

## 7 Presentation of officer reports

### 7.2 Council's membership of the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)

#### Abstract

The City of Boroondara is one of the current 46 Council members of the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA).

Membership provides Council with a range of benefits and opportunities which are taken up by councillors and Council staff to different degrees.

Council has received a request to renew its VLGA membership for 2020-21, at a cost of \$37,760 excluding GST. The VLGA has not increased membership fees for the 2020-21 period.

According to the VLGA website, it “is an independent organisation committed to supporting councils and councillors in good governance. We provide opportunities for councillor networking, professional development and information exchange and we actively engage with key policymakers and broader stakeholders to inform, influence and lead the conversations that determine the priorities for the local government sector in Victoria”.

The VLGA's narrower scope and an increasing organisational focus on the MAV as the primary peak body and advocate representing the interests of the sector, is reflected in a continued trend towards minimal officer participation in the VLGA's activities.

Officers are of the view that Council's needs for representation, advocacy and support can be met by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), and are therefore of the view the direct benefits of VLGA membership are not sufficient on their own to justify the ongoing membership subscription fees.

#### Officers' recommendation

That Council resolve not to renew its membership of the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA).

**Responsible officer:** **Phillip Storer**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is for Council to consider whether to renew Council's membership of the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA).

## 2. Policy implications and relevance to community plan and council plan

Council's membership of the VLGA primarily relates to Priority Theme 7: Civic Leadership and Governance in the Boroondara Community Plan 2017-2021. Further, this report is consistent with Strategic Objective 7: Ensure that ethical, financial and socially responsible decision making reflects community needs and is based on principles of accountability, transparency, responsiveness and consultation.

A key activity of the VLGA is to support councils and councillors in good governance through its numerous programs, projects, training and presence in the sector; which may relate to many different strategies and objectives within the Council plan.

## 3. Background

The VLGA's membership is comprised of councils, associate members and individuals.

There are 46 Council members, including 25 of 31 metropolitan Councils. The 6 non-member metropolitan Councils according to the VLGA website are the Cities of Banyule, Bayside, Casey, Frankston, Glen Eira and Maroondah.

Current associate members of the VLGA are the Alliance for Gambling Reform and Aspire.

Council has not appointed a representative to the VLGA for the 2019-20 mayoral year. The Mayor, Councillor Watson became a member of the VLGA Board on 1 July 2019.

The VLGA recently wrote to the Chief Executive Officer inviting Council to renew its membership for 2020-21 (**Attachment 1**). In recognition of the difficult start to 2020 with bushfires in regional areas and the COVID-19 pandemic the VLGA has not increased membership fees for 2020-21. The membership fees for 2020-21 are \$37,760 excluding GST.

In that correspondence the VLGA also outlined the support provided to councils and communities and highlighted their recent and ongoing work on:

- the potential deferral of the October elections;
- options available to defer council budgets if required; and
- the legislative impediment for councils to hold virtual 'formal' council meetings.

**Appendix 2** lists the benefits to Council of VLGA membership.

In addition the VLGA website highlights “as a peak body for local government, the VLGA gives member councils a voice through regular meetings with key government departments, the Minister for Local Government, portfolio ministers and their advisors. The VLGA meets regularly with the Shadow Minister for Local Government, the Chief Municipal Inspector, the CEO of IBAC, the Victorian Auditor General and numerous stakeholders (including the MAV, LGPro and IPAA Vic), policy makers and regulators whose work impacts upon the local government sector”.

Further, the VLGA website goes on to state “the VLGA represents and advocates on behalf of its membership in a number of policy and stakeholder working groups including:

- The Ministerial Council on Women’s Equality
- The Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF) Steering Committee
- Stakeholder Reference Group - Officers for the Protection of the Local Environment
- The Local Government Gender Equity Working Group
- Rural and Regional Councils Sustainability Steering Group
- The Alliance for Gambling Reform
- The Ministerial Women’s Roundtable for Local Government
- Essential Services Commission Engagement & Performance Technical Working Groups (Rate Capping)
- Victorian Councils’ January 26 Network”.

#### **4. Outline of key issues/options**

Council benefits from VLGA membership have been assessed across four key areas:

1. Access to specialised products and services;
2. Access to information, advice and networks;
3. Access to professional development and training; and
4. Opportunities to inform/influence advocacy.

##### **1. Access to specialised products and services**

No department reported recent access to specialised products and services from the VLGA.

##### **2. Access to information, advice and networks**

Feedback from staff varies regarding the usefulness of the various publications and circulars produced by the VLGA as a means of keeping up to date with legislative changes, news and issues of relevance to the sector. Similarly, participation in various networks differs by department and from time to time.

There has been limited recent staff participation in VLGA networks. Governance staff have attended a VLGA session regarding the review of the Local Government Act.

Community Planning and Development department staff when possible participate in the VLGA convened Local Government Working Group on Gambling (LGWGOG) on a bi-annual basis. The group provides an opportunity for councillors, council officers and representatives from various organisations working in the gambling harm prevention space to come together to discuss ways to prevent harm from gambling in local communities.

There is no cost to attend and you do not need to be a member of the VLGA to participate in the meetings.

### 3. Access to professional development and training

Staff have not reported recent attendance at any VLGA training or development opportunities. Some councillors have taken up the following professional development and training opportunities offered by the VLGA:

- Victorian Local Government Women's Charter Champions Working Lunch - Maintaining the Momentum on 21 June 2019
- Building Communities Symposium held on 5 July 2019
- Leading the Agenda in July 2019 - Optimising Our Planning System on 19 July 2019
- Transport for Melbourne Public Forum held on 9 August 2019
- Leading the Agenda Forum Series - Addressing Systemic Barriers to Councils' Community Engagement on 19 September 2019
- Fast Track Mayor Leadership Development Program held on 28 February 2020
- Connect Live Forum - Chairing Virtual Council Meetings on 29 April 2020

### 4. Opportunities to inform/influence advocacy

Council's increasing focus on the MAV as the primary peak body and advocate representing the interests of the sector, has also somewhat reduced the VLGA's relevance to Council.

There may be benefit to the sector from "many voices" when it comes to advocacy, however concerns have previously been expressed about duplication of effort when both the MAV and VLGA are committing resources to advocacy on the same issue.

Notwithstanding, the VLGA describing itself as a peak body it is arguable whether the VLGA is a peak body for the local government sector. The VLGA currently represents 46 councils and all 79 Victorian councils are currently members of the MAV. Acknowledging the MAV is the statutory peak body for Victorian local government it is arguable whether the VLGA can be considered a peak body when it only represents just over half (58%) of the local government sector.

Continued membership brings some capacity to formally and/or informally influence the VLGA's advocacy position. The value of this capacity is hard to quantify and linked to how actively Council takes up opportunities to engage with the VLGA, how well the VLGA's advocacy aligns with Council's views on a given issue, and of course, how successful VLGA advocacy is in achieving its objective.

## **5. Consultation/communication**

The Executive and Senior Leadership Teams were consulted in the preparation of this report about their interactions with the VLGA.

## **6. Financial and resource implications**

Membership fees for 2020-21 are \$37,760 excluding GST and are provided for within the Governance Department operational budget.

Withdrawal of membership from the VLGA is unlikely to have any adverse financial and resource implications on the organisation. Officers are of the view that Council's needs for representation, advocacy and support can be met by the MAV.

## **7. Governance issues**

Officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

There are no implications for rights prescribed in Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities anticipated to flow directly from the decision to renew, or not renew, Council's membership of the VLGA.

## **8. Social and environmental issues**

There are no social or environmental issues anticipated flowing directly from the decision to renew, or not renew, Council's membership of the VLGA.

## **9. Conclusion**

Few departments and councillors report regular engagement with the VLGA and the benefits of VLGA membership are therefore difficult to quantify organisationally in terms of dollar-for-dollar outcomes.

Given the low level of engagement, officers are of the view that the direct benefits of VLGA membership are not sufficient to justify the ongoing subscription fees.

This is not to say the VLGA's work and offer to members is without value, or not valued by those staff and Councillors who are engaging with them.

Council's financial membership of the VLGA contributes to their capacity to undertake advocacy, research and other work on behalf of the sector, which is at least of indirect benefit to Council. This capacity may change if the VLGA is unable to attract the financial support of local government members.

**Manager:** David Thompson, Governance

**Report officer:** Phillip Storer, Chief Executive Officer and  
David Thompson, Manager Governance



Mr Phillip Storer  
Chief Executive Officer  
Boroondara City Council  
[boroondara@boroondara.vic.gov.au](mailto:boroondara@boroondara.vic.gov.au)

[invoices@boroondara.vic.gov.au](mailto:invoices@boroondara.vic.gov.au)

30 March 2020

Dear Phillip

**Re: VLGA Member Council Update**

The VLGA acknowledges that it has been a difficult start to 2020 with bushfires in regional areas and the COVID-19 pandemic which is affecting us all.

With this in mind VLGA will not increase membership fees for the 20/21 period (please refer attached).

The VLGA continues to work for you, our valued member, during this unprecedented time. We are meeting regularly with the Minister for Local Government, Local Government Victoria, relevant portfolio Ministers and the Opposition and minor parties to advance those matters which are front of mind for the sector, specifically;

- 1) the potential deferral of the October elections;
- 2) options available to defer council budgets if required; and
- 3) the current legislative impediment for councils to hold virtual 'formal' council meetings.

Following the recent updates to guidance from authorities, and in an effort to protect the health and well-being of our network, we have made adjustments as to how we deliver services and engage with members.

Member councils who have booked in for the VLGA Candidate Workshops may now opt for virtual workshops commencing in May or register for face-to-face workshops in August/September. Noting that these dates may change due to COVID-19 crisis. All general candidate workshops will have the same content and will be conducted via Zoom.

Liddy Clark from our virtual office will be in contact with councils who have booked sessions to-date. Those councils who have not registered please contact Liddy at [vlga@vlga.org.au](mailto:vlga@vlga.org.au)

Similarly, the *Local Women Leading Change, Local Government 101* program will continue in a virtual format led by VLGA Women's Policy and Engagement Officer, Deborah Wu. Deborah will be in contact with councils registered for LWLC and discuss the format.

The VLGA is committed to supporting members through these uncertain times. As well as the VLGA Connect interviews with Chris Eddy, we will be conducting open forums for our member councillors, CEOs and officers. These will begin next week with the Minister for Local Government the Hon Adem Somyurek. These sessions will be led by VLGA Chief Executive Officer Kathryn Arndt and VLGA President Cr Lambros Tapinos with Chris Eddy. These open forums will be moderated - [VLGA Connect](#).



The strength and the capacity of the VLGA lies in its membership. It is with your council's membership that the VLGA continues to be a strong voice for the sector.

We look forward to continuing to support the work of council and the Victorian local government sector more broadly through the advocacy and stakeholder engagement activity we undertake on behalf of the sector, through the programs and services we offer to member councils, through our seat on the state government's Local Government Act Project Control Board and the Ministerial Mayor Advisory Council.

At this time, the importance of retaining connections with peak bodies such as the VLGA is critical because it is only through working together that we can support the essential work of the local government sector in delivering crucial services to our communities.

Please contact us if we may be of any assistance. We are acutely aware of the challenges facing member councils across Victoria during this unprecedented time and are committed to continuing to support you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathryn Arndt".

Kathryn Arndt  
**Chief Executive Officer**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cr Lambros Tapinos".

Cr Lambros Tapinos (Mayor, Moreland)  
**President**



## Council Member Benefits

### Lobbying and representation

**We aim to protect, advance and advocate for effective local government.**

To this end, the VLGA holds regular meetings with the Minister for Local Government, Local Government Victoria, the Chief Municipal Inspector, CEO of IBAC, Victorian Auditor General and other industry stakeholders.

We participate in working groups, steering committees and reference group discussions on the implementation of government policy impacting the local government sector, including:

- the Ministerial Council on Women's Equality
- the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework Steering Committee
- the Local Government Gender Equity Working Group; and
- the Rural and Regional Councils Sustainability Steering Group.

We also provide feedback and submissions on key government inquiries and discussion papers, based on the views and concerns of member councils. We give member councils a seat at the table with state government decision-makers.

### Connecting councillors

**We aim to support and assist councillors to do their job well.**

The VLGA has recently established the Councillor Advisory Network ([CAN](#)), made up of member councillors, which meets quarterly to drive our advocacy agenda and discuss pertinent issues facing the sector. We are also establishing the [Young Councillor Network](#), a social and professional network for young councillors to provide them with the organisational and peer-based support they need to thrive in complex council environments. This network is open to member councillors 30 years and under.

We also hold networking opportunities for Mayors and Deputy Mayors, such as the member only Mayors, Deputy Mayors & CEOs Welcome Drinks and the Mayors and Deputy Mayors FastTrack Leadership Program, scheduled annually at the beginning of the mayoral term.

### Professional development for councillors and council staff

**We aim to provide resources, information and education, and undertake projects to support good governance and leadership.**

The VLGA runs high-level training for councillors and council officers, including masterclasses in governance and integrity in both metro and regional areas, and leadership training for Mayors and Deputy Mayors. We work with councils to deliver training that meets their needs and requirements, available to member councils at a discounted rate.

We are a sought-after provider of introductory training for newly elected representatives, and will offer a comprehensive program of councillor induction workshops following the October 2020 elections.

### Bringing together experts and leaders

**The VLGA holds monthly Leading the Agenda panel discussions on various topics of interest to the local government sector.** Our March Leading the Agenda was on [Treaty](#), April on [Activating Community](#) and May on [Empowering Children](#).

P 03 9349 7999 | [www.vlga.org.au](http://www.vlga.org.au) | [vlga@vlga.org.au](mailto:vlga@vlga.org.au)

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## Pre-candidate training for women

[Local Women Leading Change](#) is the VLGA's signature women's campaign for the 2020 local government elections.

The campaign [launch](#) was attended by over 100 people, with Lord Mayor Sally Capp welcoming attendees to the City of Melbourne. We were pleased to receive [an important funding announcement from the Andrews Government](#) to support our efforts in this space. As part of the campaign, we have developed '[Your campaign toolkit](#)', which is an essential guide for women considering running in 2020.

The VLGA will be providing training across Victoria over the second half of 2019 and throughout 2020, visiting various regional hubs.

## Pre-candidate training and information sessions for local government elections

We encourage participation in local government by equipping community members with the skills, knowledge and connections they need to be successful community leaders.

The VLGA will be holding information and training sessions over the second half of 2019 and throughout 2020. These sessions are provided at a discounted rate to member councils.

## Preventing harm from gambling

We aim to be a sustainable, focussed and values driven organisation.

The VLGA has received concurrent funding over several years from the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF) to work with councils and local communities to reduce harm from poker machine venues.

These short videos ([here](#) and [here](#)) showcase our work in supporting strong, resilient communities. We also host the Local Government Working Group on Gambling ([LWGOG](#)) which meets every second month. LWGOG provides an opportunity for councillors, council officers and representatives from various organisations working in the gambling harm prevention space to come together to discuss ways to prevent harm from gambling in local communities.

## Highlighting brilliance and innovation in the local government sector

Last year, the VLGA launched its Innovation in Local Government Series. The first video in the series highlights the innovative approaches that Cardinia Shire Council, Brimbank City Council and Wyndham City Council are undertaking to benefit their communities.

The reinvigorated [Victorian Local Government Women's Charter](#) Champions Network (WCCN) will also provide an opportunity for councils to showcase the work that they are doing in the gender equity space and collaborate to achieve better outcomes.

In partnership with Reconciliation Victoria, the VLGA presents the annual [HART Awards](#), now in its sixth year. The Awards recognise and celebrate Victorian partnerships and initiatives that contribute to local reconciliation outcomes. These initiatives demonstrate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together to build and strengthen ongoing relationships, respect and understanding. Nominations are submitted by local governments and community groups.

