

Security Support Pilot – Evaluation and Future State

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Executive Summary

1. This report to the Future Melbourne Committee (FMC) details the outcomes of a pilot established to support the safety of Local Laws officers, and also considers a parallel trial of social workers in place of security guards; an international review of best practice responses to public consumption of alcohol and begging; and advice on future training and support needs of City of Melbourne on-street compliance officers.
2. In February 2025, FMC approved a pilot which provided for two contracted private security guards to support the safety of Local Laws Officers while they are working to enforce Local Laws relating to on-street behavioural issues, including the public consumption of alcohol and begging. Following an initial 6-week trial period (7 March – 17 April 2025), the trial was extended for a further 10 weeks and concludes on 1 July 2025.
3. An evaluation of the pilot has been conducted which included the analysis of key operational metrics, observational data from on-street activity, an intercept survey and direct stakeholder engagement. Importantly, the evaluation identified improved safety and perceptions of safety by Local Laws Officers. There are less defined results relating to community perceptions of safety, possibly due to the short tenure of the pilot and low community awareness of the pilot as revealed by the intercept survey. While the pilot has led to several referrals to support services, further work is required with existing service providers to support individuals engaging in behaviours which may not align to an existing referral pathway.
4. Considering the positive pilot outcomes and the ongoing desire to have an increased visible on-street presence, FMC is asked to endorse a proposed approach to enable the establishment of a Community Safety function within the City of Melbourne. The Community Safety function will aim to reduce reports and observations of on-street behaviours which breach the Local Laws in hot-spot and high-footfall locations in the city, while also aiming to improve support for vulnerable people and impact declining perceptions of safety within Melbourne.
5. The Community Safety function proposal has been informed by the pilot evaluation, a literature review of a variety of legislative and policy approaches and stakeholder feedback. The Community Safety function aims to strike a balance between principles of deterrence and enforcement, prevention and early intervention to enable a visible and consistent response to on-street issues while addressing the underlying drivers of complex on-street behaviours and providing support for vulnerable people through existing support services.
6. To provide continuity of service with the current on-street security presence, the current contracted arrangement with CrownLand Security is proposed to be extended within the General Manager delegation/exemption while transition activities are undertaken.

Recommendation from management

7. That the Future Melbourne Committee:
 - 7.1. Endorses the proposed approach to establish an internal Community Safety function within the City of Melbourne.
 - 7.2. Notes that, if the draft Budget 2025-26 is approved with funding for the Community Safety function, the General Manager, Infrastructure and Amenity will implement the proposed approach and will provide updates to Councillors at intervals of six months from the program's commencement.

- 7.3. Notes the General Manager, Infrastructure and Amenity will extend under delegation the existing contracted security services to enable continued service delivery while transition activities are undertaken. A further briefing will be provided to Councillors as the details and timing of the transition is confirmed.
- 7.4. Notes that management will continue to work with the Council to identify opportunities to advocate to Victoria Police and the State Government for additional opportunities to improve safety and ensure increased support for the underlying drivers, particularly mental health programs.

Purpose

8. This report details the outcomes of a pilot established to support the safety of Local Laws officers and seeks FMC's approval of the proposed approach to establish a Community Safety function within the City of Melbourne.

Background

9. Public safety is critically important to the City of Melbourne, underpinning the wellbeing and confidence of residents, businesses, and visitors to our city. A safe environment allows people to live, work, and travel freely without fear, supporting social cohesion and economic growth.
10. Within Melbourne public safety is addressed in a variety of ways, with services directly and indirectly aimed at improving public safety delivered by several different organisations. Within the City of Melbourne, Local Laws Officers promote safety and compliance around a wide range of laws that protect the amenity of public places for everyone.
11. The City of Melbourne's Local Laws Officers, along with Victoria Police, are responsible for dealing with on-street behaviour related issues, including consumption of alcohol and begging. Both matters can be enforced under the Activities Local Law 2024 (Local Law).
12. While these issues have previously been enforced jointly by the City of Melbourne and Victoria Police, including through operations like Operation Brightside, Victoria Police have been unable to commit resources to operations on an ongoing capacity.
13. The City of Melbourne as an employer has certain responsibilities and duties in relation to the occupational health and safety of its employees, including providing and maintaining a work environment that is safe and free of risks to health, as far as is reasonably practicable. In the two years prior to the pilot, there were 37 incidents of occupational violence against local laws officers when performing their duties.
14. City of Melbourne Local Laws Officers are trained to educate and enforce matters covered in the *Activities Local Law 2024*, *Environment Local Law 2024* and other relevant legislation. They are not trained security guards, yet they have previously found themselves in situations that can put them in danger and prevent them from doing their job. This occupational violence, when combined with the inconsistent availability of Victoria Police has led to the Local Laws relating to begging and the consumption of alcohol not being consistently enforced.
15. The 2024 City of Melbourne *Social Indicator Survey* found declining perceptions of safety, which are felt particularly at night, on public transport and by certain community groups including women and young people. Similarly, *The Victoria Police Sentiment Survey 2024* found the top three safety concerns were in the categories of "safety in public places", "safety of my property and possessions" and "drugs and alcohol". The most common responses about how to improve safety were "increased police presence", "more patrols", and "improving community environments such as better lighting on streets/more CCTV". The city safety score has stayed steady at 2.9 out of 5 in 2023 and 2024, which is slightly below the state average.
16. Following a resolution at the FMC meeting on 4 February 2025, City of Melbourne procured the services of Crownland Security to undertake a trial ('the Pilot) supporting the safety of Local Laws Officers in conducting their duties while they addressed complex on-street issues including the administration of

Local Laws relating to begging, the public consumption of alcohol and anti-social or public nuisance behaviours.

17. FMC also approved the commissioning of a detailed design and evaluation of the pilot which was to form part of a subsequent report to FMC outlining the outcome of the pilot and next steps, with consideration given to a parallel trial of social workers in place of security guards; along with an international review of best practice responses to public consumption of alcohol and begging; and advice on future training and support needs of City of Melbourne on-street compliance officers.
18. City of Melbourne engaged the services of CrownLand Security and the Pilot commenced on Friday 7 March 2025 and was originally planned to run for six weeks. On 15 April 2025 Council passed a motion to extend the Pilot for another 10 weeks, to conclude on Tuesday 1 July 2025 while the City of Melbourne gathered further data on the program's effectiveness; and responds to positive feedback from traders.
19. The 2025-26 Draft Budget released for consultation on 13 May, commits \$2m to 'expand the visible safety presence in the city'.

Key considerations

20. An evaluation of the pilot, including an international review of best practice responses to public consumption of alcohol and begging, has been undertaken and utilised observational data from on-street activity, an intercept survey and direct stakeholder engagement. The evaluation considered the extent to which the pilot has been able to address three key outcomes; the safety of Local Laws Officers, community perceptions of safety and support for vulnerable people.
21. *Safety of Local Laws Officers:* Officers usually work alone or, where there is a heightened risk to their safety, in pairs. The trial has involved operating in groups of four (including two security guards) which has enabled Officers to address complex on-street issues more consistently. Feedback from staff during the trial has been positive in terms of their feelings of safety, and a further survey will be distributed prior to the end of the trial.
22. *Community perceptions of safety:* The Social Indicator Survey (CoMSIS) shows that public perceptions of safety are at their lowest since 2018. Intercept surveys were undertaken in May as part of this evaluation and questions on perceptions of safety were aligned with CoMSIS data. There was low community awareness about the pilot. Once informed, most respondents indicated they felt the same or safer knowing the pilot was occurring. Businesses in the primary patrol area were also surveyed in late May through to early June. Awareness of the pilot was low, however there was overwhelming support for an increased presence of authorities equipped to manage the issues targeted by the pilot.
23. *Support for vulnerable people:* There were over 50 referrals to support services made throughout the pilot, however there is limited oversight of the outcome of these referrals. The pilot highlighted that there is a gap in support for people who are housed and still experiencing vulnerability and hardship.
24. A literature review examined different responses to begging including legislative frameworks and policy initiatives from different jurisdictions. The literature review found that begging (or panhandling as it's referred to in the United States of America) is a global issue with no clear or simple solution due in part to the complex underlying drivers of the behaviour including homelessness, poverty, substance abuse and mental illness which require a holistic approach.
25. The literature review highlighted examples which varied between prevention, education and enforcement approaches which have been trialled across the globe with mixed success. The review found that while enforcement may be necessary, there must be an incremental approach which prioritises diversion into welfare and towards appropriate support agencies, only utilising the criminal justice system as a last resort. This is intended to mitigate the risk of increasing the vulnerability of at-risk individuals or displacing these individuals.
26. One of the more commonly utilised approaches globally was for Diverted Giving Schemes (DGS) and public education campaigns which are designed to reduce the lucrativeness of begging by encouraging the public to donate money to charities and support services instead of the individuals on the street with

examples of these programs existing in America and England. However, the review found that there is no empirical evidence that DGS has decreased the number of beggars in areas where they have been established, and their ability to generate meaningful income for support agencies is doubted.

27. The considerations from the literature review and the experiences from the pilot are reflected in the proposed Community Safety function which will embed the following operating principles to guide strategic decision making:
28. Enforcement and deterrence: A visible on street presence with swift, consistent and proportionate responses to inappropriate on-street behaviours in a graduated sanctions model, focusing on high-risk individuals, locations or behaviours. Deterrence and enforcement are balanced with prevention and early intervention to mitigate risk of disproportionately impacting vulnerable people or displacing on-street issues.
29. Prevention and early intervention: Reducing repeated or chronic behaviours through prevention, early intervention and utilising existing support service coordination processes. Delivered concurrently with deterrence and enforcement aiming to reduce long-term demand through service coordination and support.
30. Adaptive learning: Working effectively with partners to address the issues, piloting best-practice/evidence-based initiatives and using outcomes, evaluation and innovation to continually improve the response. Encompasses prevention and early intervention, education responses, deterrence and enforcement and identifies opportunities to pilot interventions based on evidence and insights from other jurisdictions and community feedback.
31. With respect to the role of social workers and FMC's request to consider a parallel trial of social workers in place of security guards. Given timeframes of the pilot and the capability, local understanding and relationships required to deliver this, the City of Melbourne engaged several services operating in Melbourne with a proposal to develop a co-responder model or approach which involved social/outreach workers being deployed with Local Laws Officers in lieu of security guards. At that time there was no support from the service providers approached, with the exception of the Salvation Army who indicated they were open to some form of joined-up approach to these issues, however still required the use of security guards to ensure safe interactions.

Proposed Community Safety Function

32. Informed by experiences during the pilot, literature review, stakeholder feedback and the operating principles, the establishment of an internal Community Safety Function is proposed.
33. This includes establishing 11 Community Safety Officer roles internal to the City of Melbourne, including supervision and coordination capacity. The roles would be authorised to act under the Local Laws. The function would deliver on-street support as well as connection and coordination with the organisation to address the underlying drivers of complex on-street behaviours and providing support for vulnerable people through existing support services.
34. As part of the proposed Community Safety function, defining a referral pathway into support services will be a key action to support people experiencing vulnerability. This is further embedded in the approach which proposes to establish a Coordinator role who would be responsible for, amongst other things, coordinating with support services.
35. During implementation of the Community Safety function, an ongoing monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed which includes undertaking baselining of the current state. It is proposed that reviews will be undertaken at six monthly intervals, with reports back to Councillors.
36. A close working relationship with Victoria Police will continue and involve opportunities to work collaboratively on operations, proactively share information relating to criminal activity and responding to other known issues including retail theft, criminal damage, and theft from vehicles and bikes.

37. While Victoria Police is the lead agency responsible for responding to these issues, the Community Safety function represents an opportunity to fill a gap which exists because of acknowledged capacity issues within Victoria Police.
38. To address capacity issues and ensure increased support for underlying drivers, particularly mental health programs, ongoing advocacy to Victoria Police and the State Government will be necessary.
39. Community Safety Officers as part of their role will be required to report incidents to Victoria Police. Additionally, in situations where issues arise or the matter falls outside of the Community Safety Officers jurisdiction, Victoria Police will be called on 000.

Transition Approach

40. To provide continuity of service and an on-street security presence for our Local Laws Officers, the current contracted arrangement with CrownLand Security is proposed to be extended within the General Manager delegation while transition activities are undertaken.
41. This will enable the appropriate time required to finalise the detailed implementation plan for the Community Safety function including recruitment, onboarding and training requirements while supporting an additional transfer of lessons learnt from the existing contract.

Legal

42. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation from management.

Finance

43. The 2025-25 Draft Budget allocation of \$2m to “expand the visible safety presence in the city” if approved, will be utilised to fund the Community Safety Program.
44. Consideration will need to be given to the expansion of this program in 2026-27 and beyond the current funding allocation.

Conflict of interest

45. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

46. The recommendation contained in this report is compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006* as it does not raise any human rights issues.

Health and Safety

47. Work Environment: The recommendation from management considers the health and safety of officers and the proposal aims to reduce risk and exposure to occupational violence.
48. Community Health and Safety: The recommendation from management considers the health and safety of the community in that it aims to both improve perceptions of safety and provide better support for vulnerable people, therefore improving health and wellbeing outcomes.

Consultation

49. Consultation has occurred with key stakeholders in relation to these issues and possible solutions to deal with them. These stakeholders include Victoria Police, agencies such as Launch Housing, cohealth and the Salvation Army, residents and business groups and associations.
50. An intercept survey in key areas of the central city where the pilot was being conducted was undertaken to understand the awareness and perceived impact of the pilot, and to ask about perceptions of safety. This is alongside direct face-to-face engagement with businesses and stakeholders to understand their feedback.
51. Feedback or submissions from stakeholders at the Future Melbourne Committee is welcomed.

Relevance to Council Plan and Council Policies

52. Major Initiative 50 (MI50) 'Street Safety Initiatives' commits to continuing work with Victoria Police and other agencies to deliver a range of initiatives that improve safety and perceptions of safety in the city.
53. Contract extensions will be done in accordance with relevant procurement policies.
54. Recruitment and workforce planning activity for the Community Safety function will be undertaken in accordance with relevant policies.

Social and environmental impacts

55. Agencies such as Launch Housing, cohealth and the Salvation Army have been engaged throughout the pilot to ensure that vulnerable communities are supported.
56. Further engagement on the future state including to define a referral pathway for vulnerable people is planned.
57. A Gender Impact Assessment has been completed and recommendations from this will be implemented into this program – including supporting the safety and wellbeing of women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and vulnerable people.

Attachment List

Nil