Expand the knowledge and awareness of non-Aboriginal staff
- Benefit from having more satisfied, responsive and productive employees by being an inclusive, culturally aware and competent workplace
- Plan for the emerging labour and skills shortage, given an overall decline in the working age population and an Aboriginal population that is growing at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population
- Become an employer of choice for Aboriginal people
- Achieve our actions within the Racial Diversity Workplace Action Plan (*to develop an Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and work proactively towards a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community we serve*)
- Leverage off the high level of staff enthusiasm and interest in developing an Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and employing more Aboriginal people, as indicated in the survey of City of Whittlesea staff (as part of the 2008 Feasibility Study)
- Leverage off current Aboriginal officer network group within Council
- Leverage off the Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) Project and the current organisational focus regarding supporting diversity and reducing race-based discrimination, as well as the development of the Reconciliation Action Plan and Bubup Wilam Early Learning Centre

- Develop recruitment processes and practices and make changes to policy that have a positive difference for all job candidates and employees, regardless of culture
- Walk the talk and be a strong role model for others

5. Resourcing the implementation phase

Implementing an effective, meaningful and sustainable Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy requires adequate financial and human resources. To achieve our Aboriginal employment aspirations, there is a need to, as our Mission states, 'strategically resource our organisation to support our community'.

The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government's Closing the Gap Through Place-based Employment, Local Government Indigenous Employment Program, Green Paper 2010, states, *"Project after project, limited funding has been allocated for Indigenous initiatives. Adequate and effective resources must be committed over the long term to ensure sustainability and success. Providing adequate resources often equates to committing to five to ten year funding horizons for projects – not one to two years. The experience of those who have been involved in Indigenous employment programs, including those in councils, is often one of frustration when inadequate funding has brought about a premature end to the project."*

Funding and support opportunities are being explored through the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations to determine how they may be able to support Council to implement our Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy. However, it is strongly recommended that the implementation of the employment strategy should not be dependent on the availability of external funding which adds an additional layer of complexity and paperwork that also needs to be resourced internally.