

DSD44/14 HEATWAVE STRATEGIES (D14/275828)

Director Social Development

Aged, Disability and Emergency Relief

Executive Summary

Council has a Heatwave Plan containing a number of actions and initiatives. There is an internal heatwave coordination group that meets to review the Heatwave Plan each year that assists in responding to heatwaves when an incident arises.

In accordance with a resolution at the February 2014 Council meeting (CI7/14), Council Officers have commissioned a discussion paper that identifies current trends and issues related to heatwaves including the establishment of heat refuges.

This Council report analyses findings of this discussion paper and provides Council with recommendations to assist Council and the community to plan for heatwaves in the future and enhance Council's existing Heatwave Plan.

Recommendation

Council resolve to:

1. Continue all strategies and actions contained in Moreland's Heatwave Plan and carefully monitor their effectiveness.
2. Investigate the introduction of the 'Know Your Neighbour' campaign as a means to build community resilience to heatwaves and other emergencies.
3. Approve an over expenditure of \$10,000 to the Aged, Disability and Emergency Relief unit's 2014-2015 budget to action the unbudgeted 'Know Your Neighbour' campaign if it proceeds.
4. Promote key community facilities as cool venues for respite from the heat during normal operating hours.
5. Ensure access to drinking water at key community facilities during heatwave periods.
6. Develop a Drinking Fountain Strategy to ensure adequate access to free water in the public domain.
7. Complete the trial assessment of the capacity of HACC clients to cope with heatwaves and develop further strategies to support this group, if needed.
8. Engage the community sector and business in planning for future heatwaves.
9. Review the efficacy of all strategies following the 2015 summer and consider avenues for further action or review and report to Council.

1. Policy Context

Council has a Heatwave Plan (**Attachment 1**) containing a number of actions and initiatives. There is an internal heatwave coordination group that meets to review the Heatwave Plan each year that assists in responding to heatwaves when an incident arises.

In February 2009, a number of Victorians died as a result of three days of continuous heat. Following this, the Department of Health requested that all Victorian Councils develop Heatwave Plans to review the way Councils prepare the community for extended periods of heat.

In Victoria, a heatwave is generally defined as a period of abnormally and uncomfortably hot weather that could impact on human health, community infrastructure and services.

The Victorian Department of Health use a temperature level to issue a 'heat health alert'. The temperature trigger is based on the minimum temperature threshold that is likely to impact on the health of a community, known as the heat health temperature threshold. An alert is issued when the average of the daily maximum and overnight minimum exceed the trigger of 30 degrees.

The heat health alert triggers elements of Councils Heatwave Plan including community information, education and monitoring of vulnerable communities including HACC clients.

Other legislative considerations in forming our Heatwave Plan include:

- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Emergency Management Act 1996*
- *Climate Change Act 2010*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Local Government Act 1989*

2. Background

At the February 2014 Council Meeting, Council resolved to:

- Call for a report to:
 - Investigate possible buildings and services in the local area which could be used as 'heat refuges / relief centres' in time for the 2014-2015 summer heatwaves.
 - Assess the cost to council of the extra staff hours to cope with heatwave responses, the air-conditioning of extra spaces opened up to the public etc.
 - Investigate cost and options to provide targeted material assistance to at-risk groups including water, public transport tickets, sunscreen, 'heatwave packs' and, where appropriate, cooling appliances.
- Continue to work with community sector organisations in preparation for heatwaves to ensure greater direct monitoring of at risk groups – especially people who are homeless, living in general public housing and in rooming houses.

- Call on the state government to:
 - put heatwaves on the same emergency planning level as bushfires and floods by linking the Statewide Heatwave Plan to emergency management planning.
 - Introduce legislated standards to improve the thermal efficiency of the homes of those Victorians who are most vulnerable in heatwaves, particularly those with disabilities, medical conditions and chronic illnesses.
 - Allocate adequate money in the state budget to adequately resource local councils and community sector organisations to respond to heatwave emergencies.

Council commissioned a discussion paper (**Attachment 2**) to consider the ways in which Council could assist the community to minimise the risk and impact of heatwave.

The paper identified current industry approaches to preparing and assisting the community in a heatwave including:

- Pre-season community education.
- Identification of vulnerable community groups including older people, infants and children and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD).
- Ensuring that Council staff that work with vulnerable communities are educated and checking on individuals, and groups to ensure that they are minimising their exposure to heat. This would include the elderly, children and working with external agencies who work with vulnerable groups.
- Identification of current Council venues that can be accessed by the community to cool down during office or extended opening hours.
- Discussion regarding other community venues such as shopping centres, cinemas and galleries that can act as alternative places for the community to remain cool.
- The efficacy and risks associated with higher level heat refuge centres being opened and run by Councils.

Finally the report provides recommendations to strengthen Council's preparedness and response to heatwave for the coming summer and beyond.

3. Issues

Risk considerations

In examining the concept of heat refuges as per Council's February 2014 resolution, it is apparent that there are essentially two types of applicable facilities, these being:

Type 1 Cool venues

Cool venues are existing community facilities promoted as locations where people can take shelter from the heat. In Moreland, this may include Council facilities such as community centres, senior's centres, libraries, galleries, swimming pools, Council offices. Other cool venues recommended by emergency services include shopping centres, cinemas and supermarkets.

Type 2 Cooling Centres (refuges)

Type 2 cooling centres are spaces that are specifically set up to provide a high level of service and cater for vulnerable people. Type 2 centres need to incorporate space to accommodate people with pre-existing health conditions, backup power and the capacity to move clientele to other facilities if there are extended power outages. In addition, given the health status of potential clients, nursing staff need to be specifically employed to monitor the health status of attendees.

The establishment of type two cooling centres would require facilities and expertise beyond the scope of Council. Specific expertise in caring for potentially seriously ill individuals and back up facilities would need to be considered. Council is not a medical facility. This level of care is better provided by health care facilities that are better resourced as well as prioritised in the event of essential services failure.

Providing type 2 cooling centres exposes Council to a range of risks and is not a strategy that should be pursued.

In addressing the overall risks associated with type 2 cooling centres, the Chief Health Officer, Dr Rosemary Lester stated at the Statewide Heatwave forum on 23 September 2014 that:

cooling centres are not appropriate mechanisms to ensure the wellbeing of individuals. The best approach is to build community resilience.

Environmental Implications

Melbourne has experienced a number of continuous days of heat over the past five summers. There is no indication that this trend is going to change. In fact the number of days each year over 35°C is predicted to rise from a current average of 9 days to up to 26 days by 2070. Climate adaptation is the best possible response to planning for heatwave. This includes education about the likelihood of heatwaves over summer and ways in which individuals and the community can reduce the impact of heatwave.

Social Implications

Providing education and community information regarding ways in which individuals can reduce their risk of heat stress promotes community resilience and encourages the community to support each other through difficult times.

Some of the approaches that are being utilised by Council or that will be trialled over the coming summer season include:

- Continued education with vulnerable communities such as maternal and child health clients, the elderly and CALD communities.

This will include discussion regarding 'Staying Healthy in the Heat' (**Attachment 3**) in Council publications, on the Council website, social media and individually with vulnerable clients and the identification of Council and community facilities that may be suitable to escape the heat. Additional staff training would need to be provided to ensure that all staff with contact with vulnerable communities understands the implications of heatwave.

- Identifying Home and Community Care Clients (HACC) who are vulnerable via a Heatwave risk assessment matrix (**Attachment 4**) and creating a prioritisation list to check on individuals prior to and during heatwave. The heatwave risk assessment could be utilised to assess other vulnerable communities.

There is also the opportunity to do a wider campaign from an 'all hazards' emergency management approach to get the community to check on other community members. Other Councils have undertaken a 'Good Neighbour Campaign' (**Attachment 5**) to promote community resilience. This could be tied in with 'Know Your Neighbour Day' which is conducted by Relationships Australia in March each year. Alternatively, the good neighbour campaign could be tied to daylight saving changes as this would allow for the checking of individuals prior to summer and the checking of smoke alarms prior to winter which would have the added advantage of aiding in the reduction of fatal house fires.

- The development of a Council drinking fountain strategy and map would enable the identification of community based drinking fountains. This strategy is a longer term initiative that needs further development prior to consideration.
- Identification of key community facilities where drinking water can be provided during heatwaves. Council reception areas already provide water coolers.

Due to sustainability issues in providing paper cups as well as implementation and maintenance costs for permanent water coolers, as an alternative measure, other key Council facilities could ensure access to drinking water during heatwave by providing jugs of water and paper cups for users.

These strategies will consider the impact on the wider community, and in particular vulnerable groups. Work will be undertaken with community sector organisations to monitor the impact of heatwave and to develop improved community resilience to the issue.

Economic implications

Heatwaves may affect essential services, industries, communities and ecosystems across Victoria and are likely to have complex economic implications through direct impacts and the flow-on effect of disruption and change through the economy. Businesses can prepare by planning for heatwaves including reviewing their business continuity insurance, planning for potential staff absences and developing a business continuity plan.

Work is currently being undertaken within the State Government to examine the efficacy of providing cooling in public housing. Consideration should be given to changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* to ensure that rental properties have adequate heating and cooling, however the provision of cooling will not necessarily mean that individuals will use the facilities due to cost.

The use of low cost measures such as having a cool space in the house, drinking plenty of water, putting your feet in a bucket of cold water and cooling the house off at night are the most effective ways to mitigate the effect of heatwave.

Regional/strategic implications

There is the potential for disruptions on a regional and state wide level to essential services as a result of a heatwave. Council has a role to play in working with other municipalities to plan for heatwaves or to support vulnerable communities via resource sharing as is requested through emergency management processes.

Emergency management Considerations

Heatwave is already a listed emergency from a state-wide perspective and is managed by Victoria Police and the Department of Health under the State Health Emergency Response Plan, a sub-plan of the State Emergency response plan.

Councils and community sector organisations respond to heatwave through the Municipal Emergency Management Plan and as requested by funding bodies such as the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Agencies have a responsibility and duty of care as part of their service agreement to educate their client base on simple things that can be done to minimise the risk of heatwave and to monitor their client base as required.

Council already has a Heatwave Plan as outlined in **Attachment 1**. It is recommended that subject to resources, that this is enhanced by this report's recommended resolutions (2,3,4,5,6, 7 and 8).

Human Rights Considerations

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

4. Consultation

Advice was sought from officers across Council involved in the delivery of HACC services, children's services, library services, building services and urban design to consider the needs vulnerable clients and to examine the capability of Council facilities to act as cool venues and to provide access to drinking water.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council Officers involved in the preparation of this report have no Conflict of Interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

- The Drinking Fountain Strategy and any associated works will be referred to the Capital Works Program and its priority will be assessed along with all other projects within the Five Year Capital Works Program.
- The funds to action the development of a community 'Know Your Neighbour Campaign' are currently unbudgeted in the 2014-2015 budget. It is recommended that Council approves an over expenditure of \$10,000 to the Aged, Disability and Emergency Relief 2014-2015 budget.
- That all other resolutions, including access to drinking water during heatwave at key Council facilities be undertaken within current resources. A report will be tabled with the Moreland Executive Group.

7. Implementation

All recommendations if approved will be implemented prior and during the coming 2014-2015 summer apart from recommendation 5 which will be referred to the capital works program.

An update on the outcome of recommendations will be provided to Council following the 2015 summer season.

Attachment/s

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| 1 | Heatwave planning - Council Heatwave Plan | D14/276632 |
| 2 | Council responses to Heatwaves Discussion Paper - September 2014 | D14/276366 |
| 3 | Heatwave planning - Staying healthy in the heat | D14/280181 |
| 4 | Heatwave risk assessment matrix | D14/276594 |
| 5 | Community Resilience - Good Neighbour Brochure | D14/276692 |