Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy

Category: All employees, contractors, volunteers, and visitors

Date of Adoption by Council: 25 August 2015

Directorate Responsibility: Community Services

Policy

Reconciliation is about building better relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal peoples for the benefit of all Australians. *The City of Whittlesea values local Aboriginal communities and cultures; Council recognises they hold a special place as the First Peoples of Australia. Council is committed to inclusivity, equity and engagement with local Aboriginal people and communities.*

In line with Council’s commitment to reconciliation the following acknowledgement statement has been developed in partnership with Traditional Owner groups; “*The City of Whittlesea recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country and acknowledges the Wurundjeri Willum Clan as the traditional owners of this place*”.

Policy Principles

The Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy Principles are designed to underpin the Policy and guide Council action:

- **RESPECT:** We will be respectful of Aboriginal communities, acknowledging and embracing their history, culture, heritage and the talents Aboriginal people bring to our community and our business.

- **SELF–DETERMINATION:** We understand and support the right of Aboriginal communities to determine their future and we will play our part.

- **EQUITY:** We strive to ensure Aboriginal communities participate and achieve to a level equal to all City of Whittlesea residents.

- **JUSTICE:** We acknowledge the wrongs of the past as a means to ensuring a better future for Aboriginal communities.

- **PARTNERSHIPS:** We will partner with Aboriginal communities in ways that are meaningful and deliver mutually-beneficial outcomes.
Objectives

The Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy objectives are designed to clearly state what Council will achieve.

Council is committed to:

- developing and delivering a Reconciliation Action Plan
- supporting the Whittlesea Reconciliation Group
- developing an Aboriginal Inclusion Charter
- developing cultural protocol/staff procedure documentation
- flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags outside the Civic Centre and displaying both flags within Council Chambers.
- supporting Bubup Wilam for Early Learning through the provision of a 50-year ‘peppercorn’ lease

Policy Context and Rationale

Council, at its meeting on 17 September 2002 formally adopted an inaugural Indigenous Reconciliation Policy, the Australian Declaration towards Reconciliation and the Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples providing foresight and leadership by formally commencing Council’s reconciliation journey.

The purpose of the City of Whittlesea’s Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy is to affirm the process of reconciliation between Council and Aboriginal people living in the City of Whittlesea. The Policy affirms the rights Aboriginal people hold within the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and Council’s Aboriginal Inclusion Charter.

Council acknowledges that colonisation, forced removals and separations, and other past Australian government policies have resulted in trauma, grief and loss for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, across generations. During community consultation for the development of Council’s first Reconciliation Action Plan, many community members spoke of the ongoing pain they experience as a result of past government policies or practices and the injustices these policies generated, especially on the Stolen Generations and their families.

Community Leader and highly respected Elder, the late Uncle Reg Blow articulated that “Recognising, remembering, and acknowledging is needed to restore respect and dignity”. Council acknowledges this and is moving forward in positive ways to educate the broader community about the need for the entire Australian Community to commit itself to reconciliation.

Research conducted by VicHealth in 2012 with the local Aboriginal population reported ‘that 97% of those surveyed had experienced racism in the previous 12 months’. It is within this context and Uncle Reg’s legacy that the Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy Statement is placed.

In 2008 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed to the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes. This included six targets to address the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal Australians in life expectancy, child mortality, education and employment. Council’s reconciliation policy provides the framework for Council’s localised efforts in ‘closing the gap’ to generate better health outcomes for Aboriginal communities living, working or visiting the City of Whittlesea.
City of Whittlesea Reconciliation Group

In 2001 Council established the Whittlesea Reconciliation Group (WRG), a community-based committee to provide leadership and be a key reference group for Council on the continuing reconciliation process. The WRG vision for reconciliation is “a connected community respecting Aboriginal people as the First Peoples of Australia, their history and culture through actions supporting reconciliation”.

Key linkages

The Aboriginal Reconciliation Policy has clear links to the following documents:

International
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)

Legislation
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001

State Policy
- Building on our Strengths: A Framework to Reduce Race-Based Discrimination and Support Diversity
- Victorian Government Aboriginal Inclusion Framework

Commonwealth Policy
- National Anti-Racism Strategy
- Australia’s Human Rights Framework

Council policies, plans and protocols
- Shaping our Future Whittlesea 2030 Strategic Community Plan
- City of Whittlesea Council Plan
- City of Whittlesea Reconciliation Action Plan
- City of Whittlesea Aboriginal Inclusion Charter
- City of Whittlesea Aboriginal Employment Pathways Strategy and Action Plan
- City of Whittlesea Cultural Protocols & Staff Procedures