

6.2.4 Youth Hub Options Paper

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Report Purpose:	Presentation
Time:	45 minutes

Recommendation(s)

That Councillors endorse the following options to be further assessed as part of the Youth Hub redevelopment.

- Build the Youth Hub in James St as planned.
- Expand/redevelop My Place.
- Build a new facility at PB Ronald or redevelop an existing building.
- Build a new facility at The Point or redevelop an existing building.
- Explore opportunities within the vicinity of the Pakenham Major Activity Centre

Attachments

Nil

Executive Summary

The Youth Hub project was initiated in 2019 and aimed to relocate and expand youth services through investment from the Victorian Government's Growing Suburbs Fund and the Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing. Partnering with multiple agencies, including major partners Headspace and Oakwood School, the project sought to provide place based holistic support to young people. Construction began in 2022 but was halted in 2023 due to structural issues and the builder going into liquidation. In line with good governance, Council officers are now exploring options to complete the project.

Cardinia Shire's population growth, service access and higher-than-average rates of socio-economic complexity underscore the need for expanded youth services. The integrated service model at the Youth Hub includes mental health, education, drug and alcohol counselling, multicultural support, employment, and housing services in partnership with multiple agencies. Officers have considered several options, including maintaining current facilities, remediating, or rebuilding at the current site, or constructing a new facility elsewhere. This process left five viable options requiring further assessment.

Councillors were briefed on the options and endorsement is sought to enable further assessment of these options using criteria, identifying a preferred option, detailing the implications, cost estimates, implementation risks and timeline.

Background

The Youth Hub project commenced in 2019 after Council secured funding from the Australian and State Governments. This financial support, along with a Council contribution, facilitated the design and commencement of construction of the Youth Hub on Council-owned land at 43 James Street, Pakenham.

The Victorian Government allocated \$3 million from the Growing Suburbs Fund to relocate the existing 'My Place' Youth facility to the new site and expand services in a multi-use facility. The Australian Government contributed \$1.5 million through the Department of Health and Ageing's Community Health and Hospitals Program to support youth mental health services. A partnership with Headspace was established as the lead mental health service in the facility.

The vision for the Youth Hub was to provide integrated holistic support to young people and their families under one roof. This aimed to address the current and anticipated growth in the youth population in Cardinia and improve service access. The facility intended to offer more youth services to bridge existing service gaps in the area.

Construction on the Youth Hub was stalled after the builder Allmore Constructions Pty Ltd went into liquidation in October 2023. Following the liquidation Council engaged relevant technical experts to undertake independent investigations of the site. While the structural investigation was expected to clear the way for a new tender process to appoint a replacement builder to finish the construction, it identified several serious structural issues. The outcome of the investigation was that the structural defects cannot be rectified and may need to be demolished.

Options are being assessed to provide a Youth Hub that will meet community and partner needs, and that can be completed as quickly as possible with available funds. Council is continuing to seek legal advice on any warranted actions for those responsible for design and construction including recovering the loss and damage incurred due to problems experienced with construction and delays in delivering the Youth Hub. This applies whether the current building is remediated and completed; or if it is demolished and re-built at 43 James Street; or if another building is constructed elsewhere for the Youth Hub.

1. Community needs and future demand for youth services

The data paints a complex picture for young people in Cardinia. Sustained population growth over the last 10 years and the prediction for growth to continue into the next decade is placing pressure on social infrastructure.

The largest growth demographic by age is parents and homebuilders in the 35-49 age group, and the children of these families make up close to 20% of the shire's total population. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population represents around 0.8% of total population, just over the average for Victoria. Approximately 16.6% of residents report living with a disability. Almost one fifth of Cardinia's residents were born overseas, from 130 different

Table 1: Estimated 2023 population and projected 2033 and 2041 population by service age group

Age group (years)	2023		2033		2041		Change: 2023 to 2041
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number (% change)
Babies and preschoolers (0 to 4)	10,476	8.1%	13,841	8.0%	13,354	7.3%	2,878 (+27.5%)
Primary schoolers (5 to 11)	15,928	12.3%	21,263	12.3%	21,289	11.6%	5,362 (+33.7%)
Secondary schoolers (12 to 17)	10,330	8.0%	13,038	7.6%	14,234	7.8%	3,904 (+37.8%)
Tertiary education and independence (18 to 24)	11,054	8.5%	14,394	8.4%	15,031	8.2%	3,977 (+36.0%)
Young workforce (25 to 34)	20,656	15.9%	25,760	15.0%	25,454	13.9%	4,798 (+23.2%)
Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49)	27,299	21.0%	35,912	20.8%	36,635	20.0%	9,337 (+34.2%)
Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59)	13,959	10.7%	17,624	10.2%	20,268	11.1%	6,309 (+45.2%)
Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69)	10,837	8.3%	14,795	8.6%	16,391	9.0%	5,555 (+51.3%)
Seniors (70 to 84)	9,652	7.4%	15,409	8.9%	18,962	10.4%	9,310 (+96.5%)
Elderly aged (85 and over)	1,743	1.3%	3,038	1.8%	3,923	2.1%	2,180 (+25.0%)
Total people	129,896	100.0	172,257	100.0	182,833	100.0	52,937 (+40.8%)

Percentage figures and totals may not equate exactly due to rounding. Current forecasts extend to 2041.

nationalities.

Economically, Cardinia has a higher-than-average proportion of residents experiencing mortgage or rental stress, with Pakenham one of the top 10 most mortgage stressed postcodes nationally.

In terms of health and social outcomes, Cardinia statistics show almost double the incidence of Drug and Alcohol (AOD) clients than the Victorian state average, and 5.2% of families report AOD problems within the family compared to the state average of 3.6%. In addition, the shire sees higher than average rates of episodes of care sought for alcohol use and AOD related assaults and family violence. Youth alcohol use data varies, but points to average or above average incidence in comparison to state rate with the 3rd highest of interface Councils for alcohol related presentations to hospital for young people.

Cardinia experiences higher than average health care sought for illicit drug use, with young people aged 15-24 representing just over 50% of all presentations. Mental health statistics for youth in the area vary depending on the source, but a recent study by Deakin University found that young people in the area report significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms than the nation average, 51% in Cardinia compared with 41% across Australia.

The area has higher than average rates of suicide deaths, attempts and/or ideation as identified by the Primary Health Network. One of the key challenges facing young people and families is the lack of accessible services, particularly in the areas of mental health, substance use, and housing. In addition to difficulties accessing services, many young people in the shire are also facing challenges related to family breakdown, social isolation, and financial difficulties.

Family Violence is a key concern for our community. In 2022 Cardinia's rate per population was ranked 43rd highest out of 79 Councils and 4th highest out of the 10 LGA's in the Southern region. Although there are a range of Family Violence Services available to adults experiencing or using violence, there is a lack of services addressing the issue for young people and their families. Youth Family Violence is an increasing concern for families and the wider community, with early intervention viewed as the most appropriate approach.

From an education and employment perspective High school completion is considerably lower for year 12 completion at 45%, compared to Greater Melbourne 59%. Further compounding these challenges is access to public transport due to lacking infrastructure and geographic disparity within the shire. Services are seeking opportunities to partner with Council on a regular basis to meet these needs. This project's delivery would take positive steps to bridge the current and future services gaps and improve outcomes for young people.

2. Cardinia Shire Service Model

Integrated youth service models focus on providing comprehensive support by co-locating services and programs. Key elements include access, early intervention, youth participation, a holistic approach, flexible service delivery, and continuous improvement. Services aim to support young people aged 12-24 by building resilience, preventing issues from escalating, re-engaging them in education or work, improving relationships with peers and family, and providing timely access to specialised services.

In line with this service model and to address the social need, Council embarked on partnership agreements with a variety of stakeholders to provide place-based support in the new facility. The services heavily invested time and consideration and developed a co-designed model that would achieve the objectives for services delivered at the site. Each partner's need was considered against their operational requirements, some greater than others. An example of this includes design specifications and approval through the Victorian School Building Authority to facilitate an onsite operational school, Oakwood.

The current service model has integrated services wrapping around a core education service provided by Oakwood. The presence of the school enhances the operations of My Place and places young people in contact with support services in a familiar and safe environment.

Opportunistic engagement with and co-ordination between agencies lead to improved outcomes for the young people engaged. This is a best practice model for youth services. The following table outlines each service committed to co-location, their focus, and context.

Table 1.

Service	Focus & Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headspace 	<p>Mental Health and Early intervention support for young people, educators, and families. Headspace/EACH (Eastern Access Community Health) with the support of SEPHN (Primary Health Network) established a satellite site in Pakenham in 2020. Co-designed Youth Hub in consultation with EACH, Southeast Primary Health Network, Headspace National and Headspace Youth Advisory Group. A GP clinic on site at the Youth Hub will assist young people to get mental health plans as well as general and sexual health information/treatment by a Youth friendly GP in a Youth friendly space.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oakwood School 	<p>Alternate education model based at My Place since 2013. 100% of students have experienced significant trauma which has had a significant impact on their mental health and education. A key pillar of success in engaging the most vulnerable young people into wrap around services due to the place-based operation within My Place. Currently experiencing a large waitlist requiring more space to facilitate classroom operations.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) 	<p>Offer drug and alcohol counselling for young people. YSAS will expand their services further in Cardinia once the Youth Hub opens.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre for Multi-cultural Youth (CMY) 	<p>Based at My Place since 2021. Increase in multicultural young people accessing support services and programs at being based at the facility. Headspace report that young people from CALD backgrounds are not accessing or being referred to mental health services. Benefit of Youth Hub will be to co-locate Headspace with CMY and SECL to strengthen referral process, support connection with CALD young people and community and reduce stigma of mental illness and help seeking.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taskforce 	<p>Based in Cardinia for over 20yrs and provide employment, education and AOD support. Continue to outreach from My Place and seek opportunities to advocate for additional resourcing to meet the needs of young people in the Shire. Will expand offerings in Cardinia at the new site.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South East Community Links (SECL) 	<p>Youth Links program seeking to expand in Cardinia. Offer employment, education, housing, and generalist wellbeing services. Will expand offerings in Cardinia at the new site.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berry Street 	<p>Provide programs including housing, preventing youth homelessness, and support and mentoring. Currently contracted to deliver Complex Outreach Family Support in Cardinia Shire. Opportunity to expand offerings in Cardinia at the new site.</p>

Council's intentions with youth services are clear in the service model, and this is reflected in the commitment to working with partners in designing and building the Youth Hub in James Street. Nothing has happened since 2019 to change that commitment and the forecast growth in population and young people in Cardinia reinforces the need for a Youth Hub to be provided as soon as possible to support service provision and expansion.

3. Identification of options

There is overlaying complexity within planning Councils next steps with this project and the options going forward. In developing a decision framework and criteria to assess options, the following aspects have been considered.

- Sites that are available now and either council owned or owned by another public authority.
- Funding partner advice (State and Federal Governments) including alignment with the grant's intent.
- Legal advice.
- Service partner's (tenants) current and future needs.
- Cost and time implications.
- Planning (Past & Future strategic plans since 2019) within the Officer and Pakenham town centres.

Consultation has occurred with the following areas of Council to help identify options:

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| ○ Buildings & Facilities. | ○ Youth Services Staff. |
| ○ Risk, Governance & Safety. | ○ SLT. |
| ○ Properties. | ○ Councillors. |
| ○ Major Projects. | |
| ○ Communications & Engagement. | |

4. Option assessment

Each option is assessed using a 2-stage process. Stage 1 assessment uses primary criteria, which are critical factors that directly impact the option's viability. These criteria are essential for determining if an option achieves the project's core objectives. A failure to meet any of these primary criteria means the option is not viable.

Further analysis will be completed using the secondary criteria to priorities options for a decision on how best to proceed with viable options.

Primary criteria

- Community outcomes.
- Major partner requirements.
- Time.
- Cost.

Secondary criteria

- Grant funding implications.
- Legal implications.
- Design/planning approvals.
- Building and construction.
- Political and reputational impacts.
- Alignment with major plans.

The viable options after stage 1 assessment are:

Table 2

Option 2: Build the Youth Hub in James St as planned.
Option 4: Expand/redevelop My Place.
Option 5: Build a new facility at PB Ronald or redevelop an existing building.
Option 6: Build a new facility at The Point or redevelop an existing building.
Option 10: Explore opportunities within the vicinity of the Pakenham Major Activity Centre

Policy Implications

There are no policy implications as part of this report.

Relevance to Council Plan

Priority 1. Strong Communities: We empower our communities to be healthy, connected, and resilient.

Priority 2. Liveable Places: We support the creation of liveable spaces and places.

Climate Emergency Consideration

There are no climate emergency considerations as part of this report.

Consultation/Communication

A comprehensive engagement and communication plan has been developed and implemented throughout the life of this project. Recent engagement updates have been provided in Councillor briefings and outlined stakeholder support for Council having been left impacted by the actions of others.

Following the recent forensic engineering report all stakeholders including state and federal funding representatives, young people, tenants, services, and wider residents have been kept informed. Signage has been installed at the existing construction site to ensure the wider public remains updated via a QR code link to Council project web page. Engagement of all stakeholders throughout this process remains a high priority.

Financial and Resource Implications

The relative cost of Youth Services in the Cardinia Annual Report for 2022/23 shows that for every \$100 of rates expenditure, \$1.78 is spent on Youth Services. It is the 5th lowest cost service out of the 17 services listed. The Youth Services expenditure in 2022/23 was \$1,031,000 (net cost of \$928,000) and there were approximately 15,000 service contacts made in services available to the 21,384 young people in the Cardinia community.

Councillors endorsed a combined total of \$7.5 million in the 24/25 Draft Budget and 25/26 budget forecast to complete the project as originally intended utilising costings available as of June 2023.

Further recommendations to Council will include revised costing estimates to support further decision making.

Conclusion

Council Officers have undertaken preliminary assessment of twelve options against a key set of criteria. Of these, seven have been excluded due to not meeting the primary criteria outlined in the report.

Officers seek endorsement to further assess the five viable options as outlined in the report. These options include consideration of maintaining current facilities, remediating, or rebuilding at the current site, or constructing a new facility elsewhere in central Pakenham.

Next steps involve assessing these options using criteria, identifying a preferred option, detailing implications, cost estimates, implementation risks and timeline to support informed decision making. Officers intend to provide a further update to Councillors at a July briefing.