



6 November 2015

Ms Claire Thorn
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Department of Health and Human Services
50 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000
Email: youth@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Ask for: Kathleen McClusky
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Dear Ms Thorn,

Hobsons Bay Submission: What's Important to YOUTH? Consultation on the Victorian Government's new youth policy


Hobsons Bay City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *What's Important to YOUTH?* discussion paper.

Council's is committed to supporting and advocating for the needs of young people in Hobsons Bay especially in relation to the social determinants of health such as education, employment, housing and public transport.

Council supports the broad direction of the Victorian Government's new youth policy, particularly the emphasis on young people who are disadvantaged, disengaged or facing particular challenges. We look forward to further development of the policy, and working together to maximise opportunities and minimise barriers for young people.

The attached submission outlines the key issues for Hobsons Bay, along with a number of practical suggestions for Victorian Government. If you would like to discuss this submission further, please contact Kathleen McClusky, Manager Strategy and Advocacy on 9932 1004 or email kmccclusky@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au .

Yours sincerely,


Natalie Walker
Director Strategic Development



Hobsons Bay City Council's Submission on the *What's Important to YOUth?* Discussion Paper

Hobsons Bay City Council covers an area of 65 square kilometres in Melbourne's south-west. It is relatively close to the City, extending from seven to 20 kilometres from the central business district. The current population is estimated to be around 90,000 people. At the time of the 2011 Census, 15.5 per cent of the population (or 13,004 people) were aged 12 to 24 years. In addition, between 2009 and 2012, a total of 505 people aged 12 to 24 years settled in Hobsons Bay from overseas. The vast majority (over 80%) were young adults aged 18 to 24, with most entering via the family and skilled migration stream.

Policy Context

Under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, Council has a responsibility to protect, improve and promote public health and wellbeing. Council's Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17 articulates the community's vision and priorities for achieving this, acknowledging that wellbeing begins with environments that are supportive, equitable, and inclusive.

Through the development of Council's Children and Young People's Plan 2014-18 the community told us they need local employment and skill development opportunities, integrated transport solutions and accessible health and wellbeing services (including services that aim to improve young people's mental health).

The Plan articulates Council's vision for a municipality where young people belong, connect, contribute and succeed. It is underpinned by objectives which promote a gender equitable community, an appropriate mix of local services, and safe and connected neighbourhoods. The plan further encourages partnerships to provide and support education, employment and housing opportunities, as well as seeking to build community capacity to prevent youth mental health issues.

Council's Advocacy Strategy 2014-18 articulates a number of key priority areas that are directly relevant to young people, including affordable housing, employment and economic development, provision of education and teaching facilities and, perhaps most significantly, appropriate mental health services for young people in Hobsons Bay.

Finally, Council supports a whole of Victorian government approach to young people's health and wellbeing. The acknowledgement of complex and interrelated challenges and the interest of multiple government departments is a useful starting point. However, it will be critical to develop and implement coordinated responses to improve outcomes for young people, particularly the most disadvantaged groups. Additionally, the future development and implementation of Plan Melbourne provides opportunities to influence a number of critical



issues for young people, including housing, transport, employment and environmental sustainability.

Consultation Questions

The following consultation questions are addressed in this submission.

What do you think should be done to improve educational opportunities for young people?

Education is key for young people. With the increasing population careful planning is required to respond to future demand. The number of children and young people aged 0 to 18 years in Hobsons Bay is forecast to increase by approximately 10 per cent by 2023. Most of the overall population growth in the municipality is anticipated in neighbourhoods to the north east, particularly in Altona North, Spotswood and South Kingsville.

The Victorian Government recently earmarked the former Eastona Primary School within this area to be sold for re-development. Fortunately, once the population growth for this area was reviewed this site was taken off the state government land sales list.

Council is pleased with this outcome, however would like to see a plan in place to ensure that this site will be reinstated with a public school when population increases. Affordability of education is a critical issue for families and Council believes that access to quality public schools is fundamental to improving educational opportunities. More generally, any decision to sell school sites should be carefully considered in the context of projected population growth and the availability of land to develop new schools, when required.

Another local issue is the lack of a major tertiary institution based in Hobsons Bay. In fact, the municipality recently lost a university campus (Victoria University, Newport) due to lack of demand for courses being offered.

The absence of a local tertiary institution means that young people must travel to study, often by public transport. As discussed later in this submission, transport can often be a barrier in itself. Further support is required to build partnerships between local learning centres (such as libraries and community centres) and tertiary intuitions to deliver more flexible and targeted classes. This approach will improve access for students and provide local opportunities for young people to remain engaged in education. Further innovative and partnership models of higher education and alternate education should be explored to ensure communities have access to appropriate opportunities.



What do you think should be done to improve employment opportunities for young people?

Many young people in Hobsons Bay find it difficult to secure and maintain employment. In March 2015, the rate of youth unemployment in western Melbourne was 14.7 per cent, almost double the rate for the broader population (7.5%).¹ Additionally, the 2011 Census revealed that six per cent of 15 to 19 year olds and 13 per cent of 20 to 24 year olds in Hobsons Bay were disengaged from paid work or education. The municipality is ranked fourth in Victoria for disengagement of 20 to 24 year olds.² Anecdotally, young people suggest they just need someone to give them a chance to prove themselves.

While manufacturing is Hobsons Bay's largest employer, the sector faces significant challenges that have led to job losses at key employers, e.g. Toyota and BAE.³ Conversely, the finance, health, construction and education industries are experiencing strong employment growth, and provide potential employment opportunities for young people.

Victorian Government can play a role in supporting large local employers (including Councils) to provide employment opportunities for young people. These opportunities may take varied forms, including traineeships, work experience, and part and fulltime employment. This support should emphasise the value of young people's skills and perspective, and how this can benefit employers and their workplace.

It will also be important in coming years to monitor the impact of recent (and proposed) Commonwealth Government policy, including to changes to income support, Work for the Dole and the employment service system. More extensive mutual obligation requirements, coupled with stronger and more immediate penalties for breaches, are expected to place additional strain on individuals, families and local services.

On a positive note, Council was encouraged by the Commonwealth Government's recent announcement of a \$331 million Youth Employment Strategy. In particular, Council welcomes the Transition to Work program, which will provide funding for community-based organisations to deliver intensive support for disengaged young people. A similar program has been operating in Hobsons Bay for a number of years. Council encourages Victorian Government to monitor (and, where possible, support) implementation of this program to ensure it responds to local challenges and opportunities.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed – Electronic Delivery*, Cat No. 6291.0.55.001. The 'western Melbourne' region includes the following LGAs: Hobsons Bay, Wyndham, Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Melton.

² City of Greater Dandenong, 'Youth Disengagement: Young People Not in Paid Employment or Education', ABS Census 2011, accessed 28/10/15.

³ Hobsons Bay City Council, 2015, Economic Development Strategy 2015-20, Hobsons Bay City Council



What do you think should be done to improve the mental health of young people?

More young people in Hobsons Bay experience psychological distress and psychiatric hospitalisations than anywhere in the Western Metropolitan Region. In 2009-10, the rate of psychiatric hospitalisations for 10 to 17 year olds was 11.2 per 1,000, almost double the rate for the region and Victoria. The most recent survey of secondary school students in Hobsons Bay found that 20 per cent reported high levels of psychological distress, substantially higher than rates reported across the region (14%) and Victoria (13%).⁴

Consultation for Council's Children's and Young People's Plan confirmed a lack of accessible and affordable mental health services in Hobsons Bay. Council's Youth Services team delivers Hobsons Bay's only free generalist support and counselling service for young people aged 12 to 25. It also provides a range of high quality support, information, referral, educational, social and recreational activities. Council also plays a role through the provision of recreational facilities, libraries and community education opportunities.

With limited accessible mental health services in Hobsons Bay, early intervention services for young people are currently being over-stretched to accommodate more complex cases, limiting ability to focus on offering preventative care to clients with "hidden" mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. This situation poses a significant risk to the ongoing mental health of young people and the overall wellbeing of our community.

Locally-based mental health services (to complement existing Council services) are the key to addressing these issues. Council has been advocating for the establishment of Headspace facility within Hobsons Bay for many years. Prioritisation through Victorian Government policy will support this advocacy further and benefit the municipality through increased investment in local programs. In particular, there is a need for services to be responsive to the needs of young people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and/or those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or questioning.

The secondary school years are critical for the development of positive mental health. At school, children and young people develop an awareness and understanding of personal relationships, coping mechanisms and social inclusion. It is therefore essential that resources for prevention strategies are in place to ensure appropriate support is available through these key transitions. This investment will help with learning and future employment, as well as providing a strong foundation for adult (mental) health and wellbeing.

⁴ Hobsons Bay City Council, *Young People's Experience in Hobsons Bay: Research Summary*, published 2013.



Council has been active in this regard through the delivery of a Youth Mental Health First Aid program to local secondary schools, parents and Council staff. This program has been successful in providing participants with the tools to assist young people experiencing mental health issues. Expansion of these types of programs (alongside other specialist and preventative mental health services) is critical to improving mental health for young people in Hobsons Bay.

What do you think should be done to improve housing for young people?

Housing is a fundamental need for all young people and is a critical social determinant of health. In most cases, young people experiencing homelessness are unable to engage in other key activities such as education, training and employment.

Over 2,000 rent-paying households in Hobsons Bay (or 22 per cent) experience housing stress, spending more than 30 per cent of weekly income on rent. Moreover, the supply of affordable rental housing is becoming increasingly scarce, with just 6.8 per cent of properties affordable to low income households.⁵

The growing shortage of affordable and appropriate housing in Hobsons Bay has meant those on low incomes have (at best) very limited choice. Affordable housing for young people may be substandard, insecure in tenure and isolated from services and infrastructure. In some cases, low income residents are at risk of (or currently experiencing) homelessness. The issues associated with securing affordable and appropriate housing are compounded by rising utility costs.

Hobsons Bay City Council is currently reviewing its Affordable Housing Policy Statement. It is also developing a Housing Strategy to support the implementation of affordable housing, given limited legislative direction from Victorian Government. While it is pleasing to see the Victorian Government investigating how affordable housing may be addressed via the Plan Melbourne refresh, this process needs to ensure legislative tools and support is available for developers and local governments, including local planning policies and clear definitions.

What do you think should be done to improve public transport for young people?

Like many other areas, there is a strong reliance on cars within Hobsons Bay with 38 per cent of households owning one car and a further 34 per cent owning two vehicles.⁶ Consultation on Council's Children and Young People's Plan highlighted access to public transport as an important issue for young people.

⁵ Hobsons Bay City Council, *Advocacy Strategy 2014-18*, published 2014

⁶ ABS, *2011 Census of Population and Housing*



Council recognises the need and benefits of a fully integrated transport system. An Integrated Transport Plan is currently in development and public transport remains a key advocacy priority for Council.

Key public transport issues for young people in Hobsons Bay include:

- bus frequency – outside of narrow morning and afternoon peaks, many bus services run every 40 minutes on weekdays and every 80 minutes on weekends and public holidays.
- Altona Loop – since 2011 passengers from Seaholme, Altona and Westona railway stations have been required to change at Newport to reach the City outside of the morning and afternoon peaks. This particularly affects young people travelling to education, employment, health appointments or job interviews
- safety – while most young people feel safe in Hobsons Bay, there are some concerns regarding perceived and actual safety in and around public transport
- fines and fare evasion – the affordability of public transport is an issue for some young people, leading them to risk fare evasion. In many cases, fines simply exacerbate the problem

Initiatives directed at improving the frequency and efficiency of buses and trains would help to improve public transport for young people. Measures to improve actual and perceived safety would also be helpful, including additional lighting and improved lines of sight in and around public transport infrastructure.

Further training for Protective Service Officers to support better engagement with young people is also encouraged, including Youth Mental Health First Aid. Additionally, programs addressing the affordability of public transport (e.g. concessions, travel vouchers), coupled with a flexible approach to enforcement and fines, can overcome some of the affordability barriers for disadvantaged young people.

Finally, additional support for active transport (walking and cycling) will help to complement existing public transport services. Council oversees a network of walking and cycling paths throughout the municipality, and has worked closely with the Victorian Government through the construction of the Federation Bike Trail. Further improvements can be made by working with VicRoads to develop and maintain bike lanes on major roads in Hobsons bay, as well through additional investment and prioritisation for local active transport programs and infrastructure within the Department of Transport.