



TERMS OF REFERENCE

Whittlesea Reconciliation Group

Acknowledgement

We recognise the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country and acknowledge the Wurundjeri Willum Clan and Taungurung People as the Traditional Owners of lands within the City of Whittlesea.

Background

As defined by Reconciliation Australia; reconciliation is about building better relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal Peoples for the benefit of all Australians.

City of Whittlesea (Council), at its meeting on 28 August 2001 resolved to establish the Whittlesea Reconciliation Group (WRG). The WRG commenced in November 2001 as a community-based committee to be a key reference group for Council on the continuing reconciliation process and to foster understanding of historical, cultural and contemporary issues.

At its meeting on 17 September 2002 Council formally adopted an inaugural Indigenous Reconciliation Policy, the Australian Declaration towards Reconciliation and the Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This Council resolution formally cemented Council's reconciliation journey.

At its meeting on 25 August 2015 Council formally adopted the Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy building on the inaugural 2001, the updated policy states:

The City of Whittlesea values local Aboriginal communities and cultures; Council recognises they hold a special place as the First Peoples of Australia. Council is committed to inclusivity, equity and engagement with local Aboriginal people and communities.

A key objective of the 2015 Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy is to provide ongoing support to the Whittlesea Reconciliation Group.

Vision

The vision of the WRG is a connected community respecting Aboriginal Peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, their history and culture through actions supporting reconciliation.

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Purpose

The purpose of the WRG is to provide advice to Council and assist Council to increase understanding of Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal culture, as well as bring all people together to support reconciliation.

The WRG embeds a genuine partnership approach with the Aboriginal community in the development of Council's strategies and plans.

Delegation

The Committee has no formal delegation. Their role is to provide advice to:

- Enable an Aboriginal voice on and through Council policies, programs and strategic plans;
- Promote involvement of the local Aboriginal community in significant events and celebrations;
- Foster local community awareness of reconciliation issues;
- Promote and strengthen Aboriginal Peoples' sense of belonging and connectedness;
- Build networks and relationships within and across communities;
- Support actions identified from the Aboriginal Action Plan.

The WRG will be provided support by Council Officers, who will primarily:

- Provide secretarial support to the WRG;
- Source requested information to inform WRG meetings and advice to Council.

Membership and Tenure

Membership of community members will be appointed for an initial period of one year, with the option to extend the appointment for a further two, one-year appointments, for a maximum member term of three years (1+1+1).

Individual members may reapply for a further term, after a period of three years as a non-member. At Council's discretion, further extension of a member's tenure may be considered and approved, dependent on their skill, experience and contribution.

Efforts will be made to ensure the membership of the WRG is diverse and representative of the local community including young people, Traditional Owners, people of all abilities, Elders and culturally diverse individuals.

The Director Community Wellbeing will act as a sponsor and Co-Chair to the group (non-voting member):

- In addition to a Councillor, the group will consist of up to 16 voting members (half of the voting members will be Aboriginal members);
- No more than one representative from any one community group or organisation will be appointed.

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Code of Conduct

All members are expected to:

- Operate with integrity, objectivity, accountability, honesty and openness.
- Declare any potential conflict of interest.
- Dedicate appropriate time and effort to the functions of the Committee.
- Prepare for and actively participate in meetings.
- Exercise independent judgment.
- Maintain effective working relationships with each other.
- All members are also bound by Council's Code of Conduct.

Roles and Responsibilities

Co-Chairs

The Co-Chairs will:

- Chair each meeting (including opening and closing meetings). In the absence of the Director of Community Wellbeing, a City of Whittlesea Councillor will Co-Chair with the WRG Co-Chair.
- Follow the agreed agenda, keep discussions focused, inclusive and respectful.
- Ensure only one member speaks at a time.
- Ensure only one item is discussed at a time.
- It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate and speak on agenda items.
- Ensure that member input is respected and congruent with the City of Whittlesea Employee Code of Conduct.

Minute taker and meeting organiser

The supporting Council Officers are responsible for minute-taker duties, recording:

- Main points of discussion;
- Attendance and apologies;
- Date, time and place of meetings;
- Confirmation of accuracy of previous minutes;
- Declarations of Conflict of Interest;
- Correspondence;
- Reports to be tabled by the Co-Chairs, and other relevant undertakings.

Proxy Voting

- Absent members may vote via proxy through completion and signature of the proxy voting template.
- Proxy votes will be taken 'after' an item is discussed but 'before' voting is taken.
- Verbal disclosure of proxy votes will be made at the commencement of an agenda item discussion.

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Ordinary Meetings

An annual schedule of six ordinary meetings will be held. Additional meetings and an annual planning meeting will be scheduled by agreement between the Co-Chairs.

WRG meetings may be held in person, online or in hybrid format and are closed to the public. Working groups may be established as required for a specific purpose and on a limited time frame to enable a focus on a specific task or project. These are subject to approval by the Director Community Wellbeing after consideration of their specific need, the availability of resources to support their operation and agreed time frames and tenure.

Special guests / subject matter experts may be invited to meetings at the discretion of Co-Chairs.

Quorum

A quorum shall comprise of 3 Aboriginal and 3 non-Aboriginal members, plus one additional voting member.

If there is no quorum the Co-Chairs may choose to continue the meeting informally, but decisions must be ratified at the next scheduled meeting.

Sitting Fee for Aboriginal Community Membership

In recognition of the intellectual property of Aboriginal members, and taking into account the multiple responsibilities, Council will provide Aboriginal WRG members with a sitting fee of \$100.00 for each full WRG meeting attended.

The sitting fee will be paid to members bi-annually based on the number of meetings attended. Payments will be made to a member's nominated bank account.

Notice of Meetings

- Members will be given notice of meetings at least 2 weeks prior via email.
- An annual meeting schedule will be provided to all members during the November meeting.
- Meeting agendas will be developed by Council Officers in collaboration with the Co-Chairs.
- An agenda and meeting pack with all required readings will be distributed to all members at least one week before the meeting.
- People wishing to nominate agenda items are required to provide notice in writing to Council Officers one week before the scheduled meeting. Additional items can be tabled during general business if time permits.

Attendance

- All members are required to attend a minimum of four meetings per year, otherwise they will be automatically disqualified from the WRG.

Absenteeism

- All members are required to attend a minimum of four ordinary meetings per year.
- Members who miss two consecutive meetings without apology, they will have disqualified themselves from membership.

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- Members may attend by hybrid methods should they not be able to attend in person and are closed to the public.
- Working groups may be established as required for a specific purpose and on a limited time frame to enable a focus on a specific task or project. These are subject to approval by the Director Community Wellbeing after consideration of their specific need, the availability of resources to support their operation and agreed time frames and tenure.
- Special guests / subject matter experts may be invited to meetings at the discretion of Co-Chairs.
- Members are to be given notice of meetings at least 2 weeks prior via email.
- A set agenda and meeting pack with all required readings will be distributed all members at least one week before the meeting.

Transparency

In order to maintain transparency of WRG operations and in alignment with Council's Governance Rules, the following information is to be published on Council's website:

- WRG Terms of Reference.
- The names of all members (where appropriate).
- Minutes of WRG meetings.
- Reports of WRG activities (as reported biannually to Council) prepared by Council officers in collaboration with the Co-Chairs.

Speaking Times

- only one member is speaking at a time- when any member is speaking all other members are not to speak;
- that one item is discussed at a time;
- that everyone has an opportunity to participate and speak on agenda items; and
- that input is respected and congruent with the code of conduct even when there is a disagreement.

Recruitment Process

If members resign or Council is required to terminate membership of any Committee member, the vacancy will be advertised on the Council's website.

Eligible individuals:

- Must follow the Expression of Interest process outlined below.
- Live, work or study in the City of Whittlesea for the duration of their WRG term.
- Are committed to the WRG purpose, vision and aims.
- Are committed to the City of Whittlesea Employee Code of Conduct.
- Are committed to attending a minimum of four ordinary meetings per year and all WRG planned events.
- Must not be a current employee of the City of Whittlesea or an ex-employee or former Councillor who has left the City of Whittlesea within a two-year period.

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- Must have current Police and Working with Children Checks.

Expression of Interest (EOI) Process:

If vacancies become available, it will be advertised as an Expression of Interest (EOI) on the Council's website and the EOI process will be followed and conducted by Council as follows:

1. Individuals wishing to join the group must complete the WRG Expression of Interest (EOI) form and submit it to the City of Whittlesea Aboriginal Communities Unit.
2. Council Officers will consult with WRG Co-chairs on all EOI received.
3. Co-Chairs supported by Council Officers will present the EOI recommendations to the WRG members for endorsement.
4. The Director Community Wellbeing as Co-Chair will seek Council approval through the CEO.
5. Council Officers will liaise with applicants and notify them of the outcome.

Council Officers will facilitate the recruitment of new members with input from WRG members. Council officers will ensure promotion of membership opportunities through networks, media channels, local schools, Council's website and other mediums as appropriate.

Co-Chair appointment and tenure

The WRG will be Co-Chaired by the Director of Community Wellbeing and a member of the WRG.

A non-Council WRG Co-Chair will be nominated (self-nominations are accepted) and voted by members of the group at the first meeting following the annual appointment of Councillors to committees (usually November/December). Where possible, the non-Council WRG Co-Chair, will be nominated from the Aboriginal member representatives.

The appointment of the WRG member Co-Chair will be for a term of one year.

Resignation or expulsion

Committee members may resign at any time in writing to the City of Whittlesea Aboriginal Communities Unit.

Membership may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

- The member's no longer lives, works or studies within the City of Whittlesea.
- Failure to attend two consecutive meetings without prior notice.
- The member does not declare a conflict of interest, breaches confidentiality or exhibits behaviour unbecoming as a member of the Committee.
- The member expresses views on behalf of the Committee or Council.

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Conflicts of Interest

The City of Whittlesea is committed to ensuring that its decision-making has integrity, is fair and is in the best interests of the community and that in making decisions conflicts of interest (COI) are avoided and managed as they arise.

Declaring COI is applicable to all members of this committee.

General Conflict - You have a General Conflict if an impartial fair-minded person would consider that your private interests could result in you acting in a way that is contrary to your Public Interest Duty.

Material Conflict - You have a Material Conflict if you or a Family Member or Close Friend could gain a benefit or suffer a loss (directly or indirectly) depending on the outcome.

For more information on COI's please refer to the [Conflict of Interest Policy Guidelines 2023](#).

Disclosed COIs are to be noted in the minutes of the applicable meeting.

Reporting Requirements

- Meeting minute records and reports are to be sent to Council for inclusion on the public record.
- Disclosed COIs are to be noted in the minutes of the applicable meeting and record whether the person who disclosed a conflict of interest was excused from meeting for the relevant discussion.
- Written reports of the Committee must include any disclosures of conflicts of interest and the outcome.

Budget

- The WRG will make recommendations to Council regarding the annual reconciliation program.
- Financial recommendations will be made by consensus at WRG meetings. In instances where decisions cannot be reached the nominated Councillor will cast the final and decisive vote.

Public Statements

Members of the Committee will agree to follow **Council's media policy** and cannot make public statements on behalf of Council.

Review

This Terms of Reference will be reviewed every 4 years, at the beginning of each new Council term, or as otherwise required.

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