

13.4	Quarterly Advocacy Report June 2024
Directorate	People, Partnerships and Performance
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Attachment(s)	1. Quarterly Advocacy Report June 2024 Summary of 2024-2025 State and Federal Budgets [13.4.1 - 2 pages]

Purpose

To report on Council's advocacy initiatives and highlights from early March 2024 to late May 2024.

Officer Recommendation

That Council notes the major advocacy highlights from March to May 2024 as detailed in this report.

Background

Brimbank's Advocacy Priorities

The Brimbank Advocacy Plan 2023-25 was adopted at the Council Meeting on 19 September 2023. The Advocacy Plan outlines Council's key advocacy priorities and seeks partnerships to deliver projects and infrastructure for the Brimbank community.

Ranked as 'Gold', 'Silver', 'Bronze' and 'Maintain Influence', the priorities identified in the Advocacy Plan are aligned to the Council Plan Strategic Directions and are listed in the table below.

Priorities	Topic	Council Plan Strategic Direction
Gold	Transforming Brimbank	Opportunity and Prosperity (Growing and Transforming)
	Mental Health	People and Community (Wellbeing and Belonging)
Silver	Road Infrastructure	Places and Spaces (Liveable and Connected)
	Climate Emergency	Places and Spaces (Sustainable and Green)
Bronze	Addressing Unemployment	Opportunity and Prosperity (Earning and Learning)
	Housing and Homelessness	Opportunity and Prosperity (Growing and Transforming)
Maintain Influence	Melbourne Airport Third Runway	People and Community (Wellbeing and Belonging)
	Gambling Harm	People and Community (Wellbeing and Belonging)

	Major Parks	Places and Spaces (Liveable and Connected)
	Libraries	Opportunity and Prosperity (Earning and Learning)
	Government Burden on Council	Leadership and Governance (High Performing and Accountable)

Advocacy efforts are tailored to the specific issue and are adjusted over the period of the plan to ensure relevance and impact. Initiatives include campaigns, Mayoral meetings with MPs and Ministers, and working with other local Councils and peak advocacy bodies such as LeadWest, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). Advocacy highlights, achievements and adjustment to priorities are reported to Council quarterly.

Matters for Consideration

In the period from early March 2024 to late May 2024, whole-of-Council advocacy highlights included:

- Release of the Albion Quarter Structure Plan discussion paper (*Gold Priority – Transforming Brimbank*).
- LeadWest’s successful advocacy for new and improved bus services in Melbourne’s west (*Gold Priority – Transforming Brimbank*).
- Expansion of the Westside Lodge public residential rehabilitation facility (*Gold Priority – Mental Health*).
- Brimbank’s successful motions at the May 2024 MAV State Council Meeting.
 - Improving Victoria’s Bus Network (*Gold priority – Transforming Brimbank*)
 - Fast-tracking the rollout of mental health social inclusion action groups to all 79 LGAs (*Gold Priority – Mental Health*)
 - Increasing the level of funding allocated for upgrading major highways (*Silver Priority – Roads Infrastructure*)
- Launch of the ‘Improving the Calder Highway’ advocacy brochure, which attracted significant media coverage (*Silver Priority – Road Infrastructure*).
- Brimbank’s increased funding allocation under the ‘Roads to Recovery’ program (*Silver Priority – Road Infrastructure*).
- Initiation of the Jobs Victoria Mentors Program, targeting over 4,000 residents from five disadvantaged LGAs, including Brimbank (*Bronze Priority – Addressing Unemployment*).
- Extension of funding for the ‘Homes for Families’ program (*Bronze Priority – Housing and Homelessness*).
- Additional funding for three schools in the City of Brimbank.

In addition, both the 2024/2025 State and Federal Budgets were announced in May. Whilst these included a number of funding commitments that align with Brimbank’s advocacy and budget priorities, Council is concerned with the four-year delay to the delivery of the Melbourne Airport Rail and the impacts this may have on the implementation of the Sunshine Station Masterplan as well as the rebuild of Albion Station.

Council will continue to advocate for the construction of the Melbourne Airport Rail to be delivered as soon as possible. The delay has been attributed to an ongoing disagreement between the Melbourne Airport operator and the Victorian Government on the positioning of the train station at the airport, with the government preferring an above

ground option and the airport operator wanting it underground. Earlier this year, the Australian Government appointed a mediator in an attempt to resolve the dispute. Recent media articles have reported that the mediator, Neil Scales OBE, will be submitting his report to government in the coming weeks.

Council is also concerned with the State Government's decision to pause the 'Improving the Calder Freeway' project, following the Federal Government's decision to withdraw \$50m committed by the previous government.

Advocacy Highlights

Albion Quarter Structure Plan (Gold Priority - Transforming Brimbank)

Last month, the State Government released the Albion Quarter Structure Plan discussion paper. The Albion Quarter is comprised of the area surrounding Albion Station which extends to the four quarters either side of the railway station north of Ballarat Road. The Structure Plan aims to transition the Albion Quarter from the current mix of industrial-focused businesses to supporting the next generation of jobs, innovation and services. It also aims to provide for new residential dwellings close to public and active transport connections. The Structure Plan acknowledges the industrial heritage of the John Darling Flour Mill and the historical significance of Sunshine Harvester to the Sunshine Precinct.

New Bus Services for Melbourne's West (Gold Priority - Transforming Brimbank)

Over the past few months, LeadWest has been campaigning for better bus services in Melbourne's west. LeadWest Chair Cr Sophie Ramsey has so far met with 12 different MPs to raise our concerns about the urgent need for bus reform in our region, including Deputy Premier the Hon Ben Carroll. LeadWest has also been active in community events and has been successful in attracting significant media coverage, both in local media outlets and in the Age newspaper.

In April, the Victorian Government announced a \$150 million investment for new bus services across Melbourne's north, west and south-east. Of great interest to LeadWest is that \$61.2m of this \$150m investment will be allocated to Melbourne's west. This includes \$39.7m for new and modified bus routes between Tarneit and Laverton North in the City of Wyndham, and \$21.5m for a new bus connection between Wyndham Vale Station and the communities in both Harpley Estate and Cornerstone Estate.

Westside Lodge (Gold Priority - Mental Health)

Located in St Albans, Westside Lodge is a public residential rehabilitation facility that provides treatment to residents living with mental illness or are faced with addiction issues. In its Budget last year, the State Government committed \$10.2m to expand the Westside Lodge public residential rehabilitation facility by an additional 10 beds to a larger 30-bed residential unit and with refurbished common areas. The expansion has now been completed and staff at the facility are able to treat an additional 40 patients per year. This will help to reduce pressure on other health services across the western suburbs.

MAV State Council Meeting

At the recent State Council Meeting held on 17 May 2024, Brimbank submitted three motions relevant to our advocacy priorities for the MAV to advocate on our behalf. All three motions were deemed to have state-wide significance and were endorsed. Through these motions, the MAV will be calling on the State Government to:

- Improve Victoria's bus network (*Transforming Brimbank - Gold Priority*)

- Fast-track the rollout of mental health social inclusion action groups to all 79 LGAs (*Mental Health – Gold Priority*)
- Increase the level of funding allocated for upgrading major highways (*Roads Infrastructure – Silver Priority*)

'Fix the Calder' Campaign (*Silver Priority – Road Infrastructure*)

On Saturday 20 April, Brimbank hosted a community event calling on both the State and Federal Governments to Fix the Calder. We also launched a new advocacy brochure titled 'Improving the Calder Highway'. The brochure was produced on behalf of the Calder Highway Improvement Committee (CHIC), consisting of the Councils of Brimbank, Buloke, Greater Bendigo, Hume, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Melton, Mildura and Mount Alexander. A number of MPs and Councillors from outside Brimbank were in attendance, including:

- Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
- Mrs Moira Deeming MP
- Mr Trung Luu MP
- Cr Kathy Majdlik, Mayor of Melton City Council
- Cr David Pollard, Buloke Shire Council; CHIC Chair

The event received significant media coverage in the 6pm bulletins of both Ch7 news and Ch9 news that night.

Roads to Recovery Program (*Silver Priority – Road Infrastructure*)

Last month, the Hon Catherine King MP advised Council that Brimbank's new allocation under the Federal Government's 'Roads to Recovery' program will be increasing. Roads to Recovery is a national program that funds the construction, upgrade and maintenance of local roads. Brimbank's allocation will be \$9.97m for the five-year period spanning 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2029. This is a significant improvement on the previous five-year period (1 July 2019 – 30 June 2024) when Council's allocation was \$5.66m. Although the total allocated nationally has also risen, Brimbank's share of the national total has increased by over 30%.

Jobs Victoria Mentors Program (*Bronze Priority – Addressing Unemployment*)

Last month, Jobs Victoria's Mentors program began working with over 4,000 participants to provide them with the support they need to become work-ready, followed by a job that's right for them. Nearly three quarters of participants in the program have been unemployed for more than 12 months. The program has targeted five disadvantaged LGAs, including Brimbank, Hume, Shepparton, Latrobe Valley and Greater Dandenong. More than 1,000 people have registered for the program in the Brimbank area since October last year. In order to deliver the program, Jobs Victoria has partnered with eleven local organisations across the state, including Jesuit Social Services, OCTEC and WCIG that are based in Brimbank.

Homes for Families Program (*Bronze Priority – Housing and Homelessness*)

The Homes for Families program is designed to support those experiencing homelessness. It falls under the 'Housing First' model which focuses on addressing homelessness by providing permanent and stable housing before addressing underlying factors such as challenges with alcohol, drugs and mental health. Ahead of the 2024-2025 State Budget, Council advocated for the extension of funding for the Homes for Families program and were pleased to learn that the Budget allocated an additional \$16.7m was allocated for this program.

Funding for Schools in Brimbank

In late April, the State Government announced an \$11.2m investment for essential works and repairs to 40 schools across Victoria. Three of these schools are located in Brimbank and will receive a total of \$676,192 as follows:

- St Albans Primary School – \$348,297
- Albion Primary School – \$269,453
- Sydenham-Hillside Primary School – \$58,442

Funded works will include fixing roofs and windows, replacing old fixtures, resurfacing floors and painting.

Outcomes of the 2024-2025 Victorian State Budget

The 2024-2025 Victorian State Budget delivers much needed investment in the areas identified in Council's "Funding Priorities for the 2024-2025 State Budget" which includes community mental health programs and reforms, suicide prevention initiatives, mental healthcare in schools and community-based support through Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs.

Council also welcomes the various initiatives to tackle climate change and address environmental issues, especially the \$270 million commitment to protect and restore Victoria's waterways and catchments, and \$15m to progress the State's circular economy targets and to support Recycling Victoria to boost recycling and help households cut down waste.

A number of measures in the Budget are specific to the City of Brimbank. These are listed below.

- \$28.8 million for community legal centres and specialist legal services, including the Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre.
 - This will enable the Centre to continue its support for victim survivors of family violence.
- \$6.6 million to expand the Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Project.
 - Project is run by Victoria Police in Brimbank and Wyndham and seeks to help young people at risk of offending.
- Funding to the Caroline Chisholm Society
 - Provides specialist services to women and children who are experiencing homelessness in the western suburbs.
- Funding for five community hubs run through primary schools to support kids and families.
- Including St Albans Heights Primary School, Holy Eucharist Primary School, St Albans Primary School and Stevensville Primary School.
- Up to \$85,000 towards a scoreboard at Sunshine Heights Cricket Club.
- Further funding for the operations of a new Tech School in Brimbank.
- Funding to expand the capacity of the Sunshine Hospital emergency department.

Other Budget announcements that align with Council's priorities are:

- \$208m fund to repair and improve Victoria's roads and intersections.
- \$240m for accommodation and support services to Victorians experiencing homelessness,
- \$18 million to build and upgrade community sport infrastructure and create more opportunities for Victorians to get involved in sport and active recreation.

A more comprehensive list of the State Budget announcements that align with Brimbank's priorities can be found in **Attachment 1** to this report.

Despite the various measures in the Budget that Council has welcomed, there is a lack of funding for significant infrastructure projects that have been promised for

Brimbank but have now stalled. Although the Melbourne Airport Rail was an election commitment of the current State Government in 2018, it has now been delayed by four years.

Despite the delay to the Melbourne Airport Rail, there are strong community expectations that progress will continue on the delivery of the Sunshine Station Masterplan and the rebuild of Albion Station. Both of these projects were Labor Government commitments ahead of the 2022 State Election and it is critical that they implemented as a priority, to unlock jobs and secure investment in Melbourne's west.

Council is also disappointed that the State Government has paused its \$50m commitment for Calder Freeway improvement works. Despite the \$50m being promised at the 2021-2022 State Budget, only \$12.9m is reported as being expended on this project by 30 June 2024.

Brimbank will continue to advocate for Melbourne's west to be given the same priority as projects being delivered in more affluent areas of Melbourne that are already well-served by adequate transport connections and infrastructure.

Outcomes of the 2024-2025 Federal Budget

Brimbank welcomes the various measures from the 2024-2025 Federal Budget that will be implemented to support Australians with the cost of living. These include tax cuts to all taxpayers, a rebate on electricity bills of \$300 for all households and \$325 for small businesses, increasing the amount of Commonwealth rent assistance by 10%, a freeze on the price of Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) scripts, the listing of 42 new medicines on the PBS, and the wiping of student debt for three million Australians of \$1200 per person.

A list of the Federal Budget announcements that align with Brimbank's priorities can also be found in **Attachment 1** to this report. These include measures to address mental health challenges, the climate emergency and housing and homelessness. Whilst Council is pleased with these measures, we remain concerned with the Federal Government's reprioritisation of funding away from upgrading the Calder Freeway, with \$437.3 million committed to upgrading suburban roads in south-eastern and northern Melbourne. Brimbank will continue to advocate for Melbourne's west to receive its fair share.

Community Engagement

This report is consistent with the policy, evidence and current positions of Council, widely informed by community engagement and insight and the Brimbank Advocacy Plan 2023-2025.

Resource And Risk Implications

Resource requirements can be met within the Annual Budget 2023-2024.

Community: potential impact on community, including public trust and customer service impact

- None

Environmental: impacts on environmental sustainability, including water/waste management, climate change, and contaminated land

- None

Financial: significant financial impacts

- None

Regulatory: legal, legislative or regulatory implications including the rights/obligations

of stakeholders

- None

Safety: health, safety or duty of care impacts

- None

Legislation/Council Plan/Policy Context

This report supports the Council Plan 2021-2025 strategic direction and objective of:

1. People and Community - A welcoming, safe and supported community - An inclusive place for all

- Wellbeing and Belonging - Responsive services that support mental and physical wellbeing

2. Places and Spaces - Liveable and connected neighbourhoods that support healthy and sustainable futures - A green place for all

- Liveable and Connected - Inviting and liveable spaces and facilities, connected so people can get around
- Sustainable and Green - Protect natural environments for current and future generations

3. Opportunity and Prosperity - A future focused, transforming city where all have opportunities to learn and earn - A prosperous place for all

- Growing and Transforming - Optimise community opportunities through infrastructure innovation and investment.

Council officers contributing to the preparation and approval of this report, have no conflicts of interests to declare.

Measures in 2024-25 State Budget

Alignment with Brimbank's Advocacy or Budget Priorities

Mental Health (Gold Priority)

- \$26 million to continue the delivery of state-wide community mental health programs and reforms, suicide prevention initiatives, telehealth, and community-based support through Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs.
- \$21 million to open another 20 Youth Prevention and Recovery Care beds, and continue operations of the Mental Health Tribunal and psychiatry services, providing treatment, care and support.
- \$16 million to deliver a new mental health graduate program in Victoria's Local Services, helping to build the pipeline of trained professionals.
- \$14 million to offer mental healthcare in schools.
- \$10 million for better mental health and alcohol and other drugs facilities across Victoria, responding to recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

Road and Pedestrian Safety (Silver Priority)

- \$208 million to repair and improve our roads and intersections.

Climate Emergency (Silver Priority)

- \$270 million to protect and restore Victoria's waterways and catchments.
- \$85 million to protect against biosecurity risks, including \$73 million to help the fight against red imported fire ants.
- \$60 million to support water corporations, Councils, farmers and primary producers with grants to promote sustainable irrigation.
- \$44 million to the Environment Protection Authority to crack down on illegal dumping and other waste crimes.
- \$38 million to prepare for and manage floods, including strengthening flood warnings and forecasts.
- \$17 million to protect our state and national parks, including funding to support community organisations and volunteer groups.
- \$15 million to progress the state's circular economy targets and support Recycling Victoria to boost recycling and help households cut down waste.
- \$7.5 million to continue the waste levy rebate grant program for charitable recyclers, helping to address the impact of illegal dumping at donation sites.
- \$12 million to protect Victoria's water system against climate change.

Housing and Homelessness (Bronze Priority)

- \$700 million to extend the Victorian Homebuyer Fund to accelerate more Victorians into home ownership.
- \$197 million for accommodation and support services to Victorians experiencing homelessness, including \$16.7m for the 'Homes for Families' program.
- \$45 million to expand the Sacred Heart Mission's Journey to Social Inclusion program to end chronic homelessness. This program will provide long-term, stable accommodation, as well as three years of intensive wrap-around support.

Community Facilities (State Budget Funding Priority)

- \$18 million to build and upgrade community sport infrastructure and create more opportunities for Victorians to get involved in sport and active recreation. This includes:
- \$8 million to deliver more sports and recreation facilities across Victoria through community sports grants.
- \$5 million to build pavilions, sports fields, courts, play spaces and skate parks where they are needed most.
- \$4.2 million to upgrade community football and netball facilities in rural, regional and outer metro areas, including ovals, courts, lighting and change rooms.
- \$300,000 to continue the Basketball Hubs program.

Measures in 2024-25 Federal Budget **Alignment with Brimbank's Advocacy or Budget Priorities**

Mental Health (Gold Priority)

- \$361m to strengthen our mental health system. This includes a national digital mental health service that will provide free support to 150,000 people a year, and \$163.9m on a new free early intervention mental health service for low-grade psychological problems.

Climate Emergency (Silver Priority)

- \$13.7bn in production tax incentives for green hydrogen (\$6.7b) and processed critical minerals (\$7.0b).
- \$1bn for the production of solar panels.
- \$625m to help farmers and rural communities reduce emissions and better prepare for climate change and drought.
- \$520m to deepen net-zero trade and engagement with our region.
- \$519.1m for farmers to prepare for future droughts.
- \$330m to big business for decarbonisation projects.

Addressing Unemployment (Bronze Priority)

- \$350m for fee-free uni-ready courses.
- \$90m for 20,000 new fee-free TAFE and VET places and pre-apprenticeships.
- \$41m to further extend eligibility for the existing higher rate of JobSeeker.

Housing and Homelessness (Bronze Priority)

- A further \$6.2b to build 1.2 million new homes over the next five years.
- \$1.9b for more loans to build 40,000 social and affordable homes.
- \$1.9b to increase the amount of Commonwealth rent assistance by 10%, boosting the rent assistance received by approximately 1 million household by an average of \$70/fortnight.