



Moreland
City Council

Governance and Democracy



<https://conversations.moreland.vic.gov.au/imagine-moreland>

Topic snapshot

A healthy and robust democracy is one where residents and ratepayers are active participants in Council's decision-making processes and can shape outcomes that best serve the needs of the community and the municipality.

Governance and democracy are about being responsible, transparent and accountable in decision-making, financial sustainability, asset management and providing great service. The Local Government Act 2020 is the law that guides these responsibilities and outlines the legal framework in which all Victorian local governments must operate.

The key issues are:

- 1. Council's governance responsibilities:** ensuring good process and quality outcomes.
- 2. Stewardship:** managing assets, resources and finances responsibly.
- 3. Customer experience:** providing effective, accessible and responsive services.
- 4. Genuine community engagement:** valuing community participation and partnership.



Relevant Council services

- Council meetings; governance; risk management and audit; finance and rates; customer service; communications; community engagement and public participation; planning; local laws; research.
- Community at the Heart internal change program – customer experience transformation program.
- Conversations Moreland Website.

Data and community feedback

Community feedback

- Community surveys as well as other community feedback suggest the level and quality of Council's community engagement should be improved. This includes concerns about a lack of representation, a belief Council doesn't undertake genuine consultation, and that the community don't have the opportunity to have their say (Wallis 2018, 2019 and 2020).
- This includes simplifying the way Council's role is explained and its complex operations, and helping the community understand how they can influence council decisions. (MCC 2020b).
- Many community members want increased influence/involvement in 'hot topics' such as urban planning, traffic and car parking and capital works. (MCC 2020a).
- The budget consultation process should seek to reach and engage a broader section of the community. Council generally receives budget submissions from a similar set of community stakeholders, and there is opportunity to expand engagement. This year Council received 60 submissions on the draft budget. (MCC 2020c).
- The services the Moreland community is most satisfied with are library services, service supporting the community diversity and services around arts and cultural opportunities (Wallis 2020).
- Informing the community, lobbying on behalf of the community, community consultation and engagement and parking facilities are service areas the Moreland community are the least satisfied with (Wallis 2020).
- In 2020 the Moreland community indicated roads, community facilities, trees and open space and parking are their top service priorities over the next year (Wallis 2020).

Data

- In 2018/19 Moreland Council expenses (what we spend our money on) per head of population were \$1,023, which is lower than similar council level average (\$1,270 per head) and all Victorian councils (\$2,071 per head) (LGV 2019).
- Over the last 10 years the Moreland population has grown by 36,000 people and in 2019 were 185,000 people living in the municipality (ABS 2019).
- Most of this population change is from people moving to Moreland from overseas. The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to have an impact on future population growth in the short to medium term due to restrictions on migrants coming to Australia over the next 2-3 years (id Consulting 2020).
- Over the 5 years to 2016, the fastest growing age group in Moreland is 25-34 years (ABS 2016) and this is a group that has not been particularly represented well in Moreland's survey responses (Wallis 2018, 2019 and 2020).
- The Moreland community is diverse; 36% of people speak a language other than English at home; over a quarter live alone and well over a third rent their own home (ABS 2016).
- Over 9,500 Moreland households (16%) do not have internet access, many of whom are older persons and/or don't speak English well (ABS 2016).
- The Victorian Ombudsman receives more complaints about Moreland City Council than any other Council; in 2018/19 this was 138 complaints with 20 of these assessed as needing further investigation (Victorian Ombudsmen 2019).
- The community has rated the organisation's Customer Service as 68/100 for the two years (Wallis 2019, 2020).
- In 2018/19 Moreland Council expenses per head of population were \$1,023, which is lower than similar councils (\$1,270 per head) and all Victorian councils (\$2,071 per head) (LGV 2019).
- Victorian Attorney-General's Office financial sustainability ratios data provided in the Current resources, strategies and policies section below. Commentary is included in Key Issue 2.



Key issue 1: Council's Governance Responsibilities

Ensuring good process and quality outcomes

Overview

As outlined by the Local Government Act 2020: "The role of a Council is to provide good governance in its municipal district for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community."

Governance is the way Council manages all its affairs, including all elements of the municipality it is responsible for, and the residents and ratepayers it serves.

This encompasses Council's governance practices and principles: administration of laws, economic, social and environmental sustainability (including planning and mitigation of climate change risk), community engagement in strategic planning and decision making, financial and asset management, Council's financial viability, and the transparency of its processes and decision making.

Good governance is accountable, transparent, follows the rule of law, is responsive, equitable and inclusive, it is effective and efficient and participatory.

Key issue 1:

Council's Governance Responsibilities

A feature of good governance is having a clear direction, and measurable goals for the community to hold Council to account. It guides day-to-day decision making and helps to evaluate progress.

Key to this is the development of strategic plans in consultation with the community. In line with the Local Government Act, Council must develop and adopt these key strategic documents:

- 10-year Community Vision outlining the community's long-term aspirations for Moreland.
- 4-year Council Plan outlining Council's priority actions.
- 4-year Budget to set out how Council is allocating its resources, and to resource the delivery of the Council Plan.
- 4-year Revenue and Rating Plan.
- 10-year Financial Plan outlining the financial resources required for assets and services.
- 10-year Asset Plan (required to be completed in 2022) outlining the maintenance, renewal, acquisition, expansion, upgrade, disposal and decommissioning of Council assets. This will include a Community Infrastructure Plan.

Developing and maintaining the links between these key plans will set the foundation for Council's ongoing success and ensure quality outcomes that will meet current and future community needs.

Good governance requires careful decision making and actions to ensure quality outcomes for the community. This aligns with the Act's principled approach.

Opportunities

- Develop strategic and financial plans in collaboration with the community, which is now outlined in the new Local Government Act.
- Implement Council's new Community Engagement Policy to improve outcomes through collaborative decision-making with the community.
- Increase access to Council's decision-making forums such as advisory committees and council meetings.
- Ensure that communication channels are contemporary and accessible to improved community confidence through transparency and accountability.
- Increase communications around Council's roles, responsibilities and complex decisions to building community trust and confidence in leadership.

Challenges

- Council decisions are made (and services delivered) in a complicated legal environment, with many layers of legislation to work within. Relationships, partnerships and agreements, particularly with State Government and Federal Government and their agencies, that sometimes need to be considered, particularly when external grant funding is involved.
- Ensuring decisions consider future impacts and are made in alignment with strategies, policies and plans.
- Ensuring decision making considers climate-related risks including financial, operational and service delivery implications (for example, direct damage to assets and other indirect impacts from supply chain disruption).
- Assessing the resilience of Council services, infrastructure and workforce to adapt to this challenge, so the impacts of climate change on the community can be reduced.



Key issue 2: Stewardship

Managing assets, resources and finances responsibly

Overview

Council finances and assets need to be managed in a way that ensures the community has what it needs now and in the future. Assets are the infrastructure needed to deliver Council services. For example, buildings, recreation centres, libraries, roads and parks. Consideration needs to be given to current and future needs for services and assets. Ongoing operational and maintenance costs also need to be considered.

To achieve intended outcomes, funds need to be raised without putting stress on the community. Opportunities to save money, seek funding from other levels of government and work with partners need to be identified. Important factors also need to be considered such as population growth, impacts from climate change and ensuring everyone has access to services and infrastructure.

Processes, checks and balances need to be in place to manage risks and provide assurance that Council are doing the right things. Trust is built by managing public resources responsibly and transparently. With trust in place, important conversations can take place to improve Council services and facilities.

A fundamental indicator for Council's effective stewardship is the financial sustainability ratios, which are established by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO), monitor the financial sustainability of the organisation under 7 categories, for example, net result, liquidity and renewal gap. These help Council assess their sustainability and the risks associated with decisions.

Council's long-term financial performance and position is sustainable where planned long-term service and infrastructure levels and standards are met without unplanned increases in rates or disruptive cuts to services. Moreland is forecasting strong financial sustainability results.

Key issue 2: Stewardship

Opportunities

- Prioritise the items Council can deliver and work with partners to deliver them.
 - Invest in flexible infrastructure that can be modified or repurposed as demographic change occurs.
 - Use deliberative engagement processes to help the community understand the complexities and realities in relation to Council's budget, financial and asset management.
 - Openly discuss any tensions and trade-offs when there are differing views on how to manage, prioritise and allocate resources.
 - Build a strong civic society, where citizens advocate for their own needs and interests (to Council and other levels of government) and have a deeper understanding of the functions of council, the financial opportunities and constraints.
- Services and assets need to be climate resilient to deal with extreme weather events, such as heatwaves and flooding.
 - Maintenance of \$2.5 billion of assets, including \$1.2 billion of infrastructure assets (road, transport, drainage, structures, buildings, parks, open space, fleet, environment and waste, street furniture and signage).
 - Balancing investment in new assets while maintaining existing assets that are cost effective sustainable and in line with community needs.
 - External factors such as assets being transferred from State Government that must be maintained, or new State Government policies that must be implemented, or external funding streams stopped.
 - The speed and extent of climate change is a significant risk to financial sustainability and the ability to ensure community wellbeing and resilience, deliver services, and sustain physical assets.
 - Potential financial impacts from climate risks include:
 - Bearing legal liability for not adapting to climate change, or adequately managing and disclosing risks.
 - Being under prepared for the move to new technologies which support a zero-carbon economy.
 - Being under prepared for the changes in market supply and demand for goods and services such as water supply, and food production and transportation.

Challenges

- The Covid-19 pandemic has put strain on Council's resources and finances in order to respond to the community's immediate needs, and channel resources towards recovery. For example, Council adopted a hardship policy for ratepayers. This offered payment plans and a freeze on interest to June 2021. Council also waved interest on late rates payments which has resulted in revenue coming in later.
- Rate capping reduces the amount of budget available to invest in future projects.





Key issue 3: Customer Experience

Providing effective, accessible and responsive services

Key issue 3: Stewardship

Overview

A multitude of services are delivered by Council. They need to be fit for purpose, available to those who need them, responsive and flexible. For example, being open and clear about what can be provided and to who is important. Transparent, evidence-based decisions need to be made to prioritise access for certain groups.

Effective customer service is a core function of service delivery. Good services meet people's needs and exceed expectations. This starts with seeking, listening and acting on feedback from the people that use or need the service. Council must be responsive to ensure services are relevant and good value for the money invested.

Improving the customer experience is a whole of Council responsibility and is essential to customer satisfaction and effective reputation management. Each customer's experience shapes the community's view of Council. If they experience the service as inadequate or bureaucratic it will reinforce negative stereotypes. If they experience responsiveness and consideration of their unique circumstances, it will leave a positive impression.

Through Council's new Community at the Heart organisational change program, it is aiming to deliver a consistent, high level customer service and experience.

This will build trust and allow the community to meaningfully engage, and in turn foster a collaborative and cooperative relationship with Council.

Opportunities

- Continue to build upon the work of the Community at the Heart program and extend the program to cover:
- Continue to improve the website including regular content reviews, accessibility audits and contemporary design to ensure it remains up to date and accessible for all.
- Implement and resource an Accessible and Inclusive Communications Action Plan.
- Build organisational capacity to implement the customer service promise and accountability framework.
- Improve Council's customer request management systems to enhance customer experience and organisational efficiencies.
- Implement the findings from the customer journey, service process mapping and complaints data.
- This will enable Council to identify efficiencies, improve customer pain points and learn from and listen to complaints.
- Increase customer service training and resources, which ensures all staff, regardless of their role, understand how to work with customers and the community.
- Improve the quality, clarity and provision of information.
- Translate more information to ensure it is accessible for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Challenges

- Respond and adjust to rising customer expectations.
- Older customer service request system which does not meet the current needs of the organisation or integrate with current Council systems resulting in double-handling and inefficient service.



Key issue 4: Genuine Community Engagement

Enabling community participation and partnership

Overview

The community have a right and want to be involved in the decisions that may impact or interest them. Through genuine and considered community engagement, Council can partner with the community to strengthen outcomes.

Given Moreland's diversity, Council needs to make an extra effort to reach out, listen to and represent the needs and interests of all people in the community. This ensures decisions and priorities are reflective of community's needs and aspirations and ensures that an equitable lens is applied to all that Council does. When people have equal opportunity to influence Council's decision making, democracy is strengthened, and decision making is improved.

Through the process of genuine and considered community engagement, Council can partner with the community to work together to strengthen outcomes through shared and collaborative decision-making that benefits the community and municipality as a whole.

Working with the community, Council can benefit from a diversity of voices and harness the community's knowledge, contribution, leadership, ideas, networks, relationships and resources. In turn, by more deeply involving the community, Council will build trust through transparency and collaboration, and the community will feel more invested in the outcomes it has been advocating for and working towards.

Strategic Council decisions, informed by strong community engagement and evidence, set the framework in which the organisation delivers its work.

Helping the community to understand how council functions, and how they can participate, is a major opportunity.

Key issue 4: Precincts

Opportunities

- Involve the Mayor as the leader of key community engagement processes.
- Implement the revised Community Engagement Policy which provides a strong platform to work with the community to shape Council decisions, projects and services.
- Implement the digital engagement strategy to ensure Council has a transparent and interactive platform to engage remotely.
- Improve community engagement and participation in decision-making to strengthen the relationship with the community and increase community trust.
- Improve decision making through a diversity of ideas and voices, including vulnerable or harder to reach groups (culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, people with disability, young people).
- Develop and roll out best practice guidelines and models for engaging people at risk of under representation.
- Improve community engagement practices around high-interest community issues such as planning, parking, climate, transport and open space.
- Engage with advisory committees comprising expert and passionate people who can help shape and inform decisions and services.
- Encourage genuine participation and collaboration, (for example the recently established Youth Services, Youth Ambassadors Program, that actively involves young people in representative democracy)
- Build upon relationship with community groups and services to help provide the connection with the community, for example build upon the existing working relationship with Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service to enable mutually beneficial participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making.
- Partner with community leaders and ambassadors to help translate information, which is digestible, easy to understand and tailored to individual communities.
- Help bridge the digital divide by providing services to the community such as a digital mentoring service

and introducing free-WiFi in council facilities and open spaces.

- Make the most of Council's existing out-reach programs, such as aged care support, and leverage their existing relationships with the community and encourage participation through these channels.
- Increase transparency in decision making and operations through improved communications and customer service channels (building upon work already underway including a website upgrade and improving Council's internal customer service culture.
- Provide the community with access to objective, relevant and timely information that will inform decision making.

Challenges

- Balancing organisational and community expectations, for example if a project has little scope for community influence (such as an emergency road maintenance, that may cause significant disruption but must go ahead due to safety requirements), the community may feel frustrated that they were not as involved as they would like.
- Resourcing genuine engagement requires appropriate resourcing and staff training so they can do what is expected.
- Covid-19 has impacted on movement and face-to-face contact, which has resulted in Council needing to rely more on digital methods of engagement/communication, which can exclude some community groups.
- Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Traditional Owners and most Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations do not have physical presence in Moreland and as a result are not participating in decision making unless directly engaged in a project or a service.
- Newly arrived families from non-English speaking backgrounds and many older residents have limited understanding how council works or what services are on offer due to language barriers and cultural differences.
- Some Moreland residents are disempowered due to unemployment, poverty, homelessness, addiction, mental and physical health challenges, which can create barriers to participation.

Current resources, strategies and policies

Policies and Resources

| Projects | Description | Links |
|---|---|---|
| Governance Rules | These determine the way in which Council will make decisions, elect the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, conduct and give notice of meetings, be informed of decision making through community engagement, require the disclosure and management of conflicts of interest. | https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/about-us/local-laws-and-legislation/moreland-local-laws/ |
| Public Transparency Policy 2020 | Outlines what Council will do to maximise transparency in Council decision making, access to and availability of information and commits Council to key principles in how it will achieve this. | https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/about-us/news-and-publications/policies-and-strategies/ |
| Community engagement policy 2020 (draft) | Sets out Council's approach to community engagement, and how the community can participate in and influence decisionmaking. | Draft emailed to Councillors 25 November 2020. |
| Council Budget Documents | Budget, Strategic Resource Plan, and Fees and Charges | https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/about-us/news-and-publications/budget/ |
| Asset Management Policy | Sets the objective for Council to maintain its infrastructure assets in a responsible and effective manner that is appropriate for the needs of current and future generations | https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/globalassets/key-docs/policy-strategy-plan/asset-management-policy.doc |
| Other relevant policies | Council produces policies, strategies and plans to help guide decisions and to achieve outcomes and goals. | https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/about-us/news-and-publications/policies-and-strategies/ |

Current resources, strategies and policies

Projects

| Projects | Description | Links |
|---|---|---|
| Community at the Heart | Customer Service Transformation Project | N/A |
| Development of key strategic documents | Community engagement (including deliberative engagement) to support the Council developing the key strategic documents in 2021 and 2022. | N/A |
| Community engagement training rollout | Increasing Council community engagement skills and capacity, through rolling out training in community engagement to senior staff, staff champions and all project managers. The rollout will be amended as required following Council adoption of a revised community engagement policy. | N/A |
| Democracy Lab | A Council funded civic participation program funded under the Social Cohesion Plan | https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/community-health/advocacy-services/2020-moreland-democracy-lab/n |
| Human Rights Advisory Committee | The Human Rights Advisory Committee provides advice to Council to guide the implementation and monitoring of the Moreland Human Rights Policy 2016-26. | https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/about-us/your-council/council-and-committee-meetings/advisory-committees/human-rights-advisory-committee/ |
| Reconciliation, Disability and Gender Equality Working Groups etc. | Moreland Reconciliation, Disability and Gender Equality Working Groups meet to provide advice to Council through the Moreland Human Rights Advisory Committee on access, equity and justice. | Reconciliation Disability Gender equality |
| Various internal projects | Includes IT Roadmap, process improvement and service improvement projects | N/A |

References

References

Sources: Reports have been published on the effect of cost shifting on local government, including the MAV's Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration Inquiry into Local Government and Cost Shifting (September 2002) and The Commonwealth House of Representatives Inquiry into Cost Shifting 2002/03 ('Hawker Inquiry').

<https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-city/demographics-and-data/research-reports/>

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019, Regional Population Growth and Estimated Resident Population

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, Census analysis generated by Moreland City Council and presented in in Vulnerable Population Group Brief Access to the Internet

<https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-city/demographics-and-data/research-reports/>

Local Government Victoria (LGV) 2020, Know Your Council

Id Consulting 2017, Moreland Population and Household Forecasts 2017-2036

Moreland City Council (MCC) 2020a, Transparency policy council report

Moreland City Council (MCC) 2020b, Community engagement policy council report

Moreland City Council (MCC)2020c, Council Budget 20/21 Community Submissions

Wallis Group Consulting 2018, 2019 and 2020, Moreland Community Satisfaction Survey, Victorian

Ombudsman 2019, Annual Report 2018/19 **[https://assets.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/assets/Reports/](https://assets.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/assets/Reports/Annual-Reports/Victorian-Ombudsman-Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf?mtime=20191107130256)**

[Annual-Reports/Victorian-Ombudsman-Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf?mtime=20191107130256](https://assets.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/assets/Reports/Annual-Reports/Victorian-Ombudsman-Annual-Report-2018-19.pdf?mtime=20191107130256)

Democracy Data Library document

Contains summary and links to research and data that relate to the Democracy Topic.

