

Aboriginal Action Plan 2024 – 2029

Engagement Summary

July 2024

Introduction

The City of Whittlesea is developing an Aboriginal Action Plan 2024-2029 which will guide the City of Whittlesea's reconciliation efforts for the next five years. Council has a long-standing commitment to reconciliation and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The Aboriginal Action Plan will build on the progress made through Council's first Reconciliation Action Plan and subsequent Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan.

The draft Aboriginal Action Plan was developed through preliminary engagement with representatives of the local Aboriginal community, and we will continue listening and learning as we finalise, implement, review, and revise this plan.

Council consulted with people who live, work, study or visit the municipality to gather feedback and understand their thoughts on the draft Aboriginal Action Plan 2024-2029. The feedback collected during the consultation process, including community concerns and suggestions, has been carefully considered and used to inform and adjust the development of the Aboriginal Action Plan for 2024-2029 as necessary.

How we engaged you

The Aboriginal Action Plan 2024 - 2029 consultation was open for community comment from 11 June to 4 July 2024. Community feedback was sought online through Council's Engage Whittlesea. The Engage Whittlesea platform utilises an accessibility add-on which enables users to easily switch to screen reader mode or easily adjust settings such as font size, contrast, dyslexia friendly options to improve the overall accessibility of the site.

Engage page

On the project's Engage page, participants were invited to take part in a survey activity. The draft Aboriginal Action Plan 2024-2029 survey addressed seven action areas set out in the Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026. These action areas were developed by the Victorian Government in consultation with local governments and the broader Aboriginal community. They also align with Council's Integrated Planning Framework and accurately reflect our journey towards reconciliation.

The seven strategic pillars presented in the survey are as follows:

Strategic Pillar One Culture, Respect and Trust	Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal Victorians, local councils and the Victorian Government that celebrate, understand and embed Aboriginal cultural heritage and foster trust and respect.
--	---

Strategic Pillar Two Awareness and Engagement	Open, proactive and ongoing dialogue between Aboriginal Victorians and local councils that is understanding, purposeful, meaningful, thoughtful and mutually beneficial.
Strategic Pillar Three Accountability and Direction	Clarity and genuine ownership and accountability that recognises the critical role Aboriginal Victorians, local councils and the Victorian Government play in progressing self-determination.
Strategic Pillar Four Governance and Participation	Aboriginal cultural values, voices, knowledge and rights are embedded into the work local councils perform in creating vibrant local communities.
Strategic Pillar Five Economic Participation	Aboriginal people are actively participating in the state economy through employment and business ventures.
Strategic Pillar Six Health and Wellbeing	Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal Victorians including the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector, local councils, regional self-determining structures including Dhek Dja and the Victorian Government that improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of Aboriginal Victorians.
Strategic Pillar Seven Resourcing and Funding	Effective and sustainable funding models that support Aboriginal Victorians and local councils and enable the strategy.

The survey asked residents whether they felt City of Whittlesea was addressing each pillar/theme appropriately and if not, open text for comment and examples of where they felt we could expand. The survey results helped the project team identify top priorities and future planning in relation to the development of Aboriginal Action Plan 2024-2029 from a community and resident perspective.

Project promotion

The opportunity to participate in the community engagement was promoted through a range of channels to have a widespread reach across the municipality including:

- Council's digital engagement platform Engage Whittlesea
- Council's social media channels
- Direct email to 64 key stakeholder groups
- Flyers displayed at Council facilities, events and libraries during the consultation period.

Participation

A total of ten community members participated in the consultation and their feedback will help Council confirm the draft Aboriginal Action Plan is meeting community priorities and make any adjustments as necessary.

Community participation



The Engage campaign received 351 direct views.



The direct email was sent to 64 community stakeholder groups who are currently connected to services throughout the municipality.



There were ten contributions made to the digital consultation.

What we heard

We asked community to share their feedback regarding the draft Aboriginal Action Plan through the survey feedback tool on the Engage Whittlesea platform.

A summary of comments is provided below:



Strategic Pillar One: Culture, Respect and Trust

Feedback advocates for a more detailed and specific approach in the Council's engagement with Aboriginal communities. It emphasises the importance of cultural training for staff, ongoing education in Aboriginal culture, and the creation of Indigenous advisory committees to guide cultural matters directly. Key recommendations include commissioning Aboriginal artists for public artworks, involving Aboriginal communities in urban planning, and maintaining transparency through regular updates and feedback mechanisms.

The overarching goal is to continuously improve strategies that support and embed Aboriginal culture within the Council's operations.

"I would like to see the wording alliance and how CoW will be a true ally to mob and as a service be culturally trained and continually reminded and new staff trained in culture and truth telling".

"Involve Aboriginal communities in urban planning and development projects to ensure their perspectives and needs are considered.".

"Commission Aboriginal artists to create public artworks that reflect local Aboriginal culture and history".

Technical response:

Council commits to the development and delivery of ongoing cultural safety training. The draft AAP outlines the delivery of a tailored cultural safety program to staff and councillors.

The draft AAP outlines Council's continued collaboration with the local Aboriginal community, including seeking formal advice from Traditional Owners, as a way of embedding Aboriginal voices and perspectives into Council's advisory groups and committees.

Council commits to prioritising culture, empowerment and supporting self-determination within Council business and activities. Council's strategies and plans will incorporate an Aboriginal lens throughout conception, development and implementation across appropriate programs and projects.

**Strategic Pillar Two: Awareness and Engagement**

Comments highlight concerns about the depth of partnership and implementation in Aboriginal engagement initiatives. They question the specificity of actions, emphasising the need for clear implementation strategies rather than broad intentions. Key concerns include the absence of existing Memoranda of Understanding or Partnership Agreements, clarity on community co-design processes, and the adequacy of cultural training for staff. There's a call for ongoing training, measurable success criteria, and an evaluation framework. Comments highlighted a sense of concern of inequity, questioning the distribution of responsibilities within the Council's Aboriginal Communities team versus a holistic approach across all departments.

"I do acknowledge the commitment to deliver the Aboriginal Gathering Place but some of the other actions are up to how Council choose to implement them".

"it seems a lot of outcomes are being put on the Aboriginal Communities team. How is this a whole of council approach when one team has half the allocated tasks".

"Online cultural awareness training is not good enough and no mention of ongoing training of staff. one training session does not make you competent".

Technical response:

The draft AAP outlines Council's commitment to creating respectful and collaborative partnerships between the Aboriginal community, Aboriginal organisations and services, including ensuring responsive agreements and co-design processes are implemented.

The draft AAP is a whole of Council commitment and the assignment of responsibilities to various Council departments and teams is outlined throughout the document. The decision for the Aboriginal Communities team to be involved in all deliverables and actions – whether it's in a lead or support capacity - is to ensure all

reporting, monitoring and evaluation applies an Aboriginal lens throughout processes, as set out in Themes Two and Three, and the Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Strategy, including Treaty and Yoorrook commission outcomes.

Monitoring and accountability will continue to be supported through Council's governance, risk, and compliance platform. Council commits to regular and transparent reporting.

Council commits to the development and delivery of ongoing cultural safety training. The draft AAP outlines staff and councillors are to have access to a tailored cultural safety program.



Strategic Pillar Three: Accountability and Direction

Feedback suggests advocating for collaboration among Local Governments to work with the Wurundjeri community focusing on clarifying commitments and ensuring specific, actionable plans. It questions the governance and accountability of the plan, emphasising the need for Aboriginal community involvement in governance to ensure transparency and meaningful oversight.

"I recommend Local Governments partnering together to work with Wurundjeri addressing some of the issues identified in action 1 and 2".

"What will the governance of the plan be? how is it accountable to Aboriginal Community if the Aboriginal Community is not part of the Governance".

"This is an internal document with internal reporting and has no accountability or oversight by Aboriginal Community".

Technical response:

As outlined in the technical response to Strategic Pillar Two, monitoring and accountability will continue to be supported through Council's governance, risk and compliance platform. Council commits to regular and transparent reporting.

The Aboriginal Communities team is to be involved in all deliverables and actions – whether it's in a lead or support capacity – ensuring all processes, reporting, monitoring and evaluation applies an Aboriginal lens throughout.

The draft AAP outlines throughout Themes One, Two and Seven, the commitment of Council in partnering, collaborating and supporting Traditional Owners.

Themes Two, Three and Four set out clear commitments to connecting with community advisory groups, which includes Whittlesea Reconciliation Group (WRG).

**Strategic Pillar Four: Governance and Participation**

Comments highlight the importance of explicitly recognising the Whittlesea Reconciliation Group (WRG) as a key advisory body. It suggests discussing the topic of Treaty to inform the community and emphasises the need for genuine partnerships that prioritise safety, inclusion, and mutual respect. There is a call for accountability and learning from failures, questioning the plan's alignment with self-determination principles and the level of Aboriginal community consultation and governance in its development.

"I think this part is quite strong but wonder in the actions if WRG (Whittlesea Reconciliation Group) should be called out specifically as a key advisory group".

"To codesign with community and partners mob need to feel safe, heard and feel our council is in alliance with our mob and Culture".

COW talks about self-determination but where is the self-determination in this plan when it's an internal council document and has had limited consultation with Aboriginal Community members and is aligned to internal documents and outcomes. Again, where is the governance where is the Aboriginal community's self-determination in designing this plan".

Technical response:

Themes Two, Three and Four set out clear commitments to connecting with community advisory groups, which includes Whittlesea Reconciliation Group (WRG).

As outlined in Theme Four, Council will continue to collaborate and seek formal advice on matters affecting Aboriginal community members. The draft AAP is informed by and incorporates crucial components from the Self-determination Reform Framework, Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Strategy and commits to including Treaty for Victoria and Yoorrook commission outcomes as they arise.

The draft AAP was informed by a two-stage consultation process including online survey, targeted stakeholder meetings, phone calls and yarns enabling Aboriginal community voice and input.

**Strategic Pillar Five: Economic Participation**

The feedback highlights the need for a targeted approach to engage effectively with First Nations people, stressing the importance of changing governance to enhance engagement levels. It suggests tailoring Council's community leadership programs to provide a culturally safe space specifically for First Nations people within the Aboriginal Gathering Place. There is a call for concrete commitments, such as ensuring senior managers and Councillors undergo cultural awareness training and creating Aboriginal cultural safety throughout the organisation. Genuine partnerships and meaningful investment in community involvement are also highlighted, along with the

inclusion of ongoing cultural training and the establishment of a dedicated Aboriginal Advisory committee for direct council advice and oversight.

“Can we commit to a number of employees?”.

“There should be an undertaking for senior managers and Councillors to participate in cultural awareness training or supervisors of First Nations staff”.

“Council needs to implement a standalone Aboriginal Advisory committee that is not reconciliation but a true advisory committee to council”.

“More of a commitment to creating Aboriginal cultural safety in the organisation”.

Technical response:

As outlined in the technical response to Strategic Pillar One, Council commits to developing and delivering an ongoing Cultural learning program for all Council staff and councillors. Furthermore, in Theme Two, Council commits to Traditional Owner groups providing feedback to enhance service delivery.

A key action in the draft AAP includes identifying more pathways for Aboriginal community to work at Council, including work experience, mentoring and traineeships. Council also commits to creating an inclusive and supportive work environment by community engagement, diversity and inclusion policies, work life balance, recognition, and rewards.



Strategic Pillar Six: Health and Wellbeing

The section lacks specificity in its commitments, raising concerns about the potential workload for the Aboriginal Communities Department if all actions were pursued. There is a call for greater organisational-wide commitment ("Whole of Organisation buy-in") rather than placing the burden solely on one department. Furthermore, it questions whether the goals align with the actual needs of the Aboriginal community in City of Whittlesea, seeking evidence that these actions reflect genuine community needs and desires.

“I would like to see more of 'Whole of Organisation' buy in”.

“Is any of these goals based on needs of the Aboriginal community in COW? where is the evidence that these are the needs and wants?”

“This section is a bit vague on what you are committing and at the same time if you were to do all of it is a tremendous volume of work for the Aboriginal Communities Department”.

Technical response:

The draft AAP is a whole of Council commitment and the assignment of responsibilities to various Council departments and teams is outlined throughout the document. Council commits to regular and transparent reporting, monitoring and evaluation and applies an Aboriginal lens throughout processes, as set out in Themes Two and Three, and the Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Strategy, including Treaty and Yoorrook commission outcomes.

The draft AAP was informed by a two-stage consultation process including online survey, targeted stakeholder meetings, phone calls and yarns enabling the local Aboriginal community voice and input.

**Strategic Pillar Seven: Resourcing and Funding**

The section should broaden engagement beyond Aboriginal health organisations and clarify terms like "Controlled" versus "Managed." Priority should be placed on strong partnerships with allied health groups, schools, youth hubs, and Aboriginal youth councils. There's a need for clarity on Council's support for Stolen Generations and engagement with services like Link-Up and Connecting Home. Addressing accessibility issues and specifying health programs for the Aboriginal community are essential, with a call for innovative approaches.

"What specific health programs will COW run for Aboriginal community? No innovative programs it seems its business as usual to me".

"Need to know what exactly Council is doing to support Stolen Generations and how are you engaging with Stolen Generations services i.e., Link-Up and Connecting Home".

"Missed opportunity here to seek increase health services in CoW by only talking about Aboriginal Heath organisations. Surely, whilst a specific lens is appropriate, in addition reach should be broader to enhance the "no wrong door" approach to service needs of our community".

Technical response:

The draft AAP identifies multiple actions/deliverables that include the development and implementation of programs, including fostering the 'no wrong door' partnerships that address social, health, physical, cultural, emotional and wellbeing needs of the Aboriginal community.



General Comments

The Aboriginal Action Plan is seen as clear and aspirational, though lacking in SMART goals and cross-Council commitment. Suggestions shared through community feedback include the addition of review milestones, a broader procurement focus, and cultural embedding at all levels. Overall, the plan is viewed positively but requires real allyship and innovative programs to ensure effectiveness and shared ownership. The feedback highlights a need for clearer support methods, such as mentoring and workshop facilitation, for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Organisations. There's concern over the sufficiency of resources for the Aboriginal Gathering Place and a call for more detailed information from Council.

"I found the Action plan thorough, well researched and presented, including embedding the advice and feedback from local Indigenous Elders and community-based groups".

"I feel that CoW are trying hard to support mob, but we need real allies who embed culture within all staff, from the CEO and down. I am a proud Wiradjuri woman living on Wurundjeri country. I live, dream and work within the CoW and pleased CoW are taking positive steps forward but the journey will be long and hard for some but together we must do better".

"I will be interested to see if there are any external Aboriginal community members represented in the governance of this plan".

Technical response:

Consultation was undertaken over a four-week period, from 11 June to 4 July 2024. Consultation activities online, through the Engage Whittlesea platform, individual emails and phone call follow ups, targeted stakeholder consultations, meeting with services, organisations, and Traditional Owner groups.

Through the draft AAP, Council commits to continuing to listen to and learn from the Aboriginal community, including reviewing the plan annually and ongoing reporting. There is a strong commitment from Council throughout the draft AAP to actively engage, support and strengthen Traditional Owners through development opportunities, including procurement and tendering pathways.

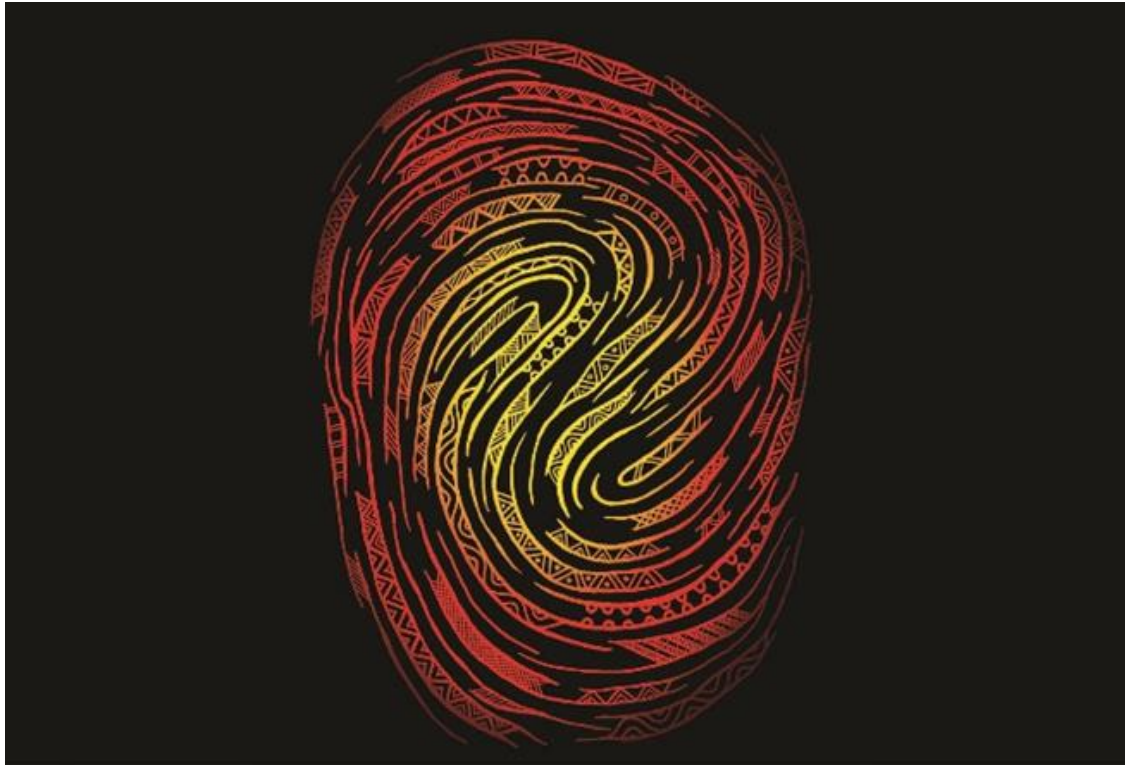
Council received valuable feedback on the draft AAP, themes raised in the feedback were identified and the draft AAP reviewed to ensure they were adequately addressed in line with community expectations. Minor amendments were made to the draft as the plan adequately addressed the themes raised through the consultation.

Next steps

The information gathered will inform the development of the *draft Aboriginal Action Plan 2024 - 2029*. The feedback captured has also been used to inform the development of other key plans and strategies Council are working on to make Whittlesea *A Place for All*.

Thank you again to everyone who participated in the community engagement by sharing feedback.

Appendix A



Have your say on the draft **Aboriginal Action Plan 2024-2029**

The City of Whittlesea's new Aboriginal Action Plan will set the direction of our community's reconciliation journey for the next five years.

Council wants to hear from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members to help determine the next steps towards reconciliation and self-determination.



To view the draft plan and leave your feedback, scan the QR code or go to engage.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-action-plan

Consultation closes Thursday 4 July, 2024.



Free telephone
interpreter service
131 450

Artwork by Mandy Nicholson,
Wurundjeri artist.



**City of
Whittlesea**