



community plan
2017-2021

COMMUNITY PLAN ENGAGEMENT

Final Report – March 2017

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive overview of the results of the community engagement activities undertaken to inform the development of the Knox Community Plan 2017-2021.

1.2. Context

Throughout 2016 a range of data was collected and community engagement activities conducted to inform the development of a new Knox Community Plan 2017-2021 (incorporating Council Plan), as the current plan expires in June 2017. This is an important Plan for the whole Knox community as it expresses their aspirations for the next four years, thereby setting the direction for Council and key stakeholders – influencing their strategies, services and support to the community as a whole.

The Knox City/Council Plan (2013-17) and the Integrated City Strategy (2014) provided the base on which to determine if the issues and priorities expressed in those documents were still relevant to the community through the following research and activities conducted during 2016:

- A municipal wide survey – which aimed to establish importance and satisfaction factors on 16 key issues from the previous plan. It included a random sample telephone survey; an open online survey and supplementary in-person interviews to target groups which may not participate in the telephone or online survey;
- The State of Knox Report - 2nd edition – a research report which provides a narrative (informed by data) of the current state or conditions on the Knox municipality. This report explores how things have changed since the first edition (2014) as well as identifying new and emerging trends;
- Face to Face consultations – which involved workshops, focus groups and community pop-ups to clarify issues raised from the survey and research data; and
- A Community Panel – that aimed to be as representative as possible of the major characteristics of the Knox community, comprising 18 members and providing input into the future direction of Council's services, activities within the context of growing financial constraints. The Panel met over three months on five full days.

The community engagement activities were directed at people who live, work, learn and play in Knox. Therefore, we wanted to capture information from people in local businesses, agencies who provide services in Knox and community groups as well as residents and students.

The aims of the Community Engagement Program were to:

- Raise awareness of the existing Community Plan, Integrated City Strategy, Council Plan and outcomes identified four years ago
- Determine if the existing Vision remains relevant for the next four years
- Identify conditions/indicators that are affecting change within the Knox area
- Encourage and stimulate community dialogue and debate about the main issues identified through the engagement process

- Identify priority areas and actions over the next four years for the City and Council
- Engender wider ownership with the community of the Community Plan
- Move towards co creation/design of the Community Plan with key partners, agencies and stakeholders
- Engender staff ownership of the new Community Plan (including Council Plan) and its implementation; and
- Acknowledge and value stakeholder's contribution to the planning process

In particular, the community engagement activities sought to check in with the community to answer:

- A. What changes have the community experienced over the past four years?
- B. What changes, trends and priorities are emerging in Knox from the most current research data?
- C. What's affecting the conditions/indicators of change?
- D. What are the priorities from the community's perspective?
- E. In a rapidly changing environment where should Council focus its energy?

1.3. Timeframes

The project was endorsed by Council in November 2015 and formally commenced in early 2016. The main engagement to inform the Community Plan was undertaken from May to December 2016. In addition, a key agency follow-up workshop was held in March 2017.

1.4. Engagement Methodology

The engagement methodology involved the following process to identify and prioritise the current issues which would inform the new Community Plan:

1. Review of existing information from the current four-year City/Council Plan (2013-2017) and Integrated City Strategy;
2. Determine the current status of importance and satisfaction with 16 key issues outlined in the Integrated City Strategy through the Municipal Wide Survey and the State of Knox Report-2nd edition;
3. Undertake face to face conversations with key stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the information coming from the Municipal Survey and the State of Knox Report (2nd Edition); and
4. Convene a group of people that represented the different aspects of the Knox community and discuss community priorities based on the engagement activities; detail the challenges Council faces over the next four years and provide feedback on how to approach these challenges with an indication of the priorities.

1.5. Council's Engagement Policy and Framework

The community engagement included a range of quantitative and qualitative activities. The project upholds the principles and purpose of the Knox Community Engagement Policy and Framework which is based on the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The activities ranged from the 'Inform' to 'Involve' stage on the IAP2 spectrum.

This approach is in line with the current City Plan 2013-2017 regarding democratic and engaged communities. In particular, it supports the following strategies:

“5.1.2 Support local community leadership programs to promote community participation and foster emerging local leaders

5.2.2 Increase genuine partnerships and collaboration between community agencies, Council and businesses

5.2.3 Increase opportunities for early, genuine and meaningful public conversations with the community on issues of interest or that directly affect them.”

1.6. Governance

The governance for this project was guided by an internal Leadership Group comprising managers from the following departments: Governance and Innovation, City Futures, City Planning and Building, Communications and Customer Service, Community Wellbeing and Sustainable Infrastructure.

Council received regular briefings on each aspect of the community engagement whilst the Executive Management team received monthly progress reports.

2. ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

2.1 Municipal Wide Survey (Appendix 1)

2.1.1 Brief Description and Methodology

Knox City Council, in consultation with newFocus Research, developed a Municipal Survey to help capture community opinions. The survey included three components:

- A random sample telephone survey was conducted of 800 Knox residents and 200 Knox business owners.
- An open online survey and a range of surveys for community groups, young people 14-18 years old, and Knox staff and elected officials.
- Supplementary in-person interviews specifically for groups that may not participate in telephone or online surveys.

Over 1,650 surveys were received, including over 110 received from staff members at Council. Approximately 50% of Knox staff live in the municipality.

The purpose of the survey was to obtain community input on perceptions of the Knox area to inform the development of the new Community Plan on priority areas. The municipal survey formed a starting point to gauge community sentiment and advance further consultation dialogue between Council and its communities. The survey did provide insight into 'what' people feel about the issues but not 'why'. These issues were unpacked more in the context of 'why' during the focus groups and workshops.

The survey covered 16 aspects of Knox as shown under 2.1.2, Key Findings. (page 7)

For each of these aspects the following questions were asked:

- How important is each aspect?
- How satisfied are you with each aspect?
- How have things changed in 4 years?
- Where should Council focus its energy?

2.1.2 Key Findings*

The Municipal Wide Survey indicated that 86% of residents are satisfied living in Knox and 73% of businesses are satisfied operating a business in Knox. Table 1 below indicates how each aspect rated in terms of Importance, Satisfaction and their overall ranking:

Table 1 – Summary of Importance and Satisfaction Survey Results

16 Aspects of Knox	Very Important and Important	Very Satisfied and satisfied	Ranking out of 16 for Importance	Ranking out of 16 for Satisfaction
A Safe Place to be	97%	55%	1	3
Education and training	89%	48%	2	7
Support those in need	89%	40%	3	10
Ease of getting around	88%	48%	4	6
Services and facilities for physical and mental health	88%	49%	5	4
Type and affordability of housing	87%	33%	6	15
Bushland and spaces for natural flora, fauna and habitat	87%	57%	7	2
The environment is cared for by the community	87%	43%	8	8
Opportunities to have a say on matters affecting the community	85%	37%	9	12
Employment opportunities	82%	35%	10	14
Community Spirit	82%	49%	11	5
Sporting, recreational and leisure activities available	79%	67%	12	1
Availability of skilled workforce	72%	39%	13	11
Services to support local business growth	63%	32%	14	16
Celebration of cultural diversity	61%	41%	15	9
A vibrant arts and cultural scene	51%	36%	16	13

** The key finding percentages are based on the 'very important/satisfied' and 'important/satisfied' answers in the survey*

There is a consistency in what is important and least important to the community about Knox:

- Safety, support for those in need, physical and mental health and education and training are the four most important aspects.
- The arts, cultural diversity and support for local business were the most common least important aspects.

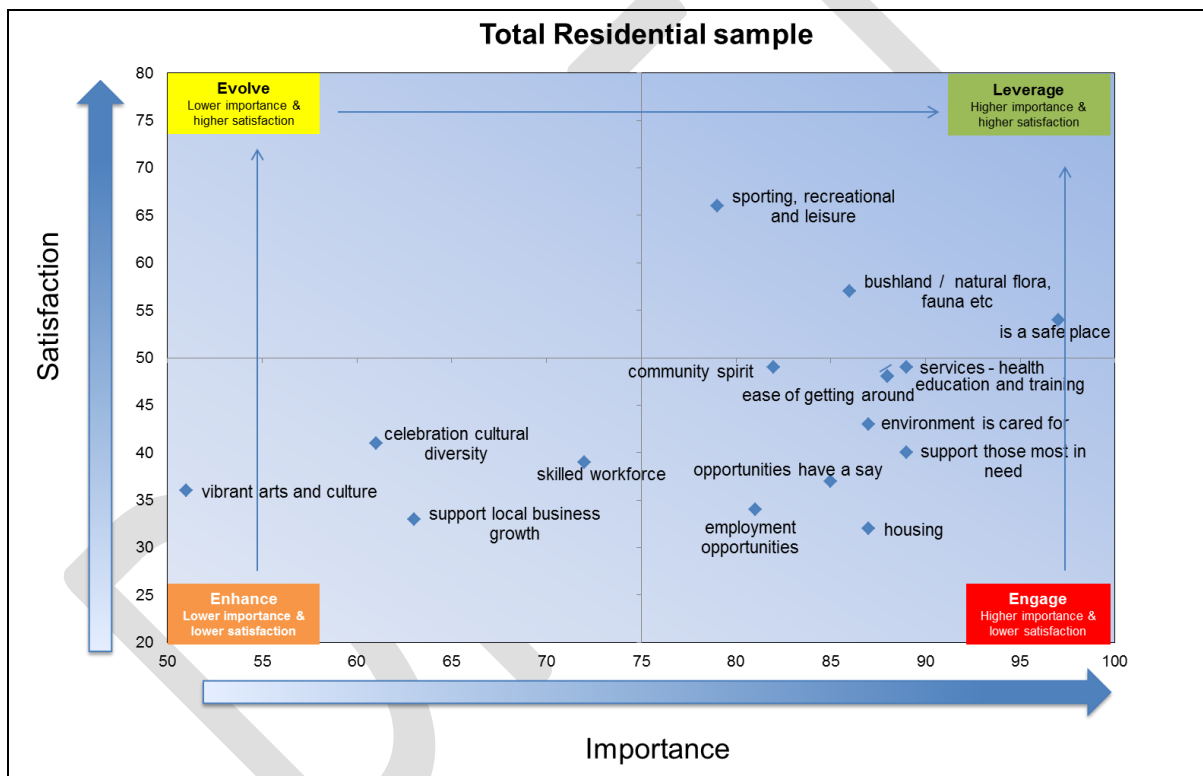
When it came to how satisfied and least satisfied are people with each aspect the results showed:

- Sporting, recreational and leisure activities along with bushland spaces, places were rated high followed by, a safe place to be, services and facilities for physical and mental health, community spirit, education and training and ease of getting around.
- Type and affordability of housing was the most common aspect across all segments with the lowest satisfaction. It was a dominant and recurring theme which was seen to have worsened over the past four years.

- Other aspects with lower levels of satisfaction across several segments were employment opportunities, support for local business and a vibrant arts and cultural scene. The latter two were considered of lower importance by the community.

The graph below provides another perspective on the information. Overall safety, the natural environment and sporting and recreational activities are the aspects which the community consider important and are most satisfied with. These represent the strengths of Knox and need to be protected.

There are a number of aspects of the City which are considered important but less than half of the community are satisfied with such as 'type and affordability of housing', 'support for those in need', 'education and training', 'opportunities to have a say', 'environment is cared for' and services and facilities for physical and mental health'. These areas require further investigation as well as culture, arts and economy other aspects which the community indicated had a lower importance and satisfaction rating.



The community generally believes that Knox has improved (or at least remained the same) on most aspects. There are some significant exceptions to this with 'type and affordability of housing' and a 'safe place to be', being the two aspects where the community believe has gotten worse. The decline in 'type and affordability of housing' was quite significant across all segments of the community and appeared to be the dominant issue.

In regards to what the community believes Council should focus on, many responses related to the things which impact people on a daily basis which Council is seen to be responsible for. The results are broken down in the following categories:

Residents:

- Transport (better roads, public transport, parking)
- Community health and well being
- Cleanliness of public places/ streets/ rubbish collection
- Development/housing issues
- Safety and security
- Care for the environment

Business

- Support for local business
- As well as most of what the residents indicated

Community Groups

- Sporting venues and facilities
- Funding along with services to support the vulnerable
- Building community spirit

Refer to Appendix 1 for detailed survey results.

2.2 State of Knox (2nd Edition) (Appendix 2)

2.2.1 Brief Description and Methodology

The State of Knox Report (2nd Edition) provides a narrative (informed by data tables) that identifies and explores the key social, health, political, cultural, environmental and economic issues in Knox. It explores how things have changed since the first edition State of Knox Report (2013), compares Knox with metropolitan (or in some cases, State) averages and outlines strengths and areas of concern in Knox.

The development of the 2nd Edition State of Knox Report consisted of the following four key components:

- Establishment of the State of Knox Master Database 2016 – which contains ‘population-level’, quantitative data, which is high quality, reliable, currently available and comparable at a metropolitan or state level. Approximately 100 data sources were utilised in the development of this report, including 2011 Census data.
- Review and Analysis of the State of Knox Master Database 2016 - which identifies key strengths, weaknesses and emerging trends in the City of Knox and was primarily designed to inform the community and stakeholder engagement process which formed a major part of the development of the Community Plan 2017-21.
- Development of the State of Knox Basic Conditions Template – which sets-out ‘indicators’ and ‘measures’ which were drawn from the first State of Knox Report and the Integrated City Strategy and Implementation Plan.
- Preparation of the State of Knox Report (2nd Edition) 2016

2.2.2 Key Findings

Key findings from the report are broken into “Areas of Strength” and ‘Areas of Concern’

The Areas of Strength include:

- Personal health & wellbeing - has been a historical strength for Knox (how people perceive their own health and wellbeing is better than average and improving) however an increase in unhealthy lifestyle choices may put this at risk as shown under the ‘Areas of Concern’ below.
- Strong community connections - is about participation in community events, getting help in an emergency, volunteering and availability of community and support groups (is a strength however declining).
- The general health of lifestages (child, youth, aged) – within the city is a strength.
- A consistently lower than average crime rate.
- A positive view of access to services & facilities.
- Pockets of vulnerability but overall, strong personal economic capacity.
- Over one third of the local workforce live and work in Knox.
- Positive indicators around business growth, economic outputs and jobs.
- Good access to parks & gardens, amount of public open space and perceptions of Knox as a well-planned, pleasant environment
- Arts & culture – high number of residents participating in cultural activities
- Leisure & recreation – opportunities and access to are better than the metro average.
- Well governed – Knox residents rate Council’s governing performance as higher than average regarding consultation and engagement, advocacy and making community decisions.

The Areas of Concern include:

- Healthy lifestyle – increase in health risk behaviours such as smoking, poor nutrition, alcohol abuse, inactivity, increase in obesity, though the latest data indicates efforts to improve lifestyle choices may be gaining traction
- Mental health – steady decline in mental health in Knox over the past ten years. Larger than average (50%) increase in adults seeking professional help and rate of hospital admissions for mental-health conditions is significantly higher than the average.
- Youth substance use – Alcohol misuse is trending negatively in the Knox population as a whole, and is particularly pronounced among youth. Ice use is a prominent emerging issue, though numbers affected are low – includes a threefold increase in ambulance call-outs (highest rate in the region) and methamphetamine treatment rates increasing more quickly than other areas.
- Family violence – Knox maintains the highest rate in Melbourne’s Outer East.
- Lifelong learning – year 12 completion is below metro average, lower than average post-school education, kindergarten participation rates consistently below regional and State levels
- Lower than average perception among employed residents of an adequate balance between work and life.
- Educational indicators underpinning resident workforce skills are lower than average.

- Lower than average proportion of highly skilled jobs on offer in Knox (51% of workers in Knox working in highly skilled jobs compared with 58% average for metropolitan LGA's)
- Green & leafy Knox – lower than average vegetation cover;
- Declining housing affordability, low supply of social housing or affordable rental housing. Mismatch in growth in the number of smaller households and construction of smaller dwellings;
- Lower than average acceptance of diverse cultures
- Citizen engagement – lower than average rate of citizen engagement, for example attending town meeting, contacting a local politician, etc. Lower than average perceptions of being valued by society and having opportunities to have a say. Lower than average involvement and inclination to participate in decision-making board or committee.

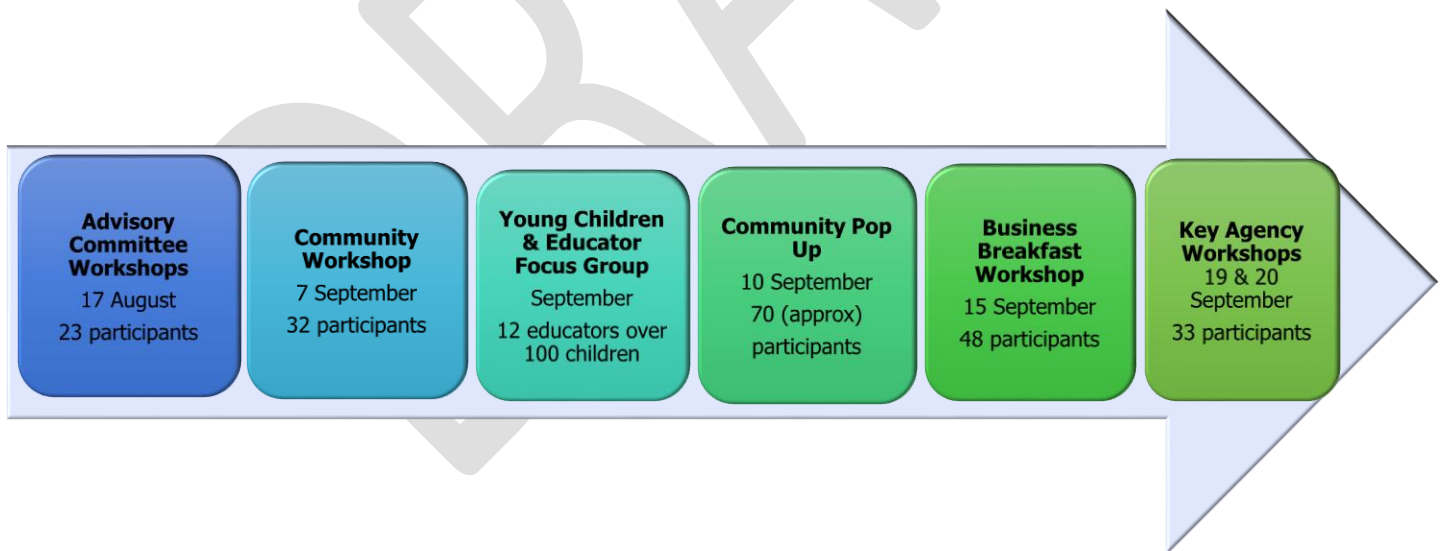
These results were further explored during the focus groups and workshops.

2.3 Focus Groups and Workshops (Appendix 3)

2.3.1 Brief Description and Methodology

A number of focus groups and workshops were conducted predominantly in August and September 2016 with members of the general public, members of Council's advisory committees, educators, young children, business people and key agencies and stakeholders. An additional follow up workshop was held on 7 March with key agencies to determine their role and focus in achieving the community vision for the next four years.

The focus groups conducted are shown below.



In total there were 218 participants in the focus groups and workshops.

In broad terms, these consultation activities sought to:

- Set the scene by providing an overview of the State of Knox, Municipal Survey and other research contributing to the development of the Community Plan;
- Prioritise critical issues as reflected in this current/emerging context;

- Have a conversation about the future direction and partnership opportunities, in a preliminary way, by identifying and discussing the work of key agencies and stakeholders; and
- Continue to develop relationships with key agencies who have a role in Knox.

2.3.2 Key Findings

Key findings from the focus groups and workshops supported most of results of the municipal survey and the State of Knox research. However, further discussion on what is included in Arts and Culture aspect indicated that people are more interested in maintaining this aspect than indicated by the survey results, especially when it is linked into improving physical/mental health and developing community connections.

Other critical issues raised during the discussion included:

- Safety and perceptions of safety which also covered domestic violence and elder abuse
- Education mainly relating to poor resourcing of schools and the question, 'why are families choosing to go to non-Knox school?'
- Mental/physical health, relating to lifestyle risks (obesity, alcohol and drugs), physical activity, work/life balance, ageing population and sport/leisure opportunities
- Lifestyle and life stages changes relating to ageing, disability, access and needs of children for play
- Housing affordability as people unable to downsize in the local area and there is a resistance to higher density living
- Workforce education and training which includes lack of alignment between local skills choices and young people's expectations
- Local employment and work/life balance as more people leaving Knox for work which highlighted the importance of attracting businesses/employers to Knox and the need for more innovation in Knox
- Local character including the environment, land use and development, housing density, open and green spaces, biodiversity and cultural heritage
- Opportunities for engagement, connecting with community, nature and open spaces, volunteerism, diversity and difference, children and young people and amenity/infrastructure.

The follow up Key Agency Workshop highlighted that many organisations including Knox City Council have a role in understanding and responding to key issues through the delivery of their service. This workshop also highlighted that there are many opportunities to work together and share knowledge, resources and partner in initiatives.

2.3.3 Evaluation

Participant evaluation for the focus group workshops was positive with the opportunity for participants to contribute ideas rated most favourably. The focus group workshops delivered the following outcomes:

- Captured a picture of current-day Knox, both in terms of what is strong and worth protecting in the municipality and in terms of what is of concern and people would like to see change.

- Provided ideas on what community, business and practitioners have been thinking about in terms of actions that might achieve the future Knox people aspire to. These ideas reflect the local desire to protect and enhance what is already working well in Knox and to establish partnerships and networks that will enable local agencies, businesses and community to respond proactively to emerging and future issues.
- A promising optimism amongst key agencies and stakeholders (including business, community groups and residents) that community issues can be addressed.

2.4 Focus Group – Young People aged 11 – 25 years (Appendix 4)

2.4.1 Brief Description and Methodology

The engagement activity with young people ran over four weeks and aimed to engage a diverse cross section of young people from a range of schools, community groups, backgrounds and identities.

A total of thirteen focus groups were held with 218 young people aged 11 to 25 years old. Focus groups were held at local primary and secondary schools, an alternative education setting, a Scout hall, Young Leaders training, Interchange Saturday Youth Group, the Youth Information Centre and at the inaugural Knox Youth Day

The main area of enquiry was to determine which issues relevant to the Community Plan, young people thought were most important and explore their ideas around what strategies/services they already considered most effective as well as areas they would like to see change or improve.

2.4.2 Key Findings

The key findings indicated that young people living or attending school in Knox, felt positive about the area as a whole, saw it as safe, with good sports and recreational facilities and generally easy (if time consuming) to negotiate by public transport. The aspects of the municipality they liked best were the parks and reserves, the fact that it felt generally quiet and safe and that most people are friendly.

The issues which were most important to them were Safety and Education. Safety was not chosen because participants felt unsafe, but more often because they placed it of greater importance relative to other categories. However, public transport and young women travelling alone in the evening were the exceptions. Regarding education, the young people felt there were good options of schools, subject choices in Knox however, they expressed a desire for consistency across schools when it came to teaching styles, technology and facilities. Plus, more education around cyber issues and sexual health and relationships was important.

Based on the categories in the survey the issues least important to them were Arts and Culture, A Sense of Community and Sports and Recreation. The participants pointed out that these are not 'unimportant' but when compared to Safety and Education, they are less important. Community is a word that the participants did not relate to in Knox but more with individual friends and family as well as their online life. Sports and Recreation was less important because it is felt that the current situation in Knox is already adequate.

2.4.3 Evaluation

Participant feedback was generally positive and young people valued the opportunity to have a say and be heard. Interestingly, discussion during the focus

groups included the sense that 'the municipality' or 'Knox community' is an abstract concept for young people. Young people don't necessarily see themselves as part of the community holistically, as to them 'community' is represented as Council and aged people. Young people associate with being in an online community.

The focus groups delivered the following outcomes:

- Engagement with a diverse cross section of young people from a range of schools, community groups, backgrounds and identities. Although young people with English as a second language or within a faith community were overall underrepresented.
- Determined that safety and education were the most important issues relevant to young people and suggested ideas on what could be changed or improved.

2.5 Community Panel (Appendix 5)

2.5.1 Brief Description and Methodology

The Knox Community Panel was a new initiative undertaken by Knox City Council and was a little different to other types of engagement activities such as Citizens Juries in that it was not a decision making body.

The emphasis of the Knox Community Panel (the Panel) was to provide an opportunity for the 'average' community member or business owner to participate in a process to discuss priorities and provide feedback on Council's challenges. The panel membership aimed to be as representative as possible of the major characteristics of the Knox community. Therefore, the suggested characteristics to recruit for the Panel were that the members be representative of:

- different service age groups from 18+ years
- gender balance
- cultural diversity (born overseas versus born in Australia)
- people with and without children
- employed versus unemployed
- business owners as well as community members

It was also decided that Panel members should not include:

- those who have a connection to Knox Council currently or in the past in relation to the following roles – employee, Councillor, advisory committee members
- current office bearers in any Knox community group

The panel was comprised of 18 people, 10 females and 8 males, aged from 18 – 70+. It was a big commitment with participants agreeing to participate in five full day sessions, held on Saturdays spanning three months having been given limited information about the Panel's scope of discussions. This approach was done intentionally to be able to reach community members and business owners that may not necessarily have had much contact with Council before.

The purpose of the Panel was to provide input into the future direction of Council's services, activities and infrastructure, within the context of growing financial

constraints. It also allowed for the Panel members to gain a deeper understanding of the Knox City Council and local government in general.

The aim was to connect with a group of people that represented the different aspects of the Knox community and -

- discuss community priorities based on the engagement activities conducted to date;
- discuss in detail the challenges Council faces over the next few years; and
- provide feedback on how to approach those challenges including an indication of priorities in order to inform the development of the new Community Plan.

2.5.2 Key Findings

The key findings and priorities from the Community Panel are:

- Health and community services. It was noted that Council has a role as an educator in this area, and a role in partnering with others to provide direct support to those who are drug dependent, and to provide direct relief to families affected by mental illness and drug dependency.
- Safety. The value of visible interventions to make all areas safer, such as better lighting and closed circuit TV surveillance, was emphasised. Again Council was seen as having a role in educating the community.
- A sustainable environment. Again the role of educator was indicated, but specific measures to encourage sustainable building practices and hard waste management were also mentioned.
- Transport. In this area the Panel saw the role of Council as advocate, especially in partnership with others, for extension of the existing rail network and for better linkage.
- Strong leadership. The Panel favoured processes of succession planning, engagement with youth and identification of leaders for the future, supporting their growth and participation.
- Community connections. The need to bring people together across potential barriers of culture, age and other differences, continued to be emphasised, as did the need to communicate effectively with the whole community so that all are aware of the services and opportunities that exist in the city.

Further details may be found in the final report, Appendix 5

2.5.3 Evaluation

The Knox Community Panel provided a new engagement model for input into the develop of the new Community Plan for Knox. This model was seen as a best practice approach for deliberative community engagement and was well received by participants and their networks.

Over the course of the Knox Community Panel, members:

- spoke openly about their aspirations for the future of Knox;
- welcomed the depth of information provided and questioned officers on how things worked;
- openly debated and considered difference viewpoints when asked to provide feedback; and
- engaged with others between panel sessions to seek further views and ideas.

The Knox Community Panel has provided Council the opportunity to engage and have a dialogue with community members. This has led to greater awareness of the inter-connectivity between issues and the complexity of issues considered by Council. During the life of the Panel, members found an empathy towards the issues and decisions faced by Council and elected members.

3. SUMMARY OF ISSUES FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, MUNICIPAL SURVEY AND STATE OF KNOX (2nd Edition)

3.1 Introduction

Through the development of the Community Plan 2017-2021 (including Council Plan), a range of methods were used to identify and gain a better understanding of what people who live, work, learn and play in Knox see as the key issues.

The issues identified below are in no specific order and aim to provide a summary of the key issues and different aspects relating to each issue.

3.2 Housing

Housing is a key issue which was highlighted from the results of the municipal survey where its importance was rated very high (87%) and the satisfaction very low (32%). Through the discussion in the focus groups, it was clear housing had a major impact on people's lives, jobs, education and security. The key aspects of housing discussed, which identified as a dilemma, were affordability, the availability to downsize in the same area and the impact that the increase in the more affordable units and townhouses was having on the local amenity. Whilst they are providing more choice in type of housing, there was definite concern on the increase in traffic, noise and environment they were having in the local area. All the different aspects where housing impacts in Knox are briefly shown below:

- **Social housing** – the availability of social housing is lower in Knox than the metropolitan average based on population and number of dwellings. Whilst there is a strong need for social housing especially for those with disabilities, there is also the attitude of NIMBY (not in my backyard) in relation to the location of new social housing development. Agencies expressed an interest to partner with Council to improve the supply of social housing. This issue was also linked to the need for good access to public transport as well.
- **Affordable housing** – agencies identified a 65% increase over the past 10 years for people needing housing assistance. Older people are unable to downsize in their local area due to lack of affordable options. This issue closely links with the availability of suitable transport options. The lack of affordable housing was also linked to mental health stress, reducing education stability, community links and health.
- **Type/size** – the need for a mix of different types of housing, older people to downsize locally, younger people to buy into the market. There is a lower than average housing choice and mismatch between the supply of smaller housing options. The need for more medium density housing was also being held up the NIMBY response and a general resistance to higher density was expressed by some.
- **Location** – the look and feel and location (the 'character') of an area is an essential component of people's acceptance or resistance to different types of housing. The change in

streets and neighbourhoods over the past few years has led to significant angst and concern about the rate and scale of change.

- **Design** – there is a priority for energy saving sustainable design for housing as well as quality building and design standards, especially for the increasing number of older people was identified.
- **Emergency housing** – directly related to the high domestic violence or similar and created bottlenecks for services as people want to transition into longer-term housing. Has an impact on children’s schooling and community involvement.
- **Changing household structures** – while ‘family with children’ households remain the dominant household type, there has been a shift to smaller household types and greater diversity in household structures, consistent with the ageing of the population. By 2031 one in two households in Knox will be a smaller unit such as a couple or single household.

3.3 Education

Education is considered a key cornerstone in the development of a person and the opportunities available to them. It is closely linked to the economy, sense of belonging and one’s mental and physical health. The results from the municipal survey rated the importance of education and training for all stages in life very high (88%) and the satisfaction lower (48%). It also indicated that services to support local business growth were less important (63%) with even less satisfaction (32%). Whilst education was generally acknowledged as a State Government issue, the impact on the lives of people in Knox reached the local level. Some of the issues raised are shown below:

- **Lifelong learning** - provides the opportunity for people to learn new skills, information throughout their lifetime. This was important especially in regards to a changing work force and an ageing community. Whilst library memberships are significantly below the metropolitan average, home internet use and broadband access was significantly higher than metropolitan averages in 2011.
- **Adult learning** – Knox has the highest number of adult education classes at the five Neighbourhood Houses in the Eastern Region.
- **Financial viability of schools** – it was noted that small schools aren’t financially viable and risk closing with the government selling them off, but there was concern about what would happen in the future if the demand increased.
- **School retention (low completion rates)** – in comparison to the metropolitan average, the number of Knox residents aged 15 and over who had completed year 12 or equivalent is lower as well as the number of 15-24 year olds who participated in vocational or university. However, the percentages of 15-19 year olds, fully engaged in work or study in non-school institutions and the percentage of 17 year olds still attending school are slightly higher than the metropolitan average.
- **Kindergarten participation** – The data indicates that the kindergarten enrolments are strong in Knox as well as having a much higher percentage of children who enrolled in Prep following their year in kindergarten than the Victorian average.

- **Quality of education / teachers / facilities** - young people in particular were concerned with the inconsistencies between school's regarding the quality of facilities and teachers. Not only the difference between State and Private Schools but also differences between State Schools which have received funding for upgrades and those that haven't. Young people desired consistency across schools when it came to teaching styles, technology and facilities. This is perceived to be resulting in a number of families are choosing to travel further to non-Knox schools.
- **Educational status** – measures of educational status are improving, though people are becoming better educated at all geographical levels, the results for Knox have remained consistently below the average.
- **Post-school qualifications** – it was identified that there is a gap in knowledge about post-school qualification and knowing what the jobs/industry are in the local area and what skills are required to meet the local industry needs.
- **Education** – young people indicated that there is a good range of experiences with formal education including the choice of schools, subjects, excursions and living skills. Young people also indicated a desire to increase activities within schools which provided life skills as well as social and emotional learning (i.e. drug education, improved sexual health education). Importantly, some felt that schools could do more to provide preparation for the workplace. This was also discussed by businesses as an issue for the next generation of school leavers.

3.4 Local Character

Knox's local character was discussed throughout the engagement. In many ways it was felt that the local character is changing. The results from the municipal survey rated the importance of Environment, Bushland and Community Spirit quite high in the 80% but the satisfaction was lower in the 40% for Environment and Community Spirit while bushland was rated higher in the 50%.

The engagement was able to identify the following aspects of Knox's local character that need to be considered/addressed over the next four years:

- **Cultural heritage** – the municipal survey ranked cultural diversity and arts and culture quite low in importance (61% and 51% respectively) and even lower in satisfaction (41% and 36% respectively). The local indigenous community have expressed a need to have their own meeting place in Knox for the past few years.
- **Land use & development** – this was one of the most contested set of issues which is also evidenced generally by the number of objections to planning applications that are often received. There was concern over development happening in unsuitable areas and the social repercussions as intensive development brings people physically together but not socially. Currently Knox data indicates Knox has a higher proportion of Knox residents with good physical access to public transport; almost all households (97%) have good access to open space within 500 metres of home.
- **Housing density** – concern about the higher number of townhouses, units and apartments going in is changing the neighbourhood character and impacting negatively with increased traffic, overlooking onto neighbours and car parking. Some felt that the reduced amount of open space could affect the mental health of its occupants.

- **Open & green spaces**- children and adults spoke very highly of the open/park spaces in Knox and their importance for mental and physical health.
- **Biodiversity** – with a lower than average percentage of vegetation cover, a huge increase in the rate of extinction of local habitat and a lack of conservation of local flora, biodiversity was considered a critical issue in Knox. A number of people felt the importance of sustainability and maintaining natural/green spaces was critical, given the changes in built form, increasing population and overall ‘urban sprawl’.
- **Green & leafy character** – people feel that the green and leafy identity is under threat with the increased development. Each year Council plants approximately 150,000 plants. People identified that the loss of large gum or remnant tree was a major contributor to the loss of the green and leafy identity while others felt they were a safety risk.
- **Identity of Knox** – this relates to the environmental identity by being surrounded by major National Parks and to the change in population with the increase of different cultures. The environmental identity is important to maintain and enhance. The change in cultural identity needs to be embraced and encouraged through things such as sharing food, festivals and events. However, some wondered what the impact might be on a new Knox identity in the future.
- **Local amenity** – there has been a reduction in the percentage of adults in Knox who rate the local area as being a pleasant environment with nice streets and well planned open spaces (87% in 2008, to 82% in 2011). In particular, the increase in medium density housing is impacting the local area with increased traffic and parking on the streets.

3.5 Environmental Values

The Knox community values and identifies with its local environment. The feedback indicated a strong preference for the environment to continue to be protected, nurtured and its value strengthened as part of our identity. The survey confirmed this sentiment by having ‘the environment is cared for by the community’ and ‘bushland and spaces for natural flora, fauna and habitat rated very important/important by 87% of the respondents. The satisfaction levels for both of these areas was considerably lower at 43% and 57% respectively. With the desire to live, work, play and learn locally, people were aware of the importance of addressing a range of environmental values as shown below:

- **Biodiversity** – “environmental integrity and biodiversity” was assessed as a critical issue facing Knox during the consultations. Again, these concerns were linked to development pressures and the associated issues of car use, congestion and tree loss. In 2016 there are six Friends groups that work to control weeds, increase habitat and restore degraded remnant vegetation in bushland reserves and waterways (also see page 3)
- **Open space** – Knox has evolved around a number of creeks, which provide a significant contribution to the sense of openness that Knox residents enjoy. They are vital to the municipal drainage system, host remnant bushland and are key components of the 100kms of shared paths that connect Knox. Many of the 118 sites of biological significance are located along or near these creeks. These sites consist of remnant indigenous vegetation and associated flora and fauna, and many of them bring the bush feel of the Dandenong Ranges

into the residential areas of the municipality; contributing to Knox's identity as 'green and leafy'.

- **Resource use** - almost two-thirds (64%) of Knox households have two or more cars compared to half of the households across metropolitan Melbourne.¹ Knox is ranked third of all Melbourne municipalities in terms of weekly expenditure on fuel.²
- **Waste / recycling** – since 2013 there has been a continued increase in garbage generation (waste to landfill) in Knox. (460 kg per Knox household in 2009-10 to 486 kg in 2013-14 which is 11 kg higher than the metropolitan average). The recyclable/green diversion rate in Knox is 55% which is considerably better than the state average of 45%.
- **Air quality** – during the consultations, some specific advice was to “embrace all types of vegetation” as important habitat and as a method for maintaining air and water quality.
- **Oil / gas / electricity availability, use & cost** –since 2007 there has been a better use of gas, electricity and solar power. In 2007, the average consumption of gas for Knox households was higher than the state average. Consistent with broad state and metropolitan trends, the volume of both residential and non-residential gas use in Knox has remained fairly steady since 2009 at approximately 5,200,000 gigajoules (GJ).³ In terms of electricity, in 2007 the average household use in Knox was consistent with the state average. Since 2010, total electricity usage across Knox has fallen steadily from a high of 886,186 megawatt-hours (MWh) to 811,169MWh in 2014, a reduction of 8.5%.⁴ Over this time, the total amount of solar electricity exported to the grid has increased from 287MWh to 10,911 kilowatt-hours (KWh).
- **Changing climate / climate change** - the greatest threats to the natural environment in Knox include changing climate patterns (rainfall and temperature), environmental weeds and a lack of fire.
- **Wildlife** – the loss of natural habitat is affecting the local wildlife.

3.6 Local Economy

Throughout the community engagement, the local economy was prominent in the discussions with residents, businesses, students and key agencies. The theme of living and working locally was continually raised which also relates to the work/life balance. To achieve this, it was acknowledged that other areas are influential to achieving this end such as education, skills, transport, jobs, health, innovation and support to local businesses.

In particular, the Municipal Survey indicated a large gap in 'employment opportunities' importance (82%) and satisfaction (35%). Other areas covered in the survey were 'services to support local business growth' and 'availability of skilled workforce' which rated lower on importance and satisfaction.

Transport was another important area relating to getting to work and transporting freight to and from Knox. In addition, there appeared to be a lack of alignment between local skill choices and 'young people's' expectations.

¹ ABS Census, 2011.

² State of Knox Master Database (from Community Indicators Victoria).

³ Multinet gas unpublished data.

⁴ AusNet data unpublished.

Further detail on areas relating to local economy are shown below:

- **Employment / local workforce** –32% of the Knox resident workforce, worked in Knox while a further 32% worked in a neighbouring municipality. While better than the metropolitan average, the percentage of people who live and work in Knox has declined. The consultation identified mismatches in local workforce as compared to local employment which has led to a number of ‘work/life balance’ issues. While many businesses state their preferences to *“work with local people/businesses with skills”*, there was an expressed *“struggle to get enough people”* with skills, especially the ‘soft skills’ of customer relations and communication for example.
- **Ageing population** - locally, there was an employment preference for older employees as *“aged workforce are valued because of attitude”* whereas younger workers *“don’t care, don’t have pride. It is about ‘what is in it for me”*.
- **Transport – commuter / freight** - poor transport infrastructure in the area was a critical priority that received many ‘votes’ across the consultation. Car dependency, long commutes and poor public transport/active transport choices were seen to have a significant impact on the local economy, example ‘hard to get experienced people because Knox is so far out and ‘transport is not good for young women to get to work because of poor access and safety issues’. Eastlink was viewed very positively, as ‘it allows great access to metro Melbourne’ and the *“many agencies in Knox to assist those in need’*.
- **Business support** - there was a set of issues raised that related to the quality of supports for business in Knox. Largely, the supports offered by Council and other industry groups were viewed positively such as: *Opportunities to network (Knox Biz); Bayswater Business Network is great, local and green (10 min city); Networking with local business is highly valuable; Business visits – quite useful (again for contacts/direct links to useful contacts); Network and relationships are critical – council is a great facilitator of business networking.*
- **Business growth** - the quantity of goods and services produced per annum for Knox has increased by 2.5% from 2011 to 2016 (to \$20.1 billion). The consultations identified that there was a need to be planning for the future of the local economy and to readjust the profile of local businesses to cater to emerging markets, needs and trends. The Knox economic indicators suggest some shifting from a production and processing economy to a knowledge based economy.
- **Industry diversity** - 55,800 jobs are estimated to exist in Knox (as at June 2013). Whilst 71% of jobs in Knox are attributable to six industry sectors (manufacturing, retail and wholesale trade, health care and social assistance, construction and education), construction, professional scientific and technical services, and rental hiring and real estate services make up 43% of all businesses operating in Knox across all 19 industry sectors.
- **Strategic employment places** - Knox has a range of business, commercial and industrial hubs. The most significant of these in terms of economic contribution is the Scoresby-Rowville Employment Precinct (SREP) (covering 240 hectares (ha) of business zoned land) and the Bayswater Business Precinct (covering 750ha and three municipalities). The

Bayswater Business Precinct⁵ currently accommodates over 4,400 businesses, employing 25,497 people in the broader catchment area,⁶ making this precinct important both locally and regionally. The SREP is home to 470 businesses. Also, Knox has a number of smaller but still significant business and industrial hubs, including the Mountain Gate Industrial and Business area; Knoxfield Industrial precinct (including the Kingston Business Park); and the Lewis Road Industrial area (within the Knox Central area in Wantirna South).

- **Jobs** - businesses employing less than 20 people continue to be the backbone of the Knox economy, representing 97% of all businesses in Knox. However, the number of registered businesses in Knox has marginally declined (3%) in five years to 12,899 in 2015.
- **Skilled workforce & education** - in 2016, 87% of business owners and managers surveyed rated availability of a skilled workforce as either “important” or “very important”, while only 42% said they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with this aspect of operating a business in Knox.
- **Innovation** - while attracting relatively few comments, the topic of innovation was raised by several participants and generally in a negative vein, as the following comments illustrate: ‘lack of new innovation in Knox; most people heading to CBD; chase emerging industry, not chase old opportunities; we are a risk adverse society; high tech – driver of future rather than playing catch up – need long term planning’. Some people did speak of the sort of local innovations that could mentor new entrepreneurial endeavours. For example, social enterprises locally have been successful and could be a training ground for future innovation. The local tech industry could also pave the way for further innovation.
- **Increasing female workforce participation** - there were positives around issues such as gender, as participants reflected that “gender diversity [in Knox] is good” and that women were often good candidates for jobs with flexible hours. Others saw benefits for their businesses in hiring young people who were able to “come in, able to use technology”.
- **Personal economic capacity** – Overall, there is no Knox suburb which is technically disadvantaged according to the 2011 Socio Economic Indexes for Area (SEIFA) data. However, there is a slowing growth of median household income which brings it closer to the Melbourne average than previously and is increasing the vulnerability in the community. There is also an increasing and considerably higher than average percentage of people on the aged pension.

3.7 Physical Health

Half or more of all adults are impacted by any or multiple lifestyle risks including, overweight/obesity, poor nutrition, insufficient physical activity or are at long term risk from alcohol use.

There was a concern that declines in children’s ‘natural play’ and independent mobility were part of a complex problem resulting in ‘children who are more isolated – in their rooms- on their

⁵ The Bayswater Business Precinct incorporates Bayswater, Bayswater North and Kilsyth across 3 municipalities – Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges.

⁶ Note these figures are significantly different to the previous report but based on the recent research undertaken for the Bayswater Business Precinct - 19,000 businesses and 35,000 jobs.

devices'. These issues coupled with broader issues related to education (retention and focus) transport/car-dependence, lifestyles (including diet and substance abuse) and employment for young people were all viewed as linked to specific health determinants for younger Knox residents. Problems with disengagement and mental health as well as physical health issues such as childhood obesity and inactivity were specific concerns.

The engagement was able to identify the following aspects that need to be considered:

- **Lifestyle risks** (e.g. alcohol/drug use, smoking) – drug abuse was a critical issue raised. The emergence and impact of Ice which could be connected to youth disengagement and to perceptions of safety. Smoking rates have declined generally although Knox is slightly higher than metropolitan Melbourne. A lower than average proportion of adults are at risk from harmful alcohol consumption. There is also a weakness in Knox with youth substance abuse, with a particular focus on alcohol, pharmaceutical and ice use.
- **Disease** – there has been an increase in Type 2 diabetes and asthma in adults in Knox.
- **Obesity** – pre-obesity and obesity are considerably higher in Knox than the metropolitan average (54.2% compared to 48.6%). Currently the upward trend has stopped and a marginal decline in all geographic levels, including Knox.
- **Physical activity** – 52.8% of Knox residents are not meeting physical activity guidelines compared with 54.1% of adults across Melbourne in 2014. However, recent municipal recreation plans⁷ and the trend observations identified a rise in the casual sports market and a shift towards more informal and unstructured activities. Walking, jogging, cycling and swimming all have strong participation rates based on modelling which considers population and participation data⁸ and the enhancement of shared recreation trails is a high priority. This change also relates to time constraints and the need for activities and facilities fitting in with people's available leisure time.
- **Ageing population (and other lifestages)** - older people tend to engage in positive and active ageing in Knox. However, increased rates of age pension dependency flag some concerns for older people in Knox. Overall the older people in Knox have a high Personal Wellbeing Index of 77.5 in 2011, which was just above the metropolitan average of 77.⁹ In addition, 73.2% of 55 year olds and above reported feeling part of the community, which was also above the metropolitan average of 72.9%.¹⁰ Children and young people in Knox generally experience positive health and wellbeing.
- **Declining breastfeeding rates and maternal care services** – it is notable that breastfeeding has dropped from 38.7% in 2010-11 to 36.8% in 2013-14, however, this figure is still above the most recent metropolitan average of 34.3%.¹¹ During the consultations, practitioners indicated the 'decline in maternal services available is affecting women which affects the families'.

⁷ Knox Leisure Plan 2014-2019.

⁸ Melbourne East Regional Sport and Recreation Strategy (2016) incorporating data on population (Forecast .id); and participation (ERASS -Exercise, Recreation and Sports Survey; and children's participation (Cultural and Leisure Activities, ABS, 2012).

⁹ VicHealth Survey, 2011.

¹⁰ VicHealth Survey, 2011.

¹¹ DEECD, Maternal and Child Health Services Annual Report, 2014.

- **Open spaces / sport & leisure** – an acknowledged strength of Knox was the opportunities it provided people to keep active and maintain good physical and mental health. This strength related to the comprehensive sporting facilities and experiences that Knox offers and to the environments available to people to get out in nature. Access to public open space is well above average and access to parks, gardens and smaller open spaces in terms of number of spaces to population is better than average.
- **Mortality** – age-standardised death rates per 1,000 population in Knox reduced slightly from 5.6 in 2012 to 5.5 in 2014.
- **Nutrition & food security** - a comparable rate of poor nutrition, which is measured by the proportion of adults that do not meet (revised) fruit and vegetable consumption guidelines (48.8% of adults in Knox compared with 48.4% metropolitan-wide).

3.8 Mental Health

The awareness levels of the broader community in regards to mental health issues were 'voted'¹² one of the most critical issues for Knox. While there was acknowledgement that *"more people acknowledging mental health, reducing the stigma"* and that *"asking for help is OK"*, people still saw further work to do in regards to improving community/workplace/school/club understanding of mental health and how to support people who are struggling.

There has been a general decline in mental health over the past 10 years which includes an increase use of mental health services (9.2% in 2008 compared to 13.5% in 2011/12) and an increase of hospital admissions for this area that is significantly higher than the national average. Mental health can be exasperated by poor lifestyle choices such as smoking, misuse of alcohol and drugs, and a sedentary lifestyle, which have all been identified as issues for Knox. There were comments on 'scarce resources for domestic violence and mental health' and 'poor access to drug rehab services'.

Mental health is affected by the following:

- **Work / life balance** – a lower than average percentage of employed people living in Knox perceived an adequate balance between work and life in 2011 (51% compared with 55% metropolitan-wide and 57% regionally). Perceptions of a balance between an individual's work and personal life were particularly low among men in Knox. Not having a good balance can create stress either on the person or within the family affected by the in balance.
- **Support / services** – research has identified a scarce number of services and resources for people experiencing mental health issues. This also is related to stresses that are on families regarding affordable child care, work/life balance.
- **Drug & alcohol abuse** – the long term risk of abuse potentially affects 56.8% of Knox adults which is slightly lower than the metropolitan average yet can have an impact on ones mental health. The number of 15-24 year olds being admitted to hospital for drug-related matters also increased from 13.8 (per 10,000) in 2009-10 to 24.8 (per 10,000) in 2012-13 and was well above the metropolitan average of 20.7.

¹² In workshops, people were allocated 'most critical issue' sticky dot votes which they applied across the five themes and the issues related to the themes.

- **Psychological distress** – the rate and percentage of adults diagnosed with depression or anxiety (2011-12) were found to be higher than the metropolitan average yet only 7.2 % of Knox adults reported ‘high’ or ‘very high’ levels of psychological distress which is far lower than the Victorian average (2011-12). The imminent release of data from the 2014 survey will enable a cross-checking of the veracity of these findings. Rates of eating disorders, psychiatric hospitalisations and reported bullying among young people in Knox are worse than the metropolitan averages for the same period.
- **Community isolation** – the importance of social interaction can be hampered by lack of confidence, distances, lack of transport and the cultural/ language barriers.
- **Ageing population (and other life stages) and elder abuse** – ageing, loss of spouse and friends can lead to people feeling socially isolated which can be compounded with the increase in the digital information environment. Also, older people experiencing pressures from family/children can have an impact.
- **Economic impacts** – the lack of job security, a changing workplace, job structure and skill level can all impact on one’s mental health. Also, loss of work days due to leave taken because of mental health.
- **Impact on education** – young people acknowledged the role of social media on their well being, self-esteem and mental health as a concern amongst themselves and their peers. They felt more should be done in schools at every level to equip students to better handle these issues. Also, young people are affected by the environment at home which can impact on their ability to concentrate and be motivated at school.

3.9 Safety

In 2016, the idea that Knox is ‘a safe place to be’ was rated by residents surveyed as the most important out of sixteen aspects of the city for which perceptions were measured, with 97% of residents and 94% of business owners and managers rating the issue as either “important” or “very important.” Satisfaction was considerably lower (54%). Crime remains lower than average in Knox but has grown faster than the Victorian average over the last few years

Several comments referred to safety and perceptions of safety being intertwined with other critical issues, like mental health and the supports given to young people in the municipality. Rises in crime were also linked to increased use of drugs in the community, particularly ‘ice’.

Some of the issues below highlight the concerns raised.

- **Family violence** – family violence (for example violence against women, child abuse, elder abuse, etc) was raised many times through the research and the consultations. Knox has had the highest rate of reported family violence in Melbourne’s outer east for over 20 years. Data for the review period reveals that the number of recorded offences per 1,000 population has increased from 10.6% in 2012-13 to 11.2% in 2015-16. Also, child abuse substantiations per 1,000 children and adolescents (0-17 years) increased from 5.3% in 2009-10 to 6.4% in 2010-11. As those at the ‘coal face’, agencies were anxious to raise matters that they are seeing in their services, especially including ‘Elder abuse: financial, emotional, becoming more prevalent and abuse victims hesitant to report their child/children.’

- **Bullying** – young people indicated that ‘Bullying is easier because it is not done face to face (cyber and text). It was suggested that digital ethics needs to be taught.’
- **World threats (e. g. terrorism)** – the threat of terrorism locally is not seen as a local concern specifically for young people but they do consider it central to their idea of safety and security. It was acknowledged as a concern in the community consultations as well.
- **Public Transport** – the main area where young people felt safety could be improved was on public transport, particularly in the evening. The increase of Protective Service Officers (PSO’s) was seen as a good step but many felt further steps could be made to include PSO’s on other public transport means such as at bus interchanges. Young women travelling alone in the evening or at night were the exceptions to young people’s sense of security and all young women who participated in focus groups said they did not or would not feel safe walking or catching public transport alone at night.
- **Walking / cycling** - there are over 1,200km of footpaths within Knox, however ‘walkability’ is typically poor (based on connectivity, density and mix of land uses). The Metropolitan Melbourne Walkability Index gives Knox a rating of 2.0 (where 1 is low and 10 is high). Knox has a significant bicycle network, catering predominately for recreational users. There are over 100 kilometres (kms) of shared paths throughout Knox, many of which follow creek corridors. They connect parks, reserves, schools, train stations and shopping precincts. While the off-road network is quite extensive, there are still a number of gaps, particularly in the on-road network.

3.10 Community Connections

The importance of community connections in its many ways came up in all areas of the engagement. The Community Panel identified community connections as the need to bring people together across potential barriers of culture, age and other differences.

The Municipal Survey identified community spirit as important (82%) with a lower satisfaction rate (42%). In the consultation it was said that “we may be more ‘connected’ now but as a community we are becoming more ‘disconnected’.” While people saw much strength with respect to community connectedness in Knox (e.g. high volunteering rates, availability of leisure and support services, the positive role of Council and others in connecting community, the value people place on their social lives, that Knox is ‘close knit and stable city with community spirit’).

Some of the specific points relating to Community Connections are shown below:

- **Isolation** – people said there is an increase in isolation through the lack of transport and distances to attend activities plus dislocation through the separation of families. Some older people are feeling ‘left out’ with the increase of information and services provided digitally. Some said that homes are set up in a more isolated way which reduces the community feel. It is forecast that 1 in 4 households will be ‘lone person by 2031.
- **Diversity (generally)** - comments from the consultation indicated ‘people feel safer with like-minded people around’ which is a challenge in a changing community with more diverse people living in it. People forwarded ideas like using local leisure as a way to build connections between people who are different from each other and forge a more contemporary, multicultural identity. They felt that it ‘takes time to ‘mould’ into community. Young people as part of the gay, bisexual transgender, queer, intersex group felt that this was

a broader social issue that should be addressed locally and at a young age through education.

- **Cultural diversity** – community acceptance of diverse cultures in Knox is below average with only 50.3% of Knox adults feel that multiculturalism makes life in the area better. This is 3.7% lower than the Melbourne metropolitan average. As such, an opportunity exists to promote cultural diversity more extensively and highlight its value. Some spoke of the increasing acceptance amongst Generation X and Y and amongst children for cultural diversity, thus normalising difference. However, the negatives identified associated with increasing diversity included issues such as a “decrease in volunteering especially among overseas arrivals” and negative media focus on difference, leading to a “hardening of attitudes regarding difference and culture”. These attitudes needed to be challenged via “creating space for discussion around what is said in a racist/sexist etc. vein” so that safety and a sense of welcome for all was improved.
- **Communication** – the consultations highlighted that there isn’t enough information on programs, services, activities already operating in Knox. This needs to be communicated much better for people to participate.
- **Sport & leisure** – provides opportunity for physical activity and social interaction. Interesting to hear that young people who spend time in sporting groups, scouts and youth groups did not relate them to a ‘sense of community’.
- **Public spaces** - public spaces need to be created that people want. Younger people are travelling to the other side of the city for events like ‘cheese and cider’ days. This could be a draw card to bring people in and keep people ‘socialising’ in Knox. Positive perceptions of access to facilities and services have been strong in Knox, but are declining in some areas.
- **Differing concepts of ‘community’ (e. g. online, communities of interest)** – young people didn’t relate to the ‘Knox’ community but more with their individual friends, family as well as their ‘on line’ life. People often think of the shopping centre when referring to ‘Knox’ as opposed to the municipality.
- **Volunteering** – is a great way to establish and develop new community connections. The concept of volunteering is changing. People may be very well connected to the wider community, their state, the nation as a whole, or even other countries via the internet/social media and ‘help out’ via other means. The percentage of Knox adults that helped out a local group by volunteering (‘yes, definitely’ and ‘sometimes’), which allows for more casual instances of volunteering, was higher than the metropolitan average (35.3% compared with 30.8%).
- **Community groups** – overall, 15.5% of Knox residents are members of an organised group which includes sports, church, action or community groups. This is lower than the 17.3% metropolitan-wide average. In particular, membership of sports groups was 28% in Knox compared to 25% metropolitan-wide; religious groups 20% compared with 18%; school groups 14% compared with 12%; and professional groups 30% compared with 25%.
- **Arts & culture** - arts and culture are integral to supporting healthy people and strong communities and has previously been viewed as a strength in Knox.¹³ Events and facilities

¹³ Knox Arts and Cultural Plan, 2012 – 2022.

provide activities and places to develop social cohesion and reduce isolation. People who participate in arts and cultural activities are able to be creative, connect with each other, develop shared identities and enjoy life. In 2016, a 'vibrant arts and cultural scene' received the lowest importance rating by residents surveyed, out of a total of sixteen different aspects of the city. Only 36% of residents surveyed said they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with this aspect of the city in the same survey.¹⁴

3.11 Infrastructure

Infrastructure is a broad term covering many areas and all life stages. Throughout the consultation it was raised mainly regarding transport, education, services and programs for people who live, work, learn and play in Knox. Some of the key points raised are shown below:

- **Poor transport infrastructure** in the Knox area was a critical priority that received many comments throughout the consultations. Car dependency, long commutes and poor public transport/active transport choices were seen to have a significant impact on the local economy, e.g. 'hard to get experienced people because Knox is so far out' and 'transport is not good for young women to get to work (safety/access)'. It is interesting to note that the State of Knox data indicates that a higher than average proportion of Knox residents (48%) have good physical access to public transport eg 400 metres to a bus stop and/or 800 metres to a train station as compared to people in metropolitan Melbourne (15%).
- **Extension of existing rail to Rowville and better linkages throughout Knox** – the community panel believed that council in partnership with others could be an advocate for these improvement to take place.
- **Services & facilities** – perceptions of service availability have been an historic strength in Knox however there has been a decline in the proportion of adults that rate the area as having good facilities and services (E.g. shops, childcare, schools, libraries, neighbourhood centres, etc), although this is still higher than the average.
- **Parking, land availability/floorspaces** and the location of staff in the east/southeast were mentioned as reasons why one business had consciously relocated to Knox.
- **Childcare** – There isn't enough mix of affordable childcare, especially in relation to occasional child care.
- **Schools** – the young people felt that there were significant inconsistencies between schools and teachers. They pointed to the difference in facilities between state and private schools and also the differences between state schools which have received upgrades and those that haven't.
- **Leisure and Recreation** – the survey indicated that these areas were a strength. The data indicates that whilst there is a reduction in perceptions of access to leisure and recreation facilities and services, it still remains better than average.

Other areas identified included:

- Lack of funding/ priority setting for infrastructure;
- Importance of storm water/drainage design and maintenance;

¹⁴ New Focus Pty Ltd for Knox City Council (2016) *City Plan Municipal Survey Final Report* p. 24.

- Maintenance of infrastructure;
- Criteria used for establishing infrastructure;
- Improved design of streetscapes to include bus/cycle lanes and improved nature strips to meet long term needs (both in terms of utility and amenity);
- Life cycle considerations; and
- Location in strategic places with good access.

3.12 Governance/Community Leadership/Volunteerism

The consultation drew out the importance of confidence in our decision making and who is making them. This confidence is founded on trust and transparency. The areas of good governance, building community leadership and encouraging volunteerism are foundation blocks which are linked together to achieve the best for Knox. Specific details of these foundation blocks are shown below:

- **Volunteering** – encouraging volunteering and the management of volunteers were identified as important issues for community groups. There is also some evidence that 'baby boomers' are not interested in 'traditional' areas of volunteering but are attracted to more educative forms of volunteering, for example, mentoring programs.
- **Community leadership** – the community has tended to be less active over the longer term in relation to civic engagement (perception of opportunities to have a say), civic engagement (attending a public meeting) and decision-making (membership of decision-making boards or committees). In fact, 57.1% of adults viewed their local area as being an active community in which people do things and get involved in local activities and issues.¹⁵ While this was higher than the metropolitan average of 55.4%, it was well below the 2008 figure of 59.8% and suggests that people in Knox are becoming less inclined to involve themselves in these sorts of activities.¹⁶
- **Good governance** – this issue was highlighted across multiple levels of government.
- **Transparency in decision making/ policy setting** - in the 2014-15 financial year, Knox Council reported that 3% of Council decisions were made at meetings closed to the public. This is a favourable result compared to 8% for Melbourne metropolitan and 12.2% for all councils in the State. In 2015-16, 4.92% of Council decisions were made in a meeting that was closed to the public. While the number of reports considered at closed meetings only increased by 1 (from 12 to 13), there has been a significant decrease in the overall number of reports presented to Council for resolution (down from 354 to 264).
- **Decision-making** – in the community there is much confusion over who is responsible (which level of government) for different services, infrastructure and programs . Uncertainty over the sphere of responsibility. Knox Council received an index score of 59 for 'decisions made in the interest of the community' in 2014 and in 2016 score is 62, higher than Knox's previous score and higher than the metropolitan average of 59.

¹⁵ DHHS, Victorian Population Health Survey, 2011-2012.

¹⁶ DHHS, Victorian Population Health Survey, 2011-2012.

- **Succession Planning** – the community panel favoured processes for succession planning and engaging with young people to identify leaders for the future by supporting their growth and participation.
- **Hard to reach and Multicultural groups** – it's important to hear from all sections of the community which requires offering translation services and different types of engagement. The responses from the survey and the participants in the community consultations reflect that the multi-cultural groups were not adequately represented.
- **Technology** – new digital technologies in the engagement space presents barriers for some. Engagement in the modern age places “too much reliance on social media and not enough on engaging in person”, a real issue for the “people who can't operate in a digital age”.
- **Community Engagement** – during the consultations, according to a wide range of participant, the main barrier to engagement in local democracy and decision making is the fact that “people are time poor” and are unable to find the space and time to properly respond to local agencies. This time poverty is a result of many of the issues previously discussed: housing and cost of living stresses, commuting times, out-of-balance work and private lives.

There is also the issue of the length of time it takes to go through the process of seeking input and feedback and the time that the final decision is made. Their interest has waned over the time lapse. Plus, the community feels that their participation/feedback is ignored by decision makers. Closing the loop is important for people to feel valued.

The feedback from the engagement for this project was that there are “segments of society that are not at all engaged”. This could be due to the above issues of time poor, length of time for a final product/decision to be made or an opportunity or language barriers making it more difficult to engage the CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 [City Plan Municipal Survey Final Report](#)

Appendix 2 [State of Knox 2nd Edition](#)

Appendix 3 [Consultation Summary and Advice](#)

Appendix 4 [Youth Focus Group Report](#)

Appendix 5 [Community Panel Final Report](#)

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