

## **PROPOSED CHANGES TO HEALTHY AGEING SERVICES**

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Report Author: Manager Community Support

Responsible Officer: Director Communities

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

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*The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.*

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

This item is to be considered at a future Council meeting that is open to the public.

### **SUMMARY**

Council has provided a range of services funded through the Australian Government's Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) since 2015. The Australian Government is in the process of reforming the overall national aged care system, implementing a range of system changes prior to fully replacing the CHSP with a new program in 2025.

An internal review of the three programs that continue to be delivered by Council's Healthy Ageing Unit has recently been completed. These programs are Meals, Transport and Social Support Group and are predominantly funded by the Australian Government through the CHSP program, with the State Government funding a very small proportion of the overall Meals program.

It is no longer essential for Council to provide these services as other funded providers of Transport and Social Support Group operate in the municipality, and there is an opportunity to establish a sustainable delivered Meals service that would increase the benefits of the current Meals program. These programs operate at a cost to Council and there is an opportunity for Council to re-invest and develop activities that other organisations do not provide that will support healthy ageing.

It is recommended that Council inform the Australian Government that it will transition out of providing these three activities and that Council renegotiate with the State Government alternative use of funding currently received to increase social inclusion and connection.

It is also recommended that Council support the ongoing investment of the current approved Council budget (\$816,000) for Healthy Ageing in activities that will benefit a greater proportion of the older community.

The possibility that Council will transition out of providing these services has been communicated to funders and current clients and the staff and volunteers involved in the provision of these programs have been consulted.

## RECOMMENDATION

### *That Council*

1. ***Transition out of being a provider of Meals, Transport and Social Support Group by 30 June 2024.***
2. ***Notify the Australian Government that Council:***
  - (a) ***Will transition out of providing the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) activities of Meals, Transport and Social Support Group by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024***
  - (b) ***Will explore opportunities to partner and transition the existing CHSP Meal Service to a suitable CHSP Meal Provider that will implement a volunteer-based delivery model and enable social connection and client wellbeing checks***
  - (c) ***Seeks to continue delivering CHSP Sector Support & Development.***
3. ***Notify the State Government that Council:***
  - (a) ***Will cease to be a meals provider for the Home & Community Care Program for Younger People***
  - (b) ***Will seek to invest the funding received through the Home & Community Care Program for Younger People (HACCPYP) in new initiatives that will increase social inclusion and connection.***
4. ***Develop a transition and communication plan to ensure clients and staff receive regular information and can provide feedback about the transition.***
5. ***Provide an in-principle commitment to continue to invest the current approved Healthy Ageing Unit budget (\$816,000) in activities that support Healthy Ageing.***
6. ***Consider a proposed model for how Council will support Healthy Ageing at a future Council meeting.***

## RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

At its meeting of 24 August 2021, Council resolved to:

1. *Authorise relevant officers to:*
  - (a) *Formally notify the Federal Government of:*
    - (i) *Council's intention to not extend Council's contract and cease delivery of some Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) services (Domestic Assistance, Personal Care, Respite Care, Social Support Individual, Home Modifications and Property Maintenance) beyond June 2022*

- (ii) Council's preference to extend Council's contract and continue delivery of the following CHSP services (Social Support Group, Transport, Meals, Volunteer Coordination and Sector Support and Development).*
- (b) Formally notify the State Government of:*
- (i) Council's intention to end its current contract and cease delivery of some Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACCPYP) services (Assessment, Domestic Assistance, Personal Care, Respite Care and Property Maintenance)*
- (ii) Council's preference to continue delivery of HACCPYP services that align with Council's future operating model (Social Support Group, Volunteer Coordination, Flexible Service Response (Transport) and Meals).*
- 2. Develop a communication and transition plan to ensure clients and staff receive regular information and can provide feedback about the transition.*
  - 3. Develop an 'information and navigation' resource to support client transition to the new providers of CHSP and HACCPYP services and to provide information to the broader Yarra Ranges community about the aged care system, and*
  - 4. Review the services that Council intends to continue delivery of, to ensure that these are meeting the needs of clients and the community.*

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Purpose and Background***

Council currently receives funding from the Australian Government through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) and from the State Government through the Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACC-PYP) to provide several services for residents assessed as requiring 'entry level' supports to remain living at home or participate in the community.

Aged Care has been undergoing significant change with the Australian Government implementing a significant reform program both prior to, and following, the Aged Care Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Extensive further change will occur over at least the next two years.

The purpose of the ongoing national Aged Care Reforms are to ensure the most vulnerable older Australians can access high quality support services and are supported to actively participate in the community.

In 2022, the Australian Government confirmed that it would introduce a new 'Support At Home Program' to replace the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and Home Care Package System. A key aspect of the Australian Government's future strategy is to ensure older Australians have a choice of providers for services by introducing a model where providers are funded by a client contribution (a fee) as well as receiving an Australian Government subsidy once an individual service

activity has been delivered. The new Support At Home Program is now expected to be introduced from July 2025.

In response to these reforms, in August 2021 Council resolved to transition delivery of a range of services to other providers identified by the Australian and State Governments and on 1 July 2022 Council ceased to provide those services. Council continued to be a provider of Meals, Transport and Social Support Group. A recent review of these three program areas has been undertaken and identified that there are other providers available, there is a relatively high cost to Council to deliver these services and there is an opportunity to reinvest to increase existing, or develop new, initiatives that no other providers are delivering.

It is noteworthy that a number of other Victorian Local Governments have undertaken similar reviews with a large majority concluding to transfer service delivery to other providers. Recently, within the Eastern Metropolitan Region, Whitehorse Council ceased to provide all CHSP services at the end of June 2023 and Manningham will cease to provide all services at the end of October 2023.

It is also noteworthy that it is the responsibility of the Australian (for over 65's) and State Governments (for under 65's) to commission and monitor the provision of these services. Yarra Ranges Council is one of a number of organisations funded to deliver these services. This recommendation that Council cease delivery of these services will require the Australian and State Governments to identify alternative provision to meet the needs of the community.

### ***Options considered***

The internal review explored the full cost to deliver these funded programs, the gendered use of these programs, and the availability of other providers. The review considered whether the cost to deliver these activities could be reduced to be within the funding parameters expected by the Australian Government. While some efficiencies could be achieved and some additional income raised, the review identified it will not be possible to achieve cost-neutrality or near cost-neutrality and Council will need to subsidise these activities at a very high level.

### **Meals**

Council is funded by the Australian Government to deliver 26,521 meals to eligible residents aged over 65 and by the State Government to deliver 2,500 meals to eligible residents aged under 65. Council delivered 43,600 meals in 2022/2023. The program cost \$1.43 million to deliver in 2022/2023 with Council contributing 47.5%.

The Australian Government is currently supporting two projects in Victoria to establish sustainable delivered meals models that can be provided within the funding parameters set by the Australian Government. Within the Eastern Metropolitan Region, a service supporting Whitehorse has recently begun through the 'Future Fit' network. Consultation with the organisation supporting this project (Miles Morgan Australia) has ascertained there is interest in developing a partnership with Yarra Ranges Council. This partnership would seek to establish a sustainable delivered meals service for the municipality that would preserve all aspects of the current

service, continue to offer volunteering opportunities, and increase the choice available to users.

Consultation with the State Government program representatives regarding the Home and Community Care Program for Younger People has indicated that if Council ceases being a meals provider the State Government would ensure the nutritional needs of eligible residents continued to be met.

### Transport

Council is funded by the Australian Government to deliver 12,477 'individual trips' but delivers significantly fewer than this. The program cost \$241,528 to deliver in 2022/2023 and cost Council \$165,440 (68% of the total cost).

The internal review identified a number of other CHSP funded community organisations who provide transport already operating in the Yarra Ranges providing services for either part or all of the municipality.

### Social Support Group

Council can access funding to enable up to 41,523 hours of Social Support Group, but in 2022/2023 significantly underperformed against this target. Groups are currently provided, or commence excursions, from Yarra Junction or Tecoma. The total cost to provide Social Support Group activities in 2022/23 was \$470,778 with the cost to Council being \$353,464 in 2022/2023 (75% of the program cost).

There are a number of other CHSP providers of Social Support Group operating in the Yarra Ranges. Many other providers of Aged Care services do offer Social Support Group activities and Council could potentially increase the attractiveness for incoming providers to establish programs in the Yarra Ranges through offering regular or sole access to Council facilities.

### ***Recommended option and justification***

#### *Option 1: Business as usual*

This option is not recommended as other government funded providers of these programs are available and Council would miss the current opportunity to establish a sustainable delivered Meals provider.

#### *Option 2: Transition and re-investment*

The recommended option is for Council to transition out of the provision of Meals, Transport and Social Support Group by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 and re-invest the approved Healthy Ageing budget (\$816,000) in activities that support the broader community to 'age well'.

It is recommended that Council seek to develop a partnership to transition Council's CHSP service to the delivered meals services supported through the 'Future Fit' network. This partnership is expected to require Council to negotiate a low cost use of relevant facilities, support current volunteers to transition should they choose to, and maintain a relationship with the future program.

It is recommended that Council relinquish the CHSP funding received for Transport and Social Support Group. There are a number of other established CHSP funded service providers operating in the Yarra Ranges. Officers expect the Australian Government to commission additional providers or increase the capacity of the existing providers. Council could offer the use of relevant facilities at peppercorn rates to encourage the availability of Social Support Group across the municipality.

### Transition Support

A communication and transition plan would be developed to enable the supported transition of eligible clients to alternative providers. Support will be available for clients during and after a transition provided by the Healthy Ageing Team, primarily through the Information & Navigation Officers.

### **Consultation**

Staff, volunteers and clients have been informed about this recommendation with formal consultation undertaken with staff.

### Staff and Volunteer Consultation

The feedback from staff centred on their concern that services delivered to the same standard would continue to be available for the community. Staff were also concerned that services continue to be available during the transition period and, understandably, the implications for their own employment.

Volunteers were given the opportunity to provide feedback. Volunteers expressed how much they enjoy their role volunteering and their hope that the role will still be available in future. Volunteers were concerned that the social connection between clients and volunteers and the welfare monitoring of clients continue through any future provision.

### Client Information

Healthy Ageing clients were informed of the proposed recommendations and provided with Healthy Ageing Team contact details should they have any questions or feedback. A small number contacted Council stating that they enjoyed the meals and/or seeking clarification about service continuity.

## **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

The cost to Council for the delivery of these programs was \$1.19million in 2022/2023 and is forecast to cost \$981,353 in 2023/2024. It is expected by the Australian Government that these programs should be cost neutral within the new Aged Care funding environment.

## **APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES**

Council's *Healthy Active Ageing Plan (2019-2023)* and *Health & Wellbeing Plan (2021-2025)* set the strategic direction for the Healthy Ageing Unit and detail how Council support optimal health and wellbeing for older and ageing residents in their communities and to ensure that our spaces are age friendly and promote good health. The 2023-25 Council Action Plan details that Council will seek to 'to increase the age and dementia friendliness of the municipality and improve social connection'.

The Healthy Ageing Unit's current business plan details that these outcomes will be achieved through the activities outlined below that will increase the overall age-friendliness of communities by valuing the contribution of older people and ensure their access to all aspects of community life.

### **1. Strategic Stewardship**

Council has an important role to consult with community and act as a system steward to support the development of the aged care service system ensuring there is an appropriate, accessible aged care program in the future that is suitable for all ageing and older residents in Yarra Ranges. This would be achieved through activities as follows:

- Monitoring community experience/perception of the final stages of the aged care reform, local coordination and advocacy to the relevant tier of government when gaps or issues are identified.
- Develop and promote collaborative partnerships to strengthen the capacity of aged care service providers to deliver quality services that are responsive to client needs, including residents with diverse needs.
- Coordinating activities that support the attraction and retention of a paid and volunteer workforce for aged care providers servicing the municipality.
- Advocacy to the State and Federal government to ensure the needs and issues of the Yarra Ranges community and aged service system are addressed.

### **2. Ageing Well Voice: Engagement, Connection & Celebration**

As a signatory to the Age Friendly Victoria Declaration since 2016, Council is committed to ensuring all its residents have an opportunity to participate in healthy ageing.

There is an opportunity to strengthen local engagement and ongoing participation, with a more diverse range of older residents. In addition to strengthening the influence of established 'senior' groups (such as U3As and Senior Citizens), there is an important need for Council to improve engagement of senior residents who are gender diverse and/or from non-English speaking backgrounds.

There is also an opportunity to increase recognition and celebration of the role that older adults play in the community that promotes inclusion of older people and respect for their decisions and lifestyle choices.

### **3. Ageing Well Hubs: Information, Connection and Navigation**

Should the recommendation be supported, this would enable Council to develop Ageing Well Hubs for older residents and the community. Council would work with local community groups and service providers to provide a range of information, connection activities and navigation to services. These would take the form of pop-ups at events or at Council links.

Council is well-placed to support navigation as part of existing local efforts, due to the knowledge of, and relationships held with other agencies in the community, as well as being a trusted source of information for those experiencing barriers or who have complex needs, and who otherwise may not present to services.

In addition to these priorities, research and consultation will be undertaken by Council to develop a Key Life Stages Plan that will supersede the *Healthy Active Ageing Plan (2021-2023)*. This plan would guide decisions about the investment of the Healthy Ageing approved budget in addition to the elements outlined above.

#### **RELEVANT LAW**

A Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) was undertaken as part of the internal review. The GIA focussed on understanding how these programs are currently utilised to inform the review, the recommendations and any service transitions that may occur.

#### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

##### ***Economic Implications***

There are no identified economic implications of these recommendations.

##### ***Social Implications***

There will be increased social benefits for the community from the ongoing investment in activities that will support the age and dementia friendliness of the municipality and Healthy Ageing.

This activity will be driven by the Key Life Stages Plan that will be developed over the remainder of 2023/24 informed by community consultation. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in activity that addresses ageism, elder abuse, and support for community groups providing opportunities for older residents to socially connect or take part in other activities.

Council will continue to provide the Information and Navigation Service to support residents to access the Aged Care System.



## ***Environmental Implications***

There are no identified environmental implications of these recommendations for the municipality.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Council's Community Engagement Policy details when Council will undertake community engagement. It has been assessed that the appropriate level of engagement regarding this issue is to ensure that the residents that will be impacted by these recommendations are informed, updated and are able to request information and have any questions addressed. Residents that will be impacted by this decision will be kept informed of all progress and have the opportunity to seek further information at any point.

Broader consultation is not appropriate for this matter as the impact for the community will be that alternative providers will be commissioned by the Australian and State Governments to deliver these services. While the methods through which the services are delivered could potentially change there would not be any loss of service for the community.

## **COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

There is an opportunity for Council to establish a partnership with the 'Future Fit' network to support the establishment and ongoing development of a sustainable delivered meals service that also enables social connection.

Council has an opportunity to expand its activities and key actions in the areas of stewardship, planning and advocacy working objectively with the service provider sector and Australian/State Government to ensure the long-term sustainability of an aged care service system that meets the needs of older residents and communities within Yarra Ranges.

Council have been informed that the State Government would support a request to retain the funding currently received through the HACCPYP to work with the community to identify initiatives that will increase the social connection and inclusion of residents that would be eligible for the HACCPYP.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

The following risks have been identified as relevant to this matter:

### ***Risks to Council***

The most significant risk for Council is to continue with a 'business as usual' approach due to the ongoing changes to the Aged Care System. The cost to Council to continue in service delivery will remain significant and it is uncertain that Council would be selected as a funded service provider in the new aged care system.

### ***Service provision risk***

There is a potential risk that the current meals-on-wheels delivery model could change if the Australian Government do not support transition to a provider utilising this approach.

### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

### **ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT**

Nil