



NOTICE OF MEETING

SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNCIL FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONSIDERING ISSUES ARISING FROM THE PROPOSED WELFARE DRUG TESTING TRIAL FOR MANDURAH & THE DEVELOPMENT A MEDIA STRATEGY TO COMMUNICATE THE CITY'S RESPONSE; AND RECONFIRMING THE DATE OF THE CITY'S AUSTRALIA DAY CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY

Members of Council are advised that a special meeting of the Council will be held in Council Chambers, Civic Building, 83 Mandurah Terrace, Mandurah on:

**Tuesday 5 September 2017
at 6.30 pm**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark R Newman".

MARK R NEWMAN
Chief Executive Officer
31 August 2017

AGENDA:

- 1 OPENING OF MEETING AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF VISITORS**
- 2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**
- 3 ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES**
- 4 IMPORTANT NOTE:**

Members of the public are advised that any decisions made at the meeting tonight can be revoked, pursuant to the *Local Government Act 1995*. Therefore, members of the public should not rely on any decisions until formal notification in writing by Council has been received.

5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Public Question time provides an opportunity for members of the public to ask a question of Council. For more information regarding Public Question Time, please ☎ 9550 3706 or visit the City's website www.mandurah.wa.gov.au.

6 PRESENTATIONS**7 DEPUTATIONS**

Any person or group wishing to make a 5-minute Deputation to the Special Council meeting regarding a matter listed on this agenda for consideration must first complete an application form. For more information about making a deputation, or to obtain an application form, please ☎ 9550 3706 or visit the City's website www.mandurah.wa.gov.au.

8 DECLARATIONS OF FINANCIAL, PROXIMITY AND IMPARTIALITY INTERESTS**9 QUESTIONS FROM ELECTED MEMBERS (WITHOUT DISCUSSION)**

9.1 Questions of which due notice has been given

9.2 Questions of which notice has not been given

10 REPORTS:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Page No</i>
1 Proposed Drug Testing for Centrelink Clients in Mandurah	To be circulated separately.

11 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

Nil.

12 CLOSE OF MEETING

1. **SUBJECT:** Proposed Drug Testing for Centrelink Clients in Mandurah
CONTACT OFFICER/S: **Mark Newman/Lesley Wilkinson**
AUTHOR: **Lesley Wilkinson/David Prattent**
FILE NO:

Summary

On the 27 August 2017 the Federal Minister for Social Services announced that Mandurah had been selected to be the third site for the two year drug testing trial for new welfare recipients on Newstart and the Youth Allowance. While it is acknowledged that like many cities in Australia, Mandurah has an issue with members of its community using drugs illicitly, it is no different from other cities and towns across Australia.

The City was not consulted about this announcement and this report outlines information to assist Council in determining its stance. The report challenges the value of the drug testing trial for Mandurah but would support initiatives for the Mandurah community which are statistically valid, have community support and have treatment pathways mapped out for people.

It also expresses its deep concerns regarding how Mandurah has been portrayed and the damage done to this thriving regional City. The report also requests that the City write to the Federal Member for Canning expressing their disappointment in the lack of consultation and seeks that the local Member would support the long term plans to address the issue of unemployment in the area by supporting the job creation projects outlined in the 2016 Federal Election Candidates' Briefing Paper and any other initiative which tackles the underlying main issue facing the Mandurah community.

The report also seeks that the City writes to the local Member for Canning, Western Australian Senators and House of Representative members informing them of the Council decision.

Disclosure of Interest

Nil

Previous Relevant Documentation

Nil

Background

On Sunday 27 August 2018 the Federal Minister for Social Services along with the Member for Canning announced that the City of Mandurah would be a site for a two year drug testing trial for new welfare recipients (Newstart and Youth Allowance) as a way to 'assist people to get off drugs and get back to work.' Three sites have been chosen, Canterbury-Blacktown in Western Sydney with a population of over 346,000 people, Logan, south of Brisbane with a population of 303,000 and Mandurah, with a population of 83,000 (2016 Census).

From 1 January 2018 new welfare applicants in Mandurah will be randomly selected to be tested for substances including methamphetamine, ecstasy (MDAM) and marijuana. It does not include testing for alcohol. Depending on what is being tested for this will either occur in the Centrelink office or at another venue.

If a positive test is returned the recipients will be put on a cashless welfare card with 80% of their benefits being quarantined for essentials such as food and rent for a 24 month period. A second test will be undertaken within 25 days of the initial positive test and if positive will see the recipient charged for the cost of the test and any further positive tests whilst also being referred for treatment.

The program will test 5,000 welfare recipients across the three trial sites and it anticipated that approximately 750 people will be tested in Mandurah across the two years. The trial has a dedicated treatment fund of up to \$10 million to support job seekers across the three sites. On this basis funding for the trial in Mandurah is likely to be less than \$1.5 million over the two year period.

The Council was unaware that Mandurah was going to be a trial site until the announcement was made by the Minister for Social Services.

Comment

While this report acknowledges that like most communities across Australia Mandurah has an issue with people using illicit drugs, the statistics presented by the Federal Government for the specific trial in Mandurah deserve some analysis.

Statement 1

“The number of drug offences in the South Metropolitan Police district (encompassing Mandurah) increased by 23% between 2014-15 and 2015-16 from 4,417 to 5,450.”

The District is one of four police districts and includes Melville, Fremantle, Cockburn, Rockingham, the Peel region, Armadale/Kelmscott and Kwinana. The total population of this area is 750,000.

Statement 2

National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Programme 2017 data aggregated for Perth Metro and regional areas shows 58 doses of methamphetamine (ice) per 1,000 per people per day for August 2016.

This statement covers approximately 90% of the population of Western Australia and is not particularly relevant to Mandurah.

Statement 3

LGA Profile:

Total Newstart and Youth Allowance population as at March 2017 = 4,199

Yearly flow of new entrants to Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance in 2015-16 = 2,297 compared to the average inflow per LGA in WA is 406.

The use of an average for WA local governments is disingenuous. Mandurah is one of the top ten local governments by population so is always going to have a much higher than the average because so many local governments have low populations.

The number of people registered for Newstart and the Youth Allowance does show that Mandurah has a high number of unemployed which needs to be addressed by both state and federal governments. That is the critical issue for Mandurah not necessarily the number of people possibly using drugs and applying for Newstart and the Youth Allowance. Job creation will greatly assist Mandurah people to have fulfilling lives.

Statement 4

Temporary incapacity exemptions due to a drug dependency diagnosis.

Time series data shows the number of job seekers (in Mandurah) granted an exemption increased by 300% from June 2015 to December 2016.

June 2015	December 2015	June 2016	December 2016	%Change
5	8	12	20	300%

While the percentage change may seem large, the actual quantum is relatively low. Given that in March 2017 Mandurah had 4,199 people registered for Newstart and the Youth Allowance with 20 exemptions it shows that less than half of one percent are seeking an exemption.

Basing the need for a drug trial on such small numbers is not justified.

Traditionally governments from across the world's response to a community drug use issue have been one of two options. Firstly to test randomly a cohort of people who receive services from the government, either through the court system or the welfare system and then direct them to treatment. The second option is to treat the issue as a health issue and work with and engage people in treatment who want to be engaged.

The proposed drug trial of testing people who are seeking to access either Newstart or the Youth Allowance and making it part of their 'mutual obligation' to undergo a drug test clearly illustrates the first option. Other countries have gone down this route before Australia and in the case of the United Kingdom and Canada both chose to cease testing in 2009 as there was a lack of evidence that the drug testing was changing behaviour.

In its submission to the Senate Inquiry into the *Welfare Reform Bill 2017* in July 2017, the Royal Australian College of Physicians addressed the fact that there was a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of drug trials and noted that *"In 2013, the New Zealand Government introduced a drug testing programme as a pre-employment condition among welfare recipients. In 2015, only 22 (0.27%) of 8,001 beneficiaries tested returned a positive test for illicit drug use or refused to be tested. This detection rate was much lower than the proportion of the population estimated to be using illicit drugs in New Zealand, for example, the 2015/16 survey found that 1.1% of adults used amphetamine in the past year."* It is noted that the percentage of the population using all forms of illicit drugs would be higher.

People who use illicit drugs are not just those who access welfare payments, this is an issue that cuts across all facets of Australian society, rich and poor, people from all parts of society and community. Drug taking is a national health issue. There is no evidence to suggest the people receiving welfare payments have a higher use of drug taking behaviour than the Australian population as every part of society has its share of drug users.

A health treatment approach works with those people using illicit drugs who want to access treatment. Medical practitioners and providers of drug treatment services have said in the media in the past week that there are not enough services for those who are actively seeking to address their drug issues, who want to change their behaviour and are currently on long wait lists to receive treatment. The medical profession's argument is that this is the group to start with, and this is where the real change will occur, not in targeting people who need to access welfare payments. Mandatory referrals for people who do not want to engage or are not yet ready to change their behaviour have very little likelihood of success.

There is no clarity in any of the documents found concerning the treatment that will be offered or indeed who will be offering the treatment. Equally there does not appear to be any indications in what makes a successful or otherwise trial.

It is disappointing that, the Federal Minister for Social Services, with the support of the Federal Member for Canning, has chosen to implement this programme with no consultation with the City or the Mandurah community. Mandurah has a positive story to tell in terms of its future potential as a thriving, independent regional city. It faces a range of issues, in which it is not unique, and has developed a set of priorities, based on the key needs to create local and regional employment, and provide better education opportunities.

The City presented to all Federal government candidates in the last Federal election a document which outlined the City's priorities for the next three years which was based on the community consultation completed for the creation of the Strategic Plan for the City.

Four of the proposals were concerned with the generation of jobs for the community and included the Transform Peel project along with the revitalisation of the eastern foreshore. One project concerned crime and safety with the Safer Streets project and the other was the funding of the Peel Youth Medical Services Health hub which has a medical focus. The overwhelming focus from the community through this consultation process was in the creation of jobs.

The Career Transition Assistance program announced by Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash on Monday 28 August for the northern area of the Perth metropolitan region which aims to prepare mature aged Australians for new jobs would be an ideal match for the cohort of older Australians who live in Mandurah and are seeking work. Equally a similar program for young people would assist many who are struggling to get a start in the workforce. This would also fit with the community feedback that jobs are the most pressing issue for this community.

Consultation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
WACOSS

Several local service providers including Palmerston and Peel Community Development Group

Statutory Environment

Welfare Reform Bill 2017 – the Bill is still under consideration and has not yet passed through the Senate.

Policy Implications

None

Economic Implications

None

Strategic Implications

The following strategies from the *City of Mandurah Strategic Community Plan 2013 – 2033* are relevant to this report:

Social:

- Help build the community's confidence in Mandurah as a safe and secure City.
- Ensure the provision of quality health services and facilities.
- Provide employment and educational opportunities, services and activities that engage the City's young people.

Economic:

- Increase the level of regional employment.
- Increase local education and training opportunities.

Leadership:

- Develop and empower our community leaders to determine, guide and advocate for the City's future.
- Demonstrate leadership on major regional, state and national issues.

Conclusion

The Federal Minister for Social Services, with the support of the Federal Member for Canning, has announced that Mandurah has been selected as a pilot area for the random drug testing of future welfare applicants. The City acknowledges that drugs are an issue in all communities across Australia and Mandurah is not unique in this.

The creation of jobs is crucial to the City's economic development and position as a major regional City, but also to a sustainable programme of offering welfare recipients the chance to secure employment and seeks support from the federal government to develop initiatives that support this.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Recognises that communities across Australia have a significant issue with people in their communities using illegal drugs and Mandurah faces the same issues.**
- 2. Would support community based initiatives that work on reducing drug use in Mandurah where those initiatives have been:**
 - a. Subject to consultation with the community**
 - b. A treatment pathway has been developed in consultation with a local provider**
- 3. Supports a program for Mandurah that assists people transition into work like the Career Transition program announced for the northern areas of the Perth metropolitan region.**
- 4. Reiterates that its top priority is the creation of jobs in the region, and reminds parliamentarians of the job creation projects outlined in the 2016 Federal Election Candidates' Briefing Paper.**
- 5. The City to write to the local Member for Canning, Western Australian Senators and House of Representative members informing them of the Council decision.**