

Local council electoral structure review

Final Report

Whittlesea City Council

December 2023

Acknowledgement of Country

The electoral representation advisory panel acknowledges the Wurundjeri and the Taungurung peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters for which it held this review and pays respects to ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. The panel acknowledges their custodianship for many thousands of years and their continuing living culture.

Report approval

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1	13 December 2023	The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC
1	13 December 2023	Ms Liz Williams PSM

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Executive summary

An electoral structure review panel appointed by the Minister for Local Government has reviewed the electoral structure of Whittlesea City Council.

The purpose of the review was to advise the Minister on the appropriate number of councillors and electoral structure, including ward names, for the council.

Under Victoria's *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), Whittlesea City Council must now have a single-councillor ward electoral structure.

The panel looked at:

- the appropriate number of councillors and wards for the council
- the location of ward boundaries
- appropriate ward names.

This report presents the panel's final advice to the Minister on the recommended new electoral structure of Whittlesea City Council to meet the requirements of the Act.

More information about the background to the review is available on page [6](#).

Recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Whittlesea City Council adopt a 11 single-councillor ward structure – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 11 wards in this electoral structure are Bundoora Ward, Epping Ward, Ganbu Gulinj Ward, Kirrip Ward, Lalor Ward, Mernda Ward, Mill Park Ward, North Ward, Painted Hills Ward, South Morang Ward, and Thomastown Ward.

This advice is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Terms of Reference of the electoral representation advisory panel and the Act.

Detailed maps of the boundaries for the recommended electoral structure are provided as [Appendix 1](#).

Summary of approach

Developing electoral structure models

The panel considered a range of factors when deciding on its final recommendation including:

- research and analysis
- voter growth or decline over time
- public submissions (see below).

More information on the way the panel decided on the models is available on page [7](#).

Preliminary report

The panel published a preliminary report on Wednesday 25 October 2023 with the following electoral structure models for public consultation:

- Model 1: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1 and Model 2.

The full preliminary report is available on the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) website at vec.vic.gov.au

Response submissions

The panel received 4 submissions responding to the preliminary report. Of these, no submissions included maps.

A full analysis of response submissions received can be found on page [15](#).

Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 2 pm on Tuesday 21 November 2023. One person spoke at the hearing.

Background

About the 2023–24 electoral structure reviews

In October 2022, the Minister for Local Government formed 2 electoral representation advisory panels to review and provide advice on the electoral structures of 39 local councils, under section 16 of the Act. If the Minister accepts the electoral structure recommended by the panel, any changes will take effect at the October 2024 local council elections.

The Act introduced several changes to local government representation, including the types of electoral structures local councils may have. All metropolitan, interface and regional city councils (including Whittlesea City Council) must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

For Whittlesea City Council, the electoral representation advisory panel examined:

- the number of councillors and wards
- where the ward boundaries should be
- the names of each ward.

The Act requires electoral structures to provide fair and equitable representation and facilitate good governance. Each ward must have an approximately equal number of voters per councillor (within +/-10% of the average). While conducting the review, the panel also noted the role of a councillor as specified under section 28 of the Act.

The electoral representation advisory panel

The panel that conducted the electoral structure review of Whittlesea City Council had 3 members:

- The Honourable Frank Vincent AO KC (Chairperson)
- Ms Liz Williams PSM
- Electoral Commissioner Mr Sven Bluemmel.

The purpose of the review is to advise the Minister on the appropriate number of councillors and electoral structure, including ward names, for the council. The panel is independent of councils and the VEC.

Under the Act, the VEC is not responsible for reviewing council electoral structures but must provide administrative and technical support to the panel. The Electoral Commissioner (or their delegate) must be a member of each panel.

Public engagement

Public information program

On behalf of the panel, the VEC conducted a public information and awareness program to inform the public about the Whittlesea City Council electoral structure review. This included:

- public notices in state-wide newspapers
- public information sessions to outline the review process and respond to questions from the community
- media releases announcing the start of the review with the release of the preliminary report
- information on social media channels
- updated website content on vec.vic.gov.au, including:
 - current information on the review process
 - submission guide and fact sheets for each council under review with background information
 - response submissions from the public.

Whittlesea City was also offered but did not take up 2 optional methods to promote the reviews:

- targeting social media advertisements at the council area
- notifying voters in the council area subscribed to the VEC's VoterAlert service about the start of the review and release of the preliminary report.

Public consultation

The panel encouraged public input to the review of Whittlesea City Council via:

- response submissions to the preliminary report
- an online public hearing for anyone who made a response submission to speak to the panel and expand on their submission.

Public submissions are an important part of the review process and are considered alongside other factors addressed during the review. These are outlined below.

Developing recommendations

The panel's final recommendations comply with the Act and were developed through careful consideration of:

- research and analysis conducted by the VEC support team, including geospatial and demographic data
- rates or patterns of population and voter change over time, and relevant forecasts of growth or decline based on forecast information provided by .id (informed decisions, a company specialising in demographics and forecasting)
- input received during public consultation.

Deciding on the number of councillors

The Act allows local councils to have between 5 and 12 councillors, but neither the Act nor the Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 specify how the number of councillors is to be determined. As such, the recommendation put forward by the panel in this report is guided by

the Act's intention for fairness and equity in voter representation and the consequent facilitation of good governance.

In examining the appropriate number of councillors for Whittlesea City Council, the panel considered the following criteria:

- the population and number of voters in the council area, compared to other councils with a similar population size and number of voters in the same category (for example, other comparable metropolitan, interface and regional city councils)
- patterns of population change and voter growth or decline in the council area over time
- the current and past numbers of councillors
- the representation needs of communities of interest in the council area
- any matter raised in public submissions not already listed above.

Local councils with a larger number of voters will often have more councillors. Large populations generally have greater diversity, both in the type and number of communities of interest and issues relating to representation. However, the ideal number of councillors can also be influenced by the circumstances of each council, such as the:

- nature and complexity of services the council provides
- geographic size and topography of the area
- forecast population and voter growth or decline
- social diversity.

Deciding the electoral structure

Under the Act, regional city, metropolitan and interface councils must now have single-councillor ward electoral structures.

When developing single-councillor ward models for Whittlesea City Council, the panel considered these criteria:

- whether the structure would comply with section 15(2) of the Act (see below), and for how long it would likely comply
- the appropriate number of councillors, as outlined above
- whether meaningful and effective ward boundaries could be established and whether these would be easily identifiable to local communities
- the representation of communities of interest
- the voter distribution and physical features of the area, and the impact these may have on the shape and size of wards
- past elections for the council, including:
 - numbers of candidates nominating
 - incidences of uncontested elections

- rates of informal voting.
- other matters raised in public submissions not already listed above.

Under section 15(2) of the Act, subdivided structures must aim for an approximately equal number of voters per councillor in each ward. This means the number of voters represented by each councillor in a ward should be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards.

During this review, the panel aimed to recommend a structure that would comply with section 15(2) at the time of the 2024 local council elections and, if possible, also comply based on voter numbers at the time the review was conducted. The panel used forecasts of population and voter change to assess compliance at the 2024 elections with as much accuracy as possible. In some cases, population change and other factors impacting voter numbers mean it is not possible to create compliant subdivided structures based both on voter numbers that were current at the time of the review and forecast voter numbers. In these instances, the panel prioritised compliance at the 2024 local government elections to ensure each vote will have approximately equal value at the 2024 election.

One of the factors that may impact compliance with section 15(2) is the number of current and forecast voters with ratepayer-based voting entitlements, also known as council-enrolled voters. Voters' rolls include both state-enrolled electors (the majority of the roll) and a smaller number of council-enrolled electors. The Act introduced changes to ratepayer-based entitlement categories. The panel took this change to the makeup of voters' rolls, and therefore compliance with section 15(2) of the Act, into consideration during this review.

Deciding on ward names

The panel has taken the following approach to naming wards.

1. Retaining existing ward names if these were still relevant to the area covered by the ward.
2. When a new name was required, the panel based this on features such as:
 - places (registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998*) in the ward
 - compass directions
 - native flora or fauna.

Use of Aboriginal language

The panel recognises that there should first be meaningful consultation with local Aboriginal communities and groups before a ward is named using Aboriginal language. Meaningful consultation is a significant process that the panel was not able to undertake within the timeframes of the current review program.

The panel also recognises that many of the place names in current use across Victoria are based on Aboriginal language. As such, the panel has only put forward new ward names using Aboriginal language if:

- it is the name of a place within a ward
- it is currently in common use

and

- the name is registered under the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998*.

Unregistered names using Aboriginal language have not been put forward by the panel as new ward names. While the panel supports the adoption of names based on Aboriginal language, this requires appropriate consultation.

Accordingly, for the panel to consider an Aboriginal language ward name that is suggested in a public submission to the review, the name submitted needs to comply with the above guidelines.

About Whittlesea City Council

Profile

Whittlesea City Council is located about 20 km north of central Melbourne and covers an area of 490 km². With an estimated population of 229,396 it is the fifth most populated local government area in Victoria (ABS 2022a). Whittlesea City Council is surrounded by Murrindindi and Mitchell shires to the north, Nillumbik Shire to the east, Hume City to the west, and Darebin and Banyule cities to the south.

The council forms part of Melbourne's peri-urban fringe, consisting of a largely urbanised area in the south extending northwards to mainly rural land in the north. Urban growth has been occurring since the 1950s, with residential developments extending northwards. From 2001 growth accelerated, with the population doubling over 2 decades. Over the next 5 years (2023-28) it will continue to grow at the third fastest rate of all Victorian councils (.id 2023).

The Traditional Custodians of the land in Whittlesea City Council are the Wurundjeri and the Taungurung peoples.

Landscape

In the south of the council area, the more established areas include a mix of significant industry, employment areas, residential communities, educational services, activity centres, and other community uses (DTP 2023). Heading north, the council area takes in new residential communities followed by mainly rural lands, which consist of grazing and rural residential areas. Along the northern boundary are the forested areas of Kinglake National Park and Yan Yean Reservoir, which sit on the north-east edge of the council (DAFF 2023). Merri Creek forms a large part of the western boundary, and the Plenty River is prominent in the south-east. The council area contains numerous parks and reserves supporting a rich diversity of flora and fauna, including Plenty Gorge Park in the south-east.

The council includes established suburbs in the south, such as Thomastown, Lalor and part of Bundoora. More recent and growing suburbs like Epping and South Morang are in the centre and rural localities and towns like Whittlesea and Woodstock sit further north (.id 2023).

The Western Ring Road runs east-west across the south of the council and the Hume Freeway begins its route in the south-west corner and runs in a northerly direction. Epping and Plenty roads form major north-south thoroughfares, while Childs, McDonalds and Bridge Inn roads provide major east-west connections. Metropolitan train services travel as far north as Mernda.

Population and community

Between 2001 and 2021 the population grew from 113,784 to 229,396 (ABS 2001, ABS 2022a). Further growth will likely see the population increase to 277,709 by 2028 and 360,692 by 2041 (.id 2023). Residential growth has and continues to occur along 2 major paths: the first in the south-west following the Epping Road corridor north through to Epping, Wollert and Donnybrook; and the second, beginning in the south-east following the Plenty Road corridor with extensive development from South Morang to Mernda and Doreen. Redevelopment in

established suburbs such as Epping, Thomastown and Lalor is also occurring (Whittlesea City Council 2023; .id 2023).

The proportion of the population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is 1.0%, higher than the Greater Melbourne average of 0.7% (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b).

Family households make up a greater proportion of all private dwellings (79.2%) in the council compared with Greater Melbourne (70.9%) and the percentage of households comprising couples with children (52.8%) and one parent families (16.6%) are also greater (ABS 2022a, 2022b). Houses are typically freestanding (86.4%) with a lower proportion of higher density flats and apartments (2.8%) (ABS 2022a).

The prominence of young families is more evident in some areas. For instance, 85.7% of households in Wollert are family households while over a quarter of its population is aged 30-40 years old and over a fifth is aged under 10 years (ABS 2022c). Mernda and surrounding areas in the east have similar age profiles (ABS 2022d). In contrast, across Greater Melbourne about 16% of people are aged 30-40 and about 12% of people are under 10 years (ABS 2022b).

Home ownership rates are high across the council area. However, in the new suburban areas of Wollert, Donnybrook, Doreen, Mernda and Epping North, homes owned with a mortgage range between 50-70% of all households. In the more established suburbs, such as Thomastown, Lalor and Epping, the rate is between 24-31%, while for Greater Melbourne it is 35% (.id 2023).

Cultural diversity is considered high amongst the population of Whittlesea, with 37.5% being born overseas and 51% speaking a language other than English at home. Residents recording Australian and English ancestry are comparatively low, at 19.7% and 17.6% respectively, both about 8 percentage points below those of Greater Melbourne (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b). Large cultural groups include Italians, Indians, and Macedonians. In addition to English, the main languages spoken include Arabic, Macedonian, Punjabi, Italian, and Greek (ABS 2022a, ABS 2022b). Some suburbs have significantly higher rates of non-English languages spoken. For instance, in Thomastown 71.8% and in Lalor 70.0% of households use a language other than English (ABS 2022e, ABS 2022f).

Median personal and family incomes of council residents in 2021 were about \$100 and \$270 lower respectively than for Greater Melbourne (ABS 2022a, 2022b) There are also parts of the council where disadvantage is high. For instance, some areas in Thomastown and Lalor are ranked as the most disadvantaged in Greater Melbourne (ABS 2023). Income levels are generally lower in these areas also.

Current number of councillors and electoral structure

Whittlesea City Council is currently divided into 3 wards with a total of 11 councillors:

- one ward with 3 councillors (North Ward)
- 2 wards with 4 councillors each (South West and South East wards).



Figure 1: Diagram of current electoral structure of Whittlesea City Council.

There are approximately 170,869 voters in Whittlesea City Council, with an approximate ratio of 15,533 voters per councillor.

Visit the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au for more information on Whittlesea City Council.

Last electoral structure review

A representation review for Whittlesea City Council was scheduled for completion in April 2020. However, the review ceased with the introduction of the *Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)*, which occurred at about the same time. The final report for the Whittlesea City Council representation review was not published.

The last electoral representation review of Whittlesea City Council was in 2012. The VEC's final recommendation was for Whittlesea City Council to change to 11 councillors elected from 3 wards (2 4-councillor wards and one 3-councillor ward). A subdivision review was conducted prior to the 2016 local government elections to correct ward boundaries affected by rapid changes in enrolment.

Whittlesea City Council was dismissed by an Act of Parliament in March 2020 and consequently no elections were held for the council in October 2020.

Preliminary report

A preliminary report was released on Wednesday 25 October 2023. The panel considered research findings and the requirements of the Act when formulating the models presented in the preliminary report.

After careful consideration, the following electoral structure models were put forward for public consultation:

- Model 1: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.
- Model 2: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1.
- Model 3: a subdivided electoral structure with a total of 11 councillors – 11 wards with one councillor per ward, with different ward boundaries to Model 1 and Model 2.

The full preliminary report is available on the VEC website at vec.vic.gov.au

Response submissions

The panel received 4 response submissions to the preliminary report from the public by the deadline of 5 pm on Wednesday 15 November 2023. You can find a list of people or organisations who made a response submission in [Appendix 2](#).

The table below provides an overview of preferences in response submissions. You can read an analysis of submissions below this table.

Table 1: Preferences expressed in response submissions				
Model 1 (11 single-councillor wards)	Model 2 (11 single-councillor wards)	Model 3 (11 single-councillor wards)	No preferred model indicated	Other
2	-	-	2	-

Two submissions supported Model 1 and a further 2 did not describe a preferred structure but recommended changes to ward boundaries.

Model 1

Former Whittlesea City Council councillor John Fry of Mill Park preferred Model 1 because he felt it achieved the difficult task of keeping communities of interest together. Fry described the boundaries as logical and easily identifiable, particularly for North, Mernda and Painted Hills wards.

Former Whittlesea City Council councillor and mayor Lawrie Cox of Wollert also preferred Model 1, reasoning that it best aligned with most communities of interest across the council area. Cox considered the North Ward was well-suited to accommodate future growth in Donnybrook. Further, Model 1 had 7 wards (Painted Hills, South Morang, Mill Park, Bundoora, Thomastown, Lalor and Epping) closely aligned to the locality boundaries, and this was considered an advantage.

Cox preferred the boundaries of Ganbu Gulinj Ward in Model 1 over those in models 2 and 3, which he felt extended too far south. Preference was also given to the Kirrip Ward as this would better allow for the growth in Wollert. Cox thought modifying Model 1 by extending the western boundary of Mernda Ward to the Darebin Creek was an improvement, as the community between Sackville Street and Darebin Creek was felt to have more in common with Mernda Ward than Kirrip Ward.

Model 2

No submitters supported Model 2, though some pointed out its potential drawbacks. Fry was critical of the boundaries in Ganbu Gulinj and Epping wards and believed Mill Park was divided in a way which did not keep communities of interest together. Cox felt the Ganbu Gulinj Ward extending to Deveny Road loses the connection to a growth or developing housing area.

Model 3

No submitters supported Model 3, though there was some opposition. Fry argued that the boundaries of Ganbu Gulinj, Galada Tamboore, Boori and Kirrip wards split communities in a way that did not make sense. Likewise, Cox felt the Ganbu Gulinj boundary extending to Kingsway Drive resulted in a division of communities of interest.

Other options

Submitter Kim Kotas from Doreen believed the modelling of different electoral structures failed to account for anticipated growth up to the October 2024 local council elections. Kotas also suggested it would be more appropriate to include Wollert and Donnybrook in one ward and all of Doreen to be included in the Painted Hills Ward.

Victorian Legislative Council Members, Evan Mulholland MP and Wendy Lovell MP, made a joint submission concerning population growth in the North Ward, which they argued was underestimated in the proposed models. They believed the models would move outside the legislated +/-10% tolerance by the time of the 2024 local council elections. They recommended the panel carefully consider the population growth of the northern half of the City of Whittlesea, contrasted to the established parts.

Submitters Fry and Cox supported the use of wards with Aboriginal names but questioned the use of Ganbu Gulinj and Kirrip Wards as proposed by the panel. They believed the names lacked status in the community and Fry questioned the extent of the Council's community consultation around these names. Cox suggested Merri and Darebin wards as alternatives based on creeks in the area. However, the panel did not support these names as they both pass through multiple wards and were potentially confusing.

Ward names

The panel received one submission from the public about possible ward names that use Aboriginal language. The panel includes these for the Minister's information but notes that it was not possible to verify whether appropriate consultation took place with relevant Aboriginal groups about the proposed names. The names proposed were Merri and Darebin.

Public hearing

The panel held an online public hearing for those wishing to speak about their response submission at 2 pm on Tuesday 21 November 2023. One person spoke at the hearing.

You can find a list of people who spoke at the hearing in [Appendix 2](#).

Tom Burgess spoke on behalf of Evan Mulholland MP and Wendy Lovell MP and stated that the submitters supported 11 single-councillor wards for the council because it was consistent with comparable interface councils across Melbourne.

Their main concern related to population and demographic statistics and that the ward boundaries proposed had not fully factored in expected growth. Burgess noted that in the reference section of the preliminary report the data sources listed were accessed on 29 August 2023 and believed council population statistics were accessed on one day only, with 8 hours research insufficient for detailed analysis into council demographics and projected population growth. The panel pointed out that the 29 August was simply the date the data was retrieved, and research did not occur only on that day. Plus, significant work involving analysis of demographic data feeding into the ERAP processes was ongoing within the VEC.

It was stated that Mulholland and Lovell believed population growth in the proposed North Ward was vastly underestimated in all 3 models, with the possibility of North Ward being out of deviation in October 2024. They noted that the current ERAP reviews of Hume City Council and Mornington Peninsula Shire Council did account for the projected population growth over the next 2 and 6 years.

Burgess added that Mulholland and Lovell believed that if the North Ward was significantly out of deviation by 2026, the people of Whittlesea township and Donnybrook would be underrepresented when compared to other council suburbs. The submitters also believed the North Ward grouped communities with few shared interests and suggested one potential improvement was to have the suburb of Doreen in one ward.

The panel was interested to know if the submitters preferred any of the proposed models, beyond their concerns regarding the North Ward. Burgess noted a key concern of the submitters was that in all 3 models the North Ward was similar in many respects. They felt an option was for Donnybrook and Wollert, as a similar community of interest, to be contained in a single ward.

Findings and recommendation

As outlined in the submission guide for this review, the panel is committed to the principle of 'one vote, one value', which is a requirement for subdivided electoral structures under the Act. This is to ensure that every person's vote counts equally. When undertaking an electoral structure review, the panel must adhere to the Act's legislated equality requirement to seek to ensure the number of voters per councillor in a ward to be within +/-10% of the average number of voters per councillor for all wards in the council area.

The equality requirement exists to support fair and equitable representation for all voters within a local council (and consequently facilitate good governance), which is a major aim of this review. All wards in a subdivided electoral structure recommended by the panel must aim to be within the legislated tolerance in time for the 2024 local council elections.

Number of councillors

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found 11 councillors to be an appropriate number for Whittlesea City Council.

The panel considered the characteristics of Whittlesea City Council in relation to similar interface councils, including its size and geography, population and the number and distribution of voters across the council area. Whittlesea City Council currently has 170,869 voters represented by 11 councillors and covers an area of 490 km². Other interface councils with a similar number of voters usually also have 11 councillors.

Submitters Fry and Cox both supported 11 councillors as appropriate for the council. In the public hearing Burgess noted that Mulholland and Lovell were also supportive of 11 councillors.

In some cases, a local council may have special circumstances that support a recommendation for fewer or more councillors. The panel did not identify any new circumstances for Whittlesea City Council since the representation review in 2012. However, the panel also recognised that the geographic features and uneven distribution of voters across the council area make developing a satisfactory single-councillor ward structure for Whittlesea City Council challenging. Because of this, the panel also considered models with fewer or more councillors. The panel explored whether an increase or decrease in the number of councillors would enable single-councillor ward structures to be created that may provide more favourable representation for the community.

Electoral structure

After considering the requirements of the Act, public submissions and the agreed criteria, the panel found Model 1 to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Whittlesea City Council and consequently facilitate good governance.

The panel received submissions from Kim Kotas, Evan Mulholland MP and Wendy Lovell MP in which the submitters argued population growth had not been adequately accounted for. The arguments put forward by Mulholland and Lovell were restated at the public hearing. The panel

noted that the submitters' calculations were carried out using population data, which includes sections of the population not entitled to vote, such as people under the age of 18. The panel's standard practice is to use elector data and to consider the information on ratepayer-based entitlements. The panel reviewed the models and were satisfied they were based on accurate forecasting.

The panel found that the proposal of placing Wollert and Donnybrook into a single ward created a highly unstable model as this would concentrate the most significant population (and elector) growth in one ward. It felt this could not be accommodated and did not support the proposal. The suggestion to include all of Doreen in one ward was also considered but could not be supported because there were too many electors in the suburb for a single ward. Moreover, if the Painted Hills Ward boundary was moved north from Hazel Glen Drive and Flaxen Hills Road to Arthurs Creek Road, then adjustments would have to be made elsewhere and would have negative implications for the surrounding wards. The panel preferred the way in which Doreen was divided in the proposed models in the preliminary report and opted for maintaining this division.

Similarly suggested as an improvement, the proposal put forward by Cox to modify Model 1 by extending the western boundary of Mernda Ward to the Darebin Creek, was also considered by the panel. While it was believed the community between Sackville Street and Darebin Creek had more in common with Mernda Ward than Kirrip Ward, the change would require alterations to surrounding wards to accommodate the +/-10% requirement. The panel concluded that such change would result in a weaker model more generally.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of all 3 models, the panel determined Model 3 to be the weakest overall. It divided too many localities, with Mill Park and Lalor divided across 4 and 3 wards respectively, which was criticised in submissions. The panel felt that of the council's suburbs, those in the south had developed strong local identities, which Model 3 did not appear to reflect. However, models 1 and 2 did and were thus preferable.

In comparing models 1 and 2, the panel noted the boundaries to be relatively similar for Thomastown and Lalor wards. To the north, Epping was divided across 4 wards in Model 1 and across 5 wards in Model 2. Not only did the panel prefer the division of Epping over fewer wards, but the impact on surrounding wards was also considered more acceptable. Comparing Ganbu Gulinj and Kirrip wards in models 1 and 2, the panel found the boundaries to be cleaner and more sensible in Model 1. For instance, in Model 2 both wards extend well into Epping, combining communities of interest likely to have weaker connections with Wollert than would be case in Model 1. Kirrip Ward in Model 2 is oddly shaped in its south and the division of Wollert in Model 1 is considered more balanced and aligned to communities of interest.

Furthermore, Model 1 keeps Bundoora in a single ward, as supported by one submitter. The configuration of the two wards covering Bundoora and most of Mill Park in Model 1 was also preferred over the splitting of Mill Park across 3 wards and its irregular shape. Additionally, in Model 2 South Morang and Mernda wards use Darebin Creek as the western boundary, and while this was considered a strong feature for a boundary, the compromises made elsewhere to

accommodate it, resulted in a weaker model overall. Finally, the inclusion of Donnybrook in the North Ward was considered necessary, otherwise the ward would have had to extend south elsewhere. Including Donnybrook in the North Ward resulted in a more logical and well-balanced model, which the panel preferred.

The panel felt 2 minor adjustments to Model 1 would make small improvements in the final recommended model. Along part of Barry Road, the Thomastown Ward and Lalor Ward boundaries were moved to follow the suburb boundary, rather than Barry Road. Also, between Kirrip and North wards the boundary was moved slightly north so that instead of following a property boundary, it continued north from the intersection of Summerhill Road and Bodycoats Road to follow Summerhill Road to Epping Road.

The panel notes valid arguments both in favour of and against the different single-councillor ward structures examined in this review. However, the panel considers Model 1 to be the single-councillor ward model with the best potential to promote fair and equitable representation for voters in Whittlesea City Council and consequently facilitate good governance under the requirements of the Act.

The panel noted that introducing single-councillor wards represents a large electoral structure change for Whittlesea City Council. Achieving models that divide communities of interest into appropriate wards, while also accounting for population growth and distribution, as well as ensuring they comply with the +/-10% requirement through to and beyond the 2024 local council elections was challenging.

While it is difficult to predict the number of candidates likely to stand at future elections, past election results provide some indication. The panel examined past election results for Whittlesea City Council including numbers of candidates nominating, incidences of uncontested elections and rates of informal voting. It found there to have been relatively strong candidate numbers across all wards under the current electoral structure. The panel assumes this trend will continue under a structure of 11 single-councillor wards, minimising the risk of uncontested or failed elections under this structure.

Ward names

The ward names for the panel's recommended electoral structure were based on the following:

- Bundoora Ward: New name based on a locality. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Epping Ward: New name based on a locality. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Ganbu Gulinj Ward: New name based on a built feature in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Kirrip Ward: New name based on a built feature in the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.

- Lalor Ward: New name based on a locality. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Mernda Ward: New name based on a locality. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Mill Park Ward: New name based on a locality. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- North Ward: Existing name of a ward under the current electoral structure.
- Painted Hills Ward: New name based on a road found within the ward. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- South Morang Ward: New name based on a locality. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.
- Thomastown Ward: New name based on a locality. This name is registered in the VICNAMES register.

The panel considered specific feedback on ward names from public submissions and felt Ganbu Gulinj and Kirrip to be appropriate because they were the registered names of newly established community centres named using Aboriginal language.

The panel's recommendation

The electoral representation advisory panel recommends that Whittlesea City Council adopt an 11 single-councillor ward structure – 11 wards with one councillor per ward.

The recommended names for the 11 wards in this electoral structure are Bundoora Ward, Epping Ward, Ganbu Gulinj Ward, Kirrip Ward, Lalor Ward, Mernda Ward, Mill Park Ward, North Ward, Painted Hills Ward, South Morang Ward, Thomastown Ward.

This advice is submitted to the Minister for Local Government as required by the Terms of Reference of the electoral representation advisory panel and the Act. This electoral structure was designated as Model 1 in the preliminary report.

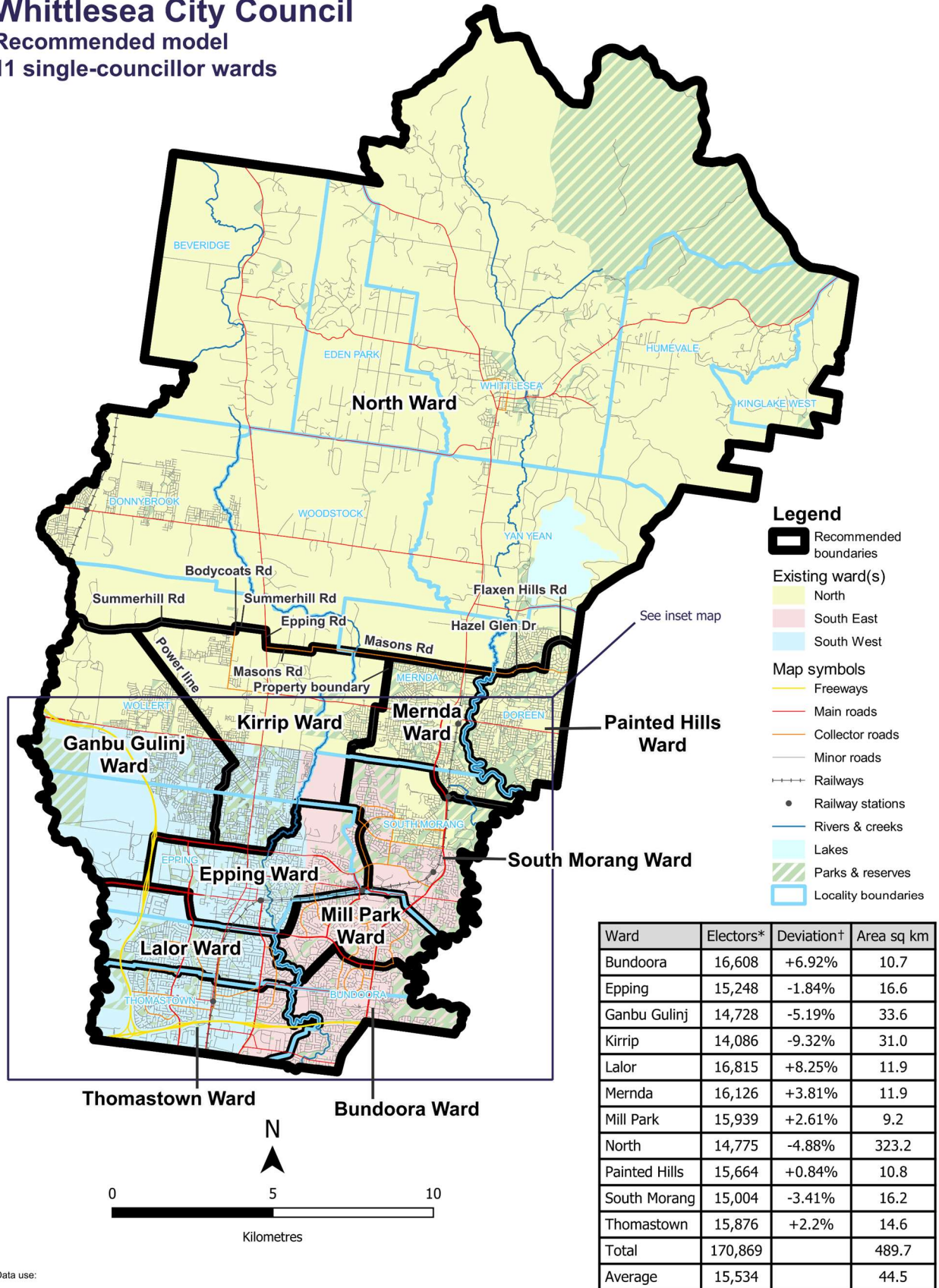
Detailed maps of the boundaries for the recommended electoral structure are provided as [Appendix 1](#).

References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2001), [2001 Census All Persons QuickStats, Whittlesea \(LGA\)](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022a) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Whittlesea \(LGA\)](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022b) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Greater Melbourne](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022c) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Wollert](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022d) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Mernda](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022e) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Thomastown](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2022f) [2021 Census All Persons QuickStats, Lalor](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- (2023) [Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), Australia, Suburbs and Localities, Indexes, SEIFA 2021](#), ABS, accessed 29 August 2023.
- DAFF (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (2021) [Catchment scale land use profile dashboard – Local government areas](#), DAFF, accessed 28 August 2023.
- DTP (Department of Transport and Planning) (2023), [Whittlesea planning scheme](#), DTP, accessed 29 August 2023.
- Electoral Act 2002 (Vic)
- Geographic Place Names Act 1998 (Vic)
- .id (informed decisions) (2023) [City of Whittlesea](#), .id, accessed 29 August 2023.
- Local Government Act 1989 (Vic)
- Local Government Act 2020 (Vic)
- Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020 (Vic)
- Whittlesea City Council (2023) [Suburbs and residents](#), Whittlesea City Council, accessed 29 August 2023.

Appendix 1: Map of recommended structure

Whittlesea City Council
Recommended model
11 single-councillor wards



Data use:

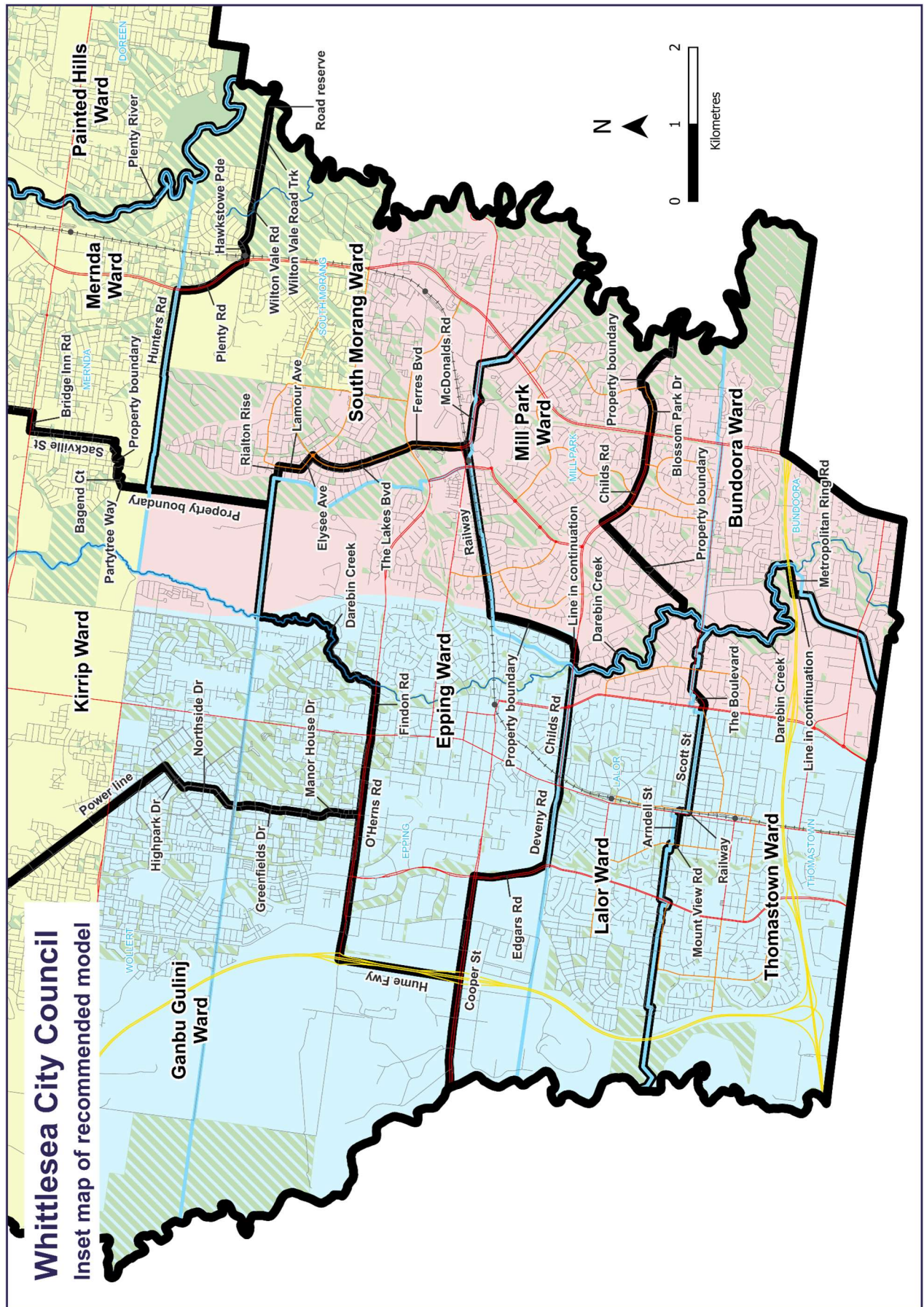


Layers for alignment:
 © State of Victoria (Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action)

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*Elector numbers as at 25 July 2023

†The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local government elections.



Data for recommended structure

Ward	Electors*	Deviation†	Area# (square km)
Bundoora	16,608	+6.92%	10.7
Epping	15,248	-1.84%	16.6
Ganbu Gulinj	14,728	-5.19%	33.6
Kirrip	14,086	-9.32%	31
Lalor	16,815	+8.25%	11.9
Mernda	16,126	+3.81%	11.9
Mill Park	15,939	+2.61%	9.2
North	14,775	-4.88%	323.2
Painted Hills	15,664	+0.84%	10.8
South Morang	15,004	-3.41%	16.2
Thomastown	15,876	+2.2%	14.6
Total	170,869	-	489.7
Average	15,534	-	44.5

* Elector numbers at 25 July 2023

† The deviations of all wards are projected to be within +/-10% by the time of the 2024 local government elections.

Ward area (square km) and total council area is measured at level of accuracy required for electoral boundaries. This may vary slightly from other data sources (e.g. ABS).

Appendix 2: Public involvement

The panel wishes to thank all submitters to the review and speakers at the public hearing for their participation in the review process.

Response submissions

Response submissions were made by:

Cox, Lawrie

Fry, John

Kotas, Kim

Mulholland, Evan MP and Lovell, Wendy MP

Public hearing

The following person spoke at the public hearing:

Burgess, Tom, (on behalf of Mulholland, Evan MP and Lovell, Wendy MP)

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