

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO BUILDING NEW COMMUNITIES

Terms of Reference

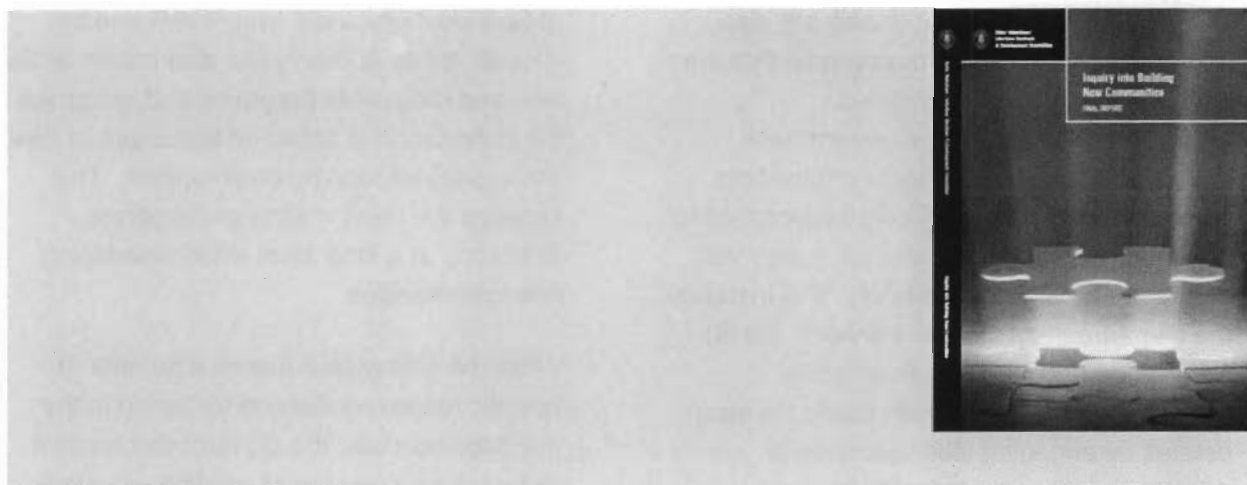
*'To inquire into and report to Parliament on issues relating to **strengthening communities** through improved community engagement in outer urban areas, including both developing and established communities'*

*Outer Suburban / Interface Services
and Development Committee*



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Introduction

The Government welcomes the Committee's report as a valuable contribution to our understanding of ways to build stronger communities in the rural-urban 'Interface' areas.

The Government supports the general thrust of the Committee's report and the central finding that government has an important role to play in assisting and empowering communities to identify and respond to the issues they confront.

The Government is currently implementing a range of policies and programs in different departments aimed at addressing most of the issues identified by the Committee. This is reflected in the response to each of the individual recommendations.

Where the specific approach recommended by the Committee is not currently being acted upon, such as formal awards for best practice community engagement, the Government will ensure the Committee's ideas are taken into account in the ongoing development of programs and policies.

The report implicitly supports the core work of the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) which is building strong communities. DVC defines these as active, confident and resilient communities, with a sustainable mix of assets (economic, human, natural, cultural) and strong networks that maximise the use of those assets. DVC has developed specific indicators to measure community strength that highlight community attitudes and opportunities for community participation and local networks.

The report also supports DVC's emphasis on support for new partnerships and networks that provide local involvement in the planning and delivery of services within communities. The strengths of the partnerships and networks in a community has been shown to affect things like crime rates and education outcomes in local areas. The report also highlights the importance of sound community engagement practices which is another focus of DVC activity especially in programs such as Community Renewal and the Community Building Initiative.

Other departments and agencies are also implementing policies and programs that are consistent with the Committee's recommendations. Across government, departments recognise that strengthening communities requires different approaches to community engagement, planning regimes and resource allocation models. For instance, the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Neighbourhood Renewal Program is transforming communities in public housing estates by engaging local residents in deciding priorities and identifying and implementing solutions. Residents, support agencies and local councils are working together to create more cohesive, safer and resilient communities. The Department of Innovation Industry & Regional Development Small Towns Development Fund is helping small towns create growth opportunities and build social infrastructure.

The Committee notes, and the Government recognises, that new communities and places on the rural-urban interface have special needs. These include rapid rates of growth leading to services lagging behind populations; few community organisations delivering services; and disconnected planning and delivery of infrastructure. One Government response has been the \$25 million investment under DHS' Growing Communities Thriving Children initiative in A Fairer Victoria 2006 to assist councils in Melbourne's outer and Interface suburbs increase services for children and their families. There is greater understanding that land use planning and the built environment are early drivers of community strengthening.

The Caroline Springs Partnership involving the Government, the Shire of Melton and Delfin Lend Lease is an example of partners working together to deliver integrated planning and timely delivery of services to a new and rapidly expanding community. This has resulted in an innovative education precinct with shared facilities and services and integrated health services. The Department

of Sustainability and Environment and the Growth Areas Authority are also implementing new and innovative programs that recognise the importance of social infrastructure to new and rapidly expanding communities. This includes the need to plan and organise differently at a local level when developing new communities.

While the Committee makes a number of specific recommendations for action in the Interface councils, the Government notes it already has a number of existing programs that include, but are not necessarily restricted to, these areas.

One of the main ideas in the report, reflected in a number of recommendations, is the need for a more comprehensive, whole of government approach to community engagement. The Government is currently supporting community engagement in a range of different ways which are outlined in the responses to individual recommendations. However the Government will, through DVC, consider how best to achieve the more integrated approach suggested by the Committee.

Whilst supporting a whole of government approach to community engagement, the Government is concerned not to be too prescriptive. Local communities and local councils need to be able to respond flexibly and innovatively to the challenges they confront. Whilst the Government does not support mandating specific processes it strongly supports processes that effectively involve people in the decisions that affect them including in planning processes that meet the present and future needs of communities.

The Government will work with local councils to encourage them to establish structures such as 'community precinct committees' to provide ongoing opportunities for community engagement and participation.

The Government's 2006 election commitments reinforce its focus on the ideas about building new communities that are contained in the report. The Government's Building Stronger Communities policy announced during the election, provides an additional \$102.2 million investment over four years for building community assets, supporting community organisations and funding community renewal projects across Victoria.

The Building New Communities report will help influence these new community strengthening investments. They include upgrading community buildings such as libraries and Neighbourhood Houses, more encouragement for volunteering, additional support for drought affected communities, additional community renewal projects and streamlining of government grants.



Government Response

2.1

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government work with the Interface local governments to further encourage small-scale **street parties** in local neighbourhoods.

AGREE

This recommendation is already **being implemented** in a range of programs.

The Government **supports** communities holding events such as street parties and recognises the benefits of these events as described by the Committee in building community cohesiveness and support. As noted in the Committee's report, the Government already provides grants for local government or other community groups to organise street parties through *A Fairer Victoria* 2005. Under the Government's \$22 million *Go For Your Life* campaign, Victoria's 79 Councils were provided a \$6,000 grant to localise a street party kit comprising advice on council planning permit requirements and public liability insurance. The grant could also be used to cover costs associated with establishing the program and publicising it, including printing costs and start up administration expenses. The Government has also assisted communities resolve insurance issues associated with such events.

2.2

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government examine and promote **web-based tools** and similar applications which empower local communities to assess the impact of small-scale community events.

AGREE

This recommendation is already **being implemented** in a range of programs.

The Government **supports** the Committee's view that small scale community events such as festivals and other events strengthen community cohesion and social interaction as well as having economic benefits. The Government supports communities being able to assess the impact of such events and already has a range of web based tools for communities to use in assessing the impacts. Arts Victoria provides a range of programs which are designed to assist in the development and presentation of cultural projects, programs, and services which benefit the Victorian arts industry and the community. These include a *Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Kit for Festivals and Events* which is available for use by festival and event organisers to assess the value of their event to the local economy. This web-based tool is available at <http://www.arts.vic.gov.au/arts/publications/publications/festivalsdiy.htm>.

2.3

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government work with developers, local government, universities and TAFE colleges to encourage **social capital research** to be carried out during the initial stages of new housing developments in the Interface areas.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), and the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the need for integrated planning of social infrastructure in new developments including in Interface areas, and is encouraging this planning through a diverse range of programs. \$20.6 million was provided over five years in the 2006-07 State Budget for the new **Growth Areas Authority (GAA)**, established to deliver the Government's **A Plan For Melbourne's Growth Areas**. The plan supports new infrastructure and services to meet growth and maintain housing affordability in Melbourne's five growth areas – Casey-Cardinia, Hume, Melton-Caroline Springs, Whittlesea and Wyndham – over the next 25 years. The GAA works with councils, developers and government agencies to plan new suburbs in a way that enhances quality of life for residents, creates local jobs and is environmentally sustainable.

Under *Direction 6 A fairer city of Melbourne 2030*, social outcomes are directly referred to which impact on social capital, specifically: 6.1 Increase the supply of well-located affordable housing; 6.2 Plan for a more equitable distribution of social infrastructure; 6.3 Improve the coordination and timing of the installation of services and infrastructure in new development areas; and 6.4 Develop a strong cultural environment and increase access to arts, recreation and other cultural facilities. Both DSE and the GAA support the development of evidence based research particularly in terms of learnings from social infrastructure provision and its impact on social capital and the physical and social well being of communities during the initial stages of new housing developments.

The Government is also supporting an Interface area community strengthening **partnership** in Caroline Springs. DVC, together with the Shire of Melton and Delfin Lend Lease, are working with community groups, industry and other areas of government to build facilities and services identified as needed by the community. A survey across neighbourhoods has been conducted by DVC for this project and this work forms part of a larger pilot study of indicators of community strength at the neighbourhood level. These indicators are adding to the growing evidence about community strengthening and community planning in Victoria. Work is also underway to examine the drivers behind the indicators of community strength.

In all of these activities the Government supports the importance of research into the role of social capital in making communities successful over the long term and encourages and utilises such research in these programs.

3.1

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government undertake an **audit of community engagement** practices across the public sector. The audit should assess support for community engagement within departments and identify any resourcing, skill or capacity needs, as well as opportunities for expertise to be shared across organisations.

The Government strongly supports community engagement processes being undertaken by departments and agencies when appropriate and there has been significant investment across government to assist and encourage community engagement in our communities. Departments and agencies generally apply and promote community engagement practices in the delivery of services, and many have specific tools in place to support effective community engagement. The Government reiterates the view set out in its submission to the Committee that there is no simple 'one size fits all' approach to community engagement.

There are a **number of tools** available to assist departments take a common approach. These include DSE's *Regional Matter – An Atlas of Regional Victoria*; *Melbourne Atlas*; *Best Practice Guide to Community Engagement*; and *Effective Engagement Kit*; and DVC's *Actions for Community Strengthening with Local Government*.

DVC has also prepared an **Implementation Framework** for Community Renewal that emphasises core principles regarding community engagement. The Committee's recommendation of an audit of community engagement practices and capacity in the public sector will be considered in the ongoing work of DVC. The Government will continue to encourage all departments to undertake community engagement processes where appropriate and will disseminate information within and between departments and agencies to ensure all public sector entities responsible for community engagement processes undertake them in the most advantageous way to ensure quality feedback to communities and to government.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

3.2

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government **promote awareness of community engagement** principles, planning and evaluation across state and local government through training and skills development.

The Government **supports** the widespread dissemination of community engagement principles, planning and evaluation across all State Government agencies and will ensure that these principles are incorporated into existing training and skills development opportunities for public sector employees. DVC is working with other departments in various programs, including the SSA, on the development of appropriate training programs for employees involved in community engagement. As described above, tools already in place to promote awareness of community engagement principles include hard copy manuals such as DSE's *Effective Engagement Kit* as well as information on its website, and DVC's **Building Stronger Communities** website and framework for

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC), the State Services Authority (SSA) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

Community Renewal. Other means of promoting training and skill development in community engagement will be considered in the ongoing work of DVC. The DSE Community Engagement Network offers a **2-day “Fundamentals” training workshop** on community engagement, together with intermediate and advanced 2 day residential courses. The DSE Community Engagement Network, in close collaboration with project partners, has also initiated the establishment of a **Statewide Community Engagement - Community of Practice**, which supports cross-disciplinary linkages between practitioners who are interested in collaborative and active learning approaches to support their own and others improved community engagement practice.

3.3

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government **commission research** into the financial costs of community engagement techniques, with a view to providing practical guidance to local governments, organisations and individuals.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) and the Department of Human Services (DHS).

The Government is currently promoting community engagement in specific programs such as **Community Renewal** and the **Community Building Initiative** in DVC, and **Neighbourhood Renewal** in DHS. As part of the evaluation of these programs the financial costs of a range of community engagement techniques will be identified. This information will provide practical guidance to departments, other public sector agencies, local government community organisations and individuals. Other ways of understanding the financial aspects of community engagement will be considered in the ongoing work of DVC. Research could be a useful adjunct to other practical guidance on community engagement currently available. It should be noted however that communities and engagement processes are different, and a fixed cost model would be difficult, and not useful, to define.

3.4

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government establish a high profile annual **awards system**, open to both state and local government, in order to showcase and reward best practice examples of community engagement.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

Whilst supporting the Committee's objective of showcasing and rewarding best practice examples of community engagement, the Government believes this is best achieved through a range of mechanisms including existing awards schemes: for volunteering; in sport and recreation; in rural communities; and, in multicultural communities. The showcasing of best practice is also achieved through the dissemination of case studies and community engagement experiences in a wide range of forums and publications across government, local government and the community sector. Many existing awards already acknowledge community engagement, for example, the **Go For Your Life Sport and Recreation Awards** and the **Regional Achievement and Community Award** (Volunteering category). The Government will consider the value of incorporating best practice community engagement as an assessment criterion in existing awards as these are reviewed from time to time.

3.5

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government investigate and review the Baw Baw consultation mapping initiative. Following this, the Committee further recommends the government promote the initiative with Interface local governments and provide resources to assist with its implementation.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the Committee's view that local government be encouraged to maximise the efficiency of community engagement and consultative processes. Local Government Victoria will continue to work with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) to ensure that examples of good practice such as the Baw Baw consultation mapping initiative are widely disseminated and, where appropriate, replicated. The Government also supports streamlining consultation with communities, of which the **Regional Management Forums** are an example. For example, the issue of coordinated consultative processes has been discussed at the Gippsland Regional Management Forum. The Government recognises the value of promoting successful initiatives aimed at streamlining community consultation across local government, will take steps to ensure this is recognised by all departments.

3.6

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government establish an agreement with local government in Victoria to: i) coordinate local and state government **consultations**, and ii) share information gained from consultations between the two levels of government.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the Committee's objective of ensuring that, so far as possible, State and local government consultative processes are coordinated and information collaboratively shared, recognising that timelines and information protocols may require different processes. DVC is currently supporting councils to improve their planning capability including, among others things, through the provision of funding to councils for data collection and community participation in planning processes under the **Local Area Planning Support Program**. These Guidelines were released in January 2006 and grants are currently being distributed to councils. Furthermore, coordination of local and state government activity and information occurs in each of the eight administrative regions in Victoria through **Regional Management Forums** on which all relevant local councils are represented.

It is well-recognised that improved data analysis will assist councils to engage their communities in decision making that affects the local area. Accordingly DVC, through Local Government Victoria, is also developing a **Victorian State-Local Government Agreement** to enact the principles in the national **Inter-Governmental Agreement Establishing Principles to Guide Inter-Governmental Relations on Local Government Matters**. This Agreement was signed by all State and Territory and Commonwealth Ministers for Local Government and the Australian Local Government Association in April 2006. The Victorian agreement will promote coordinated approaches to community needs and establish guidelines for communication and consultation between State and local government. There are existing agreements between State Departments and local

governments, such as **Victoria's Local Sustainability Accord**, which will in the future seek to incorporate better community engagement tools and approaches. The Municipal Association of Victoria and the Department of Human Services Partnerships Protocols also acknowledge community consultation as an area of mutual interest.

3.7

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government consider the feasibility of trialling a '**community organisation small grants scheme**' administered by local communities, along the lines of the New Zealand COGS model.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the concept of providing small grants to assist communities engage in planning process or similar activities. A range of grants are already available for this purpose to community organisations including **Volunteer Small Grants**, as well as **Planning** and **Community Strengthening Grants** through the **Community Support Fund**. The **Office of Disability** has grants for self-help groups, and the **Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC)** runs a significant small grants program. The Government also announced additional funding for new and existing grants programs during the 2006 election. These included an additional \$4 million for the VMC's Community Grants Program outlined in the 'Promoting Diversity: Strengthening Multiculturalism in Victoria' policy, the \$1.5 million grant program for local sporting clubs outlined in the 'Go For Your Life' policy, and the \$43 million Community Support Grants to help local communities outlined in the 'Building Stronger Communities: Your Street, Your Suburb, Your Community' policy.

3.8

The Committee recommends local government in Victoria investigate the suitability of '**community precinct committees**' as mechanisms to provide ongoing opportunities for community engagement and participation.

COMMENT

Recommendation for local government.

Noting this recommendation is directed to local government, the Government **supports** the thrust of the recommendation as supporting local community engagement and participation. Whilst the Government does not support mandating specific processes it strongly supports processes that effectively involve people in the decisions that affect them including in planning processes that meet the present and future needs of communities. The Government will work with local councils to encourage them to establish structures such as 'community precinct committees' to provide ongoing opportunities for community engagement and participation. This will build on support the Government is currently giving to local planning processes through the **Local Planning Support Program** and direct Government funding of community engagement processes in communities being funded under the **Community Renewal** and **Neighbourhood Renewal Programs**. The **Implementation Framework for Community Renewal** identifies local government as a key partner and encourages resident participation through a range of community engagement activities.

4.1

The Committee recommends the Department for Victorian Communities, in consultation with the community sector, review and publish its findings on the extent to which legislative and regulatory obligations faced by **community boards and committees** can be simplified.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by a number of departments.

The Government **supports** the thrust of the recommendation which is to reduce the regulatory burden on community sector organisations insofar as this is compatible with accountability and transparency requirements regarding the expenditure of public money. There is a body of work that has been, or is currently being, undertaken by various departments including the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) on improving regulation of the not-for-profit sector – see, for example, the DVC commissioned **Allen Consulting Group's Improving Not-For-Profit Law and Regulation Options Paper**. Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) is currently providing operational governance support to boards and committees and is leading three **pilot projects on governance**. In partnership with Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the Commonwealth Office of Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations, CAV is also delivering **governance training** to Board and Committee members and senior staff from a number of Victorian organisations, and developing training models to assist members of organisations understand organisational governance.

In addition, community organisations and boards will benefit from the Government's recently announced \$42 million commitment of **Reducing the Regulatory Burden**, which is intended reduce the administrative and compliance burden of regulation. This will ensure that production and service delivery activities of businesses and not-for-profit organisations are not hampered by unnecessary regulatory impositions. Current regulation of the not-for-profit sector in Victoria falls within the scope of this whole-of-government initiative. The Government's responses to the recent reviews of the *Associations Incorporation Act* and the *Fundraising Appeals Act* have also contributed to reducing unnecessary regulation. The Government notes that this focus on simplifying obligations as in clarifying reporting obligations and streamlining the processes is not intended to reduce duties of boards and committees.

The **Stronger Community Organisations Project** funded under A Fairer Victoria 2006, and led by DVC, will also contribute to these efforts, as well as contribute toward the identification of any further work that needs to be done with respect to regulatory requirements imposed on community organisations. This work will be built on by the Government's recently announced commitment in the **Building Stronger Communities** policy to develop **model legislation** which helps rather than hinders community and not-for-profit organisations and to use this to press for national change to relevant legislation.

4.2

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government work with the Adult and Community Education (ACE) Community Building Hubs to promote the need for ongoing **governance training** and the services provided by the Hubs to community organisations in the Interface areas.

AGREE IN PART

This recommendation is **supported in principle**, noting that there are many providers of governance training across Victoria.

The Government **supports** the role of the ACE sector in building stronger communities and this is reflected in the Government's recent decision to transfer departmental responsibility for ACFE from the Department of Education (DoE) to the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC). The Government has also committed an additional \$4 million to fund new equipment for ACE organisations in its **Skills For A Growing Economy** policy.

In relation to this specific recommendation, **ACE Community Building Hubs** currently focus on providing training and support to committees of management of small, local, community owned and managed not-for-profit organisations, giving priority to groups without a national or state support base or access to a tailored governance program. The service is learner-centred, responsive, flexible and 'face-to-face'. The Government will consider a range of options for promoting the Hubs service in Interface areas that have been used effectively in other areas, such as:

1. Referrals from local government to local Hubs, directly when approached by community organisations seeking funding and support and indirectly through Council websites and community notices;
2. Referrals from Neighbourhood Houses, local public sector managers and social service agencies dealing with community groups;
3. Articles and notices in local press; and
4. Government providing opportunities for Hubs to run information sessions at community forums.

Further promotion and awareness to these supports will be provided through DVC by providing links to information on resources provided by government to support community organisations.

4.3

The Committee further recommends the Victorian Government examine opportunities to **increase funding** to Adult and Community Education (ACE) organisations to enable the enhancement of the ACE Community Building Hubs initiative in the Interface areas.

AGREE IN PART

This recommendation is **supported in principle**, noting that any increased funding will need to be considered in the budget context.

Following the relocation of ACFE to **DVC** the Government will **examine** options for building on the **ACE Community Building Hubs** initiative. We note this was funded through the Community Support Fund until November 2005 and twelve ACE organisations are currently operating as Community Building Hubs in **six Interface** Municipalities.

4.4

The Committee recommends the Department for Victorian Communities, in consultation with the community sector, establish a '**skilled specialist**' program as part of its capacity building strategy for the sector.

The Government **supports** the Committee's objective of enhancing community capacity building through skills training and information activities. The provision of training is usually an integrated component of DVC's community strengthening initiatives which include **Community Renewal** and the **Community Building Initiative**. The Government has jointly established the *Agora Think Tank* and supports a range of organisations such as **Melbourne Cares**, **BacLinks**, **GoodCompany** and **VCOSS** to join community organisations up with skilled expertise available on a pro bono basis from the private sector. The transfer of skills across organisations and sectors is seen by the Government as an effective way of ensuring skills in community strengthening are built and sustained. This is also a matter that may be canvassed through the Stronger Community Organisations Project referred to in the response to recommendation 4.1.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

4.5

The Committee further recommends the Department for Victorian Communities examine the suitability of establishing a network of skilled and experienced **advisors** able to provide expert advice and guidance to local community strengthening projects.

The Government **supports** the intent of the recommendation which is to ensure there are skilled and experienced advisors able to provide expert advice and guidance to local community strengthening projects. However the Government considers that there are already a significant number of individuals and organisations who advise local communities on their community strengthening projects, and a range of relationships between them. **Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) Local Teams** are available to provide assistance to local communities in this regard and **place managers** and **project officers** are generally employed in DVC place based projects such as Community Renewal. In these circumstances the Government will continue to encourage the use of appropriately skilled advisers by local communities where necessary, however a formal network is not envisaged.

AGREE IN PART

This recommendation is **supported in principle**, noting that local communities are able to make choices about which advisors best suit their needs.

4.6

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government, as a matter of priority, work with local government to ensure community groups in Victoria have access to affordable **public liability** insurance.

The Government **supports** the objective of the recommendation which is to ensure community groups in Victoria have access to affordable public liability insurance. In 2002-2003 the Government implemented a significant tort **law reform program**, amending the *Wrongs Act 1958*

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

and other related legislation. These reforms were designed to put in place a legislative framework in Victoria that would facilitate a stronger and more flexible insurance market following the collapse of the HIH Group and the events of September 11, 2001. The key legislative amendments aimed at facilitating greater accessibility to public liability insurance cover included enacting volunteer protection provisions that transfers any liability of volunteers (in civil proceedings), where they undertake community work organised by a community organisation, to that organisation.

DVC supports, through the Community Support Fund, action by the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Council of Social Services to offer affordable insurance to community groups. The outcomes of these initiatives are regularly monitored through Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, Australian Consumer and Competition Commission, and Commonwealth and State Treasuries.

4.7

The Committee recommends Interface local governments investigate the Caroline Springs **community bank** model and work with developers to establish similar arrangements in new housing developments.

COMMENT

Recommendation for local government.

Noting this recommendation is directed at local government, the Government **supports** the recommendation and has implemented a relevant initiative through Regional Development Victoria. The **Your Town Your Bank** program, for which funding is committed to June 2007, provides grants up to \$20,000 on a matching dollar-for-dollar basis, to eligible rural, regional and Interface councils, on behalf of their communities. These grants are used by communities to undertake feasibility studies on establishing local banking or other financial services facilities. Communities located in the 48 rural and regional and the nine Interface council areas are eligible for funding consideration.

4.8

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government, in implementing A Fairer Victoria, move towards the development of funding models for community strengthening with greater flexibility and timeframes of a **minimum of three years**. As part of this, monitoring and evaluation requirements for projects should be well targeted and provide opportunities for learning, dialogue and networking between projects and stakeholders.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government is supportive of the thrust of the recommendation in relation to certain programs. Recent initiatives such as the **Community Building Initiative** and the **Community Renewal Program** administered by the DVC have had longer than 3 year funding commitments. These are flexible programs that allow local communities to come together to identify local solutions to local problems. Monitoring and evaluation are part of the project design of both of these programs. The **Arts Victoria Local Partnership Program** is another example of multi-year funding agreements (up to four years). Longer term funding, monitoring and evaluation will be examined in the development of similar programs in the future. Timeframes for funding need to be determined by

the length and needs of the project. It is an ongoing aim of Government to ensure effective evaluation and learning from funded projects.

The Government has also recently committed in its **Building Stronger Communities** policy to provide a **one stop portal** for community applications, using DVC's local teams as entry points for all government grants linking people to government and other community and business organisations. The Government has committed to improving the overall coordination and assessment across all grant programs, particularly around complex local projects and local area partnerships. The Government has also committed in the Efficient Government policy to best practice grants administration across all government departments to make it easier for businesses and community groups through reductions in time to access grants.

5.1

The Committee recommends the Department for Victorian Communities work with Victoria Police to identify and report back on measures to substantially reduce both the **cost of police checks** for volunteers and the length of time for police checks to be processed.

AGREE IN PART

This recommendation is **supported in principle**, noting that some forms of police check are already substantially subsidised by the Government.

The recommendation is **supported** in principle noting that the new Working With Children checks are already substantially subsidised by the Government. Other police records checks directly undertaken by Victoria Police are set by the Police Charges Regulations and many are conducted at the behest of the organisation itself, rather than to comply with any legislative requirement and most are processed within days. The Department for Victorian Communities will continue to monitor the impact of regulatory requirements for checks on volunteer activity; the Department of Justice will continue to monitor the efficiency of police check processing.

5.2

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government, in implementing A Fairer Victoria, work closely with the Interface local governments and existing training providers to coordinate, support and expand local **training opportunities for volunteers**.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the intent of the recommendation and is currently undertaking a range of activities to support the training of volunteers. Through the **Volunteering and Community Enterprise Strategy**, DVC is undertaking a focused and systematic study into local volunteering training needs in Victoria. This project is being developed with local government and will address the coordination, support and expansion of local training for volunteers in Interface areas. **Volunteer Support Grants** administered by DVC have also made significant investments in this area.

The Commonwealth Games Legacy Program **Games@Work** accredited short course, **Introduction to Community and Event Volunteering**, was designed to encourage people traditionally under-represented in volunteering for major events to volunteer. This includes people with disabilities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, early school leavers, indigenous people and unemployed people. **Adult Community Education** organisations have

continued to deliver this course on a fee-for-service basis with 75 organisations currently registered. The Government will look to further developing these training opportunities in future policies and programs.

The Government has recently committed an additional \$6 million in its **Building Stronger Communities** policy to expand and extend the Victorian Volunteer Small Grants program to include grants: to improve disability access; to allow established groups to improve technology; for groups to improve financial and marketing skills; and for equipment. This will further improve volunteer programs, including training opportunities for volunteers, across the state. In addition the Government has committed \$1 million to enhance the skills of current sports coaches and officials, and recruit new sports coaches and officials, and \$100k to assist volunteers from the 2007 World Swimming Championships to continue volunteering activity in local community sport settings.

5.3

The Committee recommends the Office for Youth improve the **YouthCentral website** to make it easier for young people to access information on local volunteering opportunities.

AGREE

This recommendation is **already** being implemented.

The Government **supports** the recommendation and in the ongoing development of the *youthcentral* website will continue to develop ways of attracting young people to volunteering opportunities. **Community Strengthening and Volunteering Division** of the Department for Victorian Communities will provide support to the **Office for Youth** in achieving this objective. The Government has also allocated \$6m to expand the Advance program to give more young people the opportunity to get involved in local volunteering.

5.4

The Committee recommends the Department for Victorian Communities provide support to the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Victorian Local Governance Association, the Victorian Multicultural Commission and volunteering peak bodies, to develop a model for **promoting local opportunities for volunteering** and other forms of community involvement at citizenship ceremonies.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently **being undertaken** by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the intent of the recommendation to have a range of models for promoting opportunities for volunteering. DVC will investigate how this can be built into existing activity supported through the **Volunteering and Community Enterprise Strategy**. In particular this investigation will focus on the **Volunteer Recognition Program** and local projects under the **Volunteer Support Grants program** which have been designed and implemented in partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria.

DVC is working closely with local government organisations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community representatives to develop approaches to local volunteering in CALD groups, and this recommendation will be progressed through those mechanisms. The Government notes that citizenship ceremonies are the responsibility of the Federal Government.

5.5

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government develop a comprehensive, practical guide for community organisations to involve **people with disabilities** as volunteers.

The Government **supports** the recommendation and in the further development of volunteering programs DVC, through the **Community Strengthening and Volunteering** Division and the new **Office of Disability**, will consider how best to involve people with disabilities as volunteers.

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently **being undertaken** by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

5.6

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government undertake research into Australian and overseas strategies aimed at linking **baby boomers** with **volunteer opportunities** and identify programs best suited to Victoria.

The Government **supports** the recommendation. DVC, through the **Community Strengthening and Volunteering** Division and the **Office of Senior Victorians**, is currently investigating how best to conduct joint research into Victoria-specific strategies to encourage and promote voluntary participation among senior Victorians. **GoodCompany** has been supported in a pilot project called *GreatCompany*, a professional volunteers program model which targets people aged 45 years and over. The Government is committed to establishing 25 additional Men's Sheds in metropolitan and regional areas which, among other things, will connect middle aged and older men to volunteering opportunities within their communities.

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently **being undertaken** by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

6.1

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government work with local government and developers to ensure community centres, such as **Neighbourhood Houses**, are accommodated and provided for as essential infrastructure in development plans for new communities.

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently **being undertaken** by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

The Government **supports** the thrust of the recommendation and has already established new Neighbourhood Houses in areas of high population growth and high need. In June 2006 the Minister for Local Government announced \$2 million funding for the establishment of new Neighbourhood Houses as part of its \$12.4 million commitment over four years to the **Modernising Neighbourhood Houses Program**. This program will provide nine new Neighbourhood Houses in areas of Victoria where communities will benefit the most from new services, including the **Interface councils** of Brimbank, Casey and Wyndham. Additionally, existing Neighbourhood Houses have benefited from this program with \$1.9 million funding for 43 redevelopment / co-location projects representing 13% of all Neighbourhood Houses. Of 105 projects for refurbishing Neighbourhood Houses including IT improvements (see response to Recommendation 6.3), 24 projects are in Interface council areas of Wyndham, Melton, Hume, Whittlesea, Cardinia, Casey or the Mornington Peninsula.

The Growth Areas Authority (GAA) has been established to work in partnership with councils and government agencies to provide advice to Government on land development, infrastructure and services in Melbourne's growth areas that are designated areas within the Urban Growth Boundary of 6 metropolitan municipalities. The GAA supports local government and developers working to enable community centres, such as Neighbourhood Houses, to be provided as essential infrastructure in development plans for new communities. Community centres – that provide for flexible, multi purpose, multi age utilisation, essential in the life of new communities – should be provided as part of the development process. The GAA notes that developers are increasingly supporting community engagement and planning processes (for example, see: the Stockland Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Report, 30 June 2005).

A plan for Melbourne's growth areas allows for the inclusion of Neighbourhood Houses in the Draft Initial State Development Contribution Plan (ISDCP). This has been possible as *A Fairer Victoria* provided a one off 'state funded' capital contribution for Neighbourhood Houses in 2005 - 2006. Education facilities have also been included in the ISDCP. This development will assist with integration of schools and community facilities in future Development Contribution Plans.

Such integration is also supported by the *Draft Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines for creating new communities in Melbourne's Growth Areas* where 'community facilities such as schools, libraries, tertiary education facilities and health facilities should be located on the edge of activity centres and close to existing or planned public transport services' (p. 13). In addition, the *Guidelines* state that 'planning for community infrastructure should maximise opportunities for collocation, integration and shared use of facilities across governments, community and the private sector' (p.13).

The GAA and DVC have commissioned a study to *Develop an Economic Model for Community Infrastructure Planning and Provision in Melbourne's Growth Areas*. The economic model is intended to establish the quantum of funds needed to support a new model for community infrastructure investment in Melbourne's growth areas.

GAA is working in partnership with the six growth councils to support the recently DVC funded Local Area Planning project 'Planning for Social Infrastructure in Growth Area Communities'. This will assist in determining standards for provision of community facilities at the neighbourhood, major and principal activity centre levels.

The Government has recently committed in its **Building Stronger Communities** policy to provide \$20 million from the Community Support Fund to build and upgrade government and non government **community buildings** making them more accessible to communities and to increase local involvement. Priority will be given to groups that provide multipurpose facilities and enhance

community participation, increase volunteer participations and increase empowerment and local decision making. This is in addition to specific new funding for new Neighbourhood Houses (see response to recommendation 6.2 below).

6.2

The Committee welcomes the increased **funding** provision for Neighbourhood Houses in the 2006/07 State Budget and recommends continued consultation with the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres to ensure funding for the sector remains adequate over time.

The Government **supports** the recommendation as is evident by the increased funding to Neighbourhood Houses which has provided a 25% increase in the hourly rate paid for coordination as well as an extra 2046 hours every week enabling Houses to offer more courses and activities. This is an increase of 34% on the current hours. The Government has also increased funding to the peak body and 16 networks that support the 338 Neighbourhood Houses across Victoria. DVC meets regularly with the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres as part of ongoing discussions and consultation regarding the support and development of the neighbourhood house sector.

The Government has also recently committed **additional investment** in Neighbourhood Houses in its ***Building Stronger Communities*** policy. This provides a further **\$5 million** for grants to upgrade, redevelop or co-locate existing Neighbourhood Houses, provide information and communications technology and purchase essential infrastructure.

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently **being undertaken** by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

6.3

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government, in conjunction with the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres and the Interface group of local governments, investigate options to provide information **technology support** for Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres.

The Government **supports** the recommendation and has already upgraded or established for the first time computer facilities in Neighbourhood Houses as well as improving public access to the Internet. Through the **Modernising Neighbourhood Houses Program** \$1.3 million in funding has been announced for 62 information technology projects at Neighbourhood Houses, representing 18% of all Neighbourhood Houses. The Government's ***Connecting Communities: the second wave*** policy is also increasing the levels of internet uptake including through the **Public Access Internet Program** (PIAP) which funds the provision of free or affordable internet access by community groups and organisations. There are currently 158 approved PIAP organisations; 80 are located in Neighbourhood Houses, Neighbourhood Centres, Learning Centres or similar community focused organisations. An additional \$5m grants program has also been allocated for neighbourhood houses as part of the Government's 'Building Stronger Communities' election

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently **being undertaken** by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) and Department of Education (DoE).

policy.

Neighbourhood Houses have proven to be an effective means of reaching key target groups and the Government will continue to encourage funding applications from them. The State funded Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board has also made significant investment in ICT in recent years benefiting the Neighbourhood Houses that form part of the Adult and Community Education sector. These include establishing mobile computer learning libraries, expanding internet access and providing lap tops and data show projectors to providers in remote areas and growth corridors. These developments will now be expanded on with the transfer of ACFE to DVC and the establishment of a new **eGovernment division** in DVC. This will result in the improved integration of ICT initiatives with broader government policy related to strengthening communities and building community capacity and skills.

6.4

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government provide **broadband capacity** to all metropolitan and Interface Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres, ideally as part of its roll-out of broadband to schools across the state. Where feasible, broadband should also be extended to Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres in rural or peri-urban municipalities.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC), the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF), and the Department of Education (DoE).

The Government **supports** the thrust of the recommendation and has already established the \$89.3 million **VicSmart Broadband Network** providing a fibre optic broadband network to all Victorian Government schools, including the upgrade of hundreds of telephone exchanges across Victoria. At the end of 2006, Victorian schools had obtained access to high-speed, business-grade broadband connection of at least 2 Mbps (megabits per second) – this will increase to 4Mbps by the end of 2008. Under current arrangements, Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres are entitled to these benefits, providing access to business-grade broadband infrastructure and other benefits for a monthly fee. Whilst internet access is currently not provided as part of these arrangements it can be negotiated separately with a carrier once infrastructure is installed at additional cost. For this reason, it is important for individual Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres to determine whether this infrastructure is the most cost effective method of obtaining a broadband internet connection.

7.1

The Committee recommends the Department for Victorian Communities monitor the progress of the Melton Learning Precinct and the Hume Global Learning Village, with particular focus on outcomes from the two projects in working collaboratively with the local governments and learning organisations, to improve the provision of high quality, **integrated learning and education** to residents, businesses and industry.

The Government **supports** this recommendation. The Government contributed \$2.5 million from the Community Support Fund for the Hume Global Learning Village and both projects are connected to the Victorian Learning Towns Network funded by the Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board. Both DVC and DoE will take an active interest in these two models and will disseminate learnings from both these projects.

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) and the Department of Education (DoE).

7.2

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government work with local governments and learning organisations, to investigate and improve the provision of suitable and affordable facilities and programs for agencies involved in **lifelong learning programs**, such as the University of the Third Age, which are outside the Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre sector.

The Government **supports** the objective of this recommendation. The 2004 Ministerial Statement *Future Directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria* recognised the importance of long term provision of adult and community education (ACE) and set out strategies to enhance the sustainability of ACE provision. The Government is committed to supporting the delivery of adult education programs and services and to building the capacity of community-based adult education organisations to deliver the priorities identified by the Ministerial Statement and the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE). The ACFE Board provides funding support to the University of the Third Age (U3A) Network with support of lifelong learning for seniors through U3As managed through DVC. DVC is working with the Statewide Network of U3As on developing and implementing strategies to improve access to U3As.

The Government's additional \$20 million investment from the Community Support Fund to upgrade government and non-government community buildings in **Building Stronger Communities** will include funding for a \$100,000 upgrade of the Nunawading U3A facility.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department of Education (DoE) and the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

8.1

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government, in implementing the Strategic Framework on Mentoring Young People, ensure targeted funding and support is directed to **youth mentoring** programs in the Interface areas.

The Government **supports** the recommendation. To date, Mentoring Projects have been funded in two Interface areas with funding of additional targeted projects due to be finalised in 2006.

The ***Linking Young People to Employment and Training Project***, implemented by Community and Regional Partnerships, engages with disengaged, unemployed young people within the Shire of Whittlesea. It provides an opportunity for young people to be linked with a trained community mentor who assists them to become work-ready and better connected to their community. The project consults with **Darebin Youth Consortium** and **Whittlesea Youth Commitment** as well as local government and businesses in the area.

The ***Beyond All Expectations Project***, implemented by the Emerald Centre for Hope and Outreach (**ECHO**), is also reconnecting young people with their community, school, further study or employment. This project enables young people in the Shire of Cardinia to build resilience, self awareness and community participation. ECHO's geographical area includes Emerald, Clematis, Avonsleigh, Menzies Creek, Cockatoo and Nangana in the north west of the Shire of Cardinia.

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

8.2

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government, in implementing the Strategic Framework on Mentoring Young People, specifically focus on providing guidelines and practical assistance for the **recruitment of mentors**. In doing so, particular attention should be paid to investigating issues concerning the recruitment and suitable matching of male mentors.

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the recommendation. A practice guide for mentoring young people has been produced as a practical resource to support those involved in mentoring programs for young people. ***A Guide to Effective Practice for Mentoring Young People*** was launched by the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs in September 2006 and draws on evidence of effective mentoring practice in Victoria, Australia and overseas. Mentoring practitioners around Victoria who participated in workshops held both regionally and in the Melbourne metropolitan region contributed to the Guide. The adoption and reinforcement of mentoring good practice principles and program components, including the recruitment of male mentors, the sharing of knowledge and building the evidence base are critical steps to building the capacity of the sector. A second resource focused on providing knowledge and tools to government departments funding mentoring programs is currently being developed for release later in 2006. The **Office for Youth**, with the **National Mentoring Partnerships** and **Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance**, hosted a 3 day training program in September 2006 for practitioners involved in mentoring to develop their skills and knowledge of effective youth mentoring practises and to share experience across Victorian

and Australia.

8.3

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government establish a 'GoldStar'- type program **recognising organisations** with good practice mentoring models. Grants should be made available to assist these organisations to share their expertise.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the recommendation in so far as it highlights the need to share good mentoring experiences. Agencies featuring high quality mentoring programs are being recognised during implementation of the Government's overall mentoring strategy. In addition to the training program led by the **Office for Youth** in September 2006, further networking and training forums are currently being planned which will include opportunities for agencies with high quality mentoring programs or innovative approaches to share skills with other mentoring agencies in Victoria. Given the mentoring experience available within Victoria, the **Office for Youth** is engaging with the **Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance**, the newly formed peak body for mentoring in Victoria, to look at models for increasing the capacity of mentoring agencies to provide sustainable mentoring opportunities to young people in the regional and metropolitan regions. An awards system will be considered in the evaluation of the Government's **Mentoring Strategy**. However, the Government does not believe grants over and above current support to organisations are necessary to achieve sharing of expertise.

9.1

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government develop and promote guidelines, protocols and tools to assist Government agencies to **form partnerships** with local government, communities and other stakeholders.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by a range of Departments.

The Government **supports** the thrust of the recommendation. Government agencies currently have access to a wide range of materials on formation of partnerships, including for example Department of Human Services (DHS) **VicHealth** partnerships material and Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) **Sport and Recreation Victoria** publications that provide case studies of successful partnership approaches. In addition, DVC is actively supporting innovative partnerships between local governments, communities and community organisations in Frankston, Whittlesea and Caroline Springs. Information relating to these partnerships is being broadly disseminated in a range of forums, including Regional Management Forums. The Government's implementation of the Intergovernmental Agreement on local government matters (see Recommendation 3.6 above) supports an environment in which State Government can further its efforts to adopt a partnership approach to working with local government.

9.2

The Committee recommends the Victorian

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation

Government work with local government, the Australian Government, business representatives and community groups to ensure small to medium sized enterprises are encouraged to enter into **partnership arrangements** of benefit to their local community.

are currently being undertaken by the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the objective of this recommendation. DVC has provided a range of assistance to encourage small to medium sized enterprises to enter local partnerships, and has cooperated with federal and local governments on a range of actions to promote such partnerships. State Government actions include support for **Melbourne Cares** and **BacLinks** in Geelong where partnerships are actively encouraged through a range of local activities. Such Partnerships are also an integral part of DVC's **Community Renewal Program**, which recently received an additional \$4 million funding in the Government's recently announced **Building Stronger Communities** policy. A total of 8 locations for Community Renewal have now been selected – Laverton, Frankston North, Whittington, Craigieburn, Hampton Park, Bayswater North, Rosebud West and Chelsea. This program is designed to tap into the significant growth that has occurred over the last five years in the proportion of all businesses, including small to medium enterprises, who partner with their local community (as identified by *Giving Australia Research*).

10.1

The Committee recommends local governments in peri-urban and rural areas apply a **triple bottom line** assessment process to large-scale urban developments, with specific regard to the likely impact on community cohesion in the local area. In doing so, local government and developers should seek to provide greater opportunity for public input in the siting and design of new communities.

COMMENT

The Government notes that the recommendation is directed to Local Government.

10.2

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government ensure resources are provided to assist all peri-urban and rural local governments experiencing rapid growth to undertake **enhanced community engagement** around the development and planning of new urban communities.

AGREE

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

The Government **supports** this recommendation. The Government notes different definitions of the term peri-urban and for the purposes of this response they are urban and rural locations in municipalities outside the metropolitan boundary which is made up of the municipal boundaries of metropolitan councils. For example, such locations in the municipalities of Geelong, Moorabool, Macedon Ranges, Mitchell and Baw Baw,.

DSE, in conjunction with local councils, undertakes strategic planning work in the corridors between Melbourne and Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Seymour and Latrobe Valley. These projects include growth strategies for corridors and assistance with local strategic planning activities such as outline development plans and local structure plans which are designed to assist councils, and infrastructure and service agencies, to manage growth. Assessing impacts of local growth and development, and promoting social cohesion, is principally the responsibility of individual councils as planning authorities. However, engagement with communities is a feature of partnership projects in which the Department participates or finances. The **Urban Improvements** sub-program of the **Creating Better Places** grants program provides funds to strategic planning projects in peri-urban locations. The program requires councils to outline how they will provide resources to support community consultation.

In 2005-2006 DSE participated in and financed such projects in Bacchus Marsh (with Moorabool Shire Council), Gisborne (with Macedon Ranges Shire Council), Geelong (with the G21 Alliance of Councils) as well as other corridor locations. In each case community engagement was a feature of the planning process. In the Gisborne example three information-consultation events were held in afternoon and evening sessions, and four editions of a project newsletter were distributed in the community.

In 2003-2005, DSE participated and six peri-urban councils cooperated in the **Fringe Metropolitan Strategic Planning Projects** in response to councils' input to **Melbourne 2030**. The projects included growth management in peri-urban towns, guidelines for sustainable subdivision, landscape assessment and other issues. A significant feature of the projects was the requirement that each should demonstrate innovative, comprehensive community engagement. Successful activities were undertaken at community fairs, at community-friendly meeting locations and times, and in community interaction on a dedicated, all-projects Web site that one council maintained

In 2006-2007 a growth planning project will be undertaken in the peri-urban area of Beveridge (Mitchell Shire Council) supported by DSE. The project is being scoped to ensure appropriate engagement in the structure planning process by residents and landowners.

Based on these experiences, and on the approaches of DSE regional offices in similar situations, it is anticipated that in accordance with present practice, all future strategic planning projects in new peri-urban communities in which the Department is involved will include assistance to councils and other stakeholders for community engagement.

10.3

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government establish a role, in conjunction with relevant peri-urban local governments, for the Growth Area Authority to monitor and report on the **impact of urban growth** on community cohesion in nearby peri-urban and rural areas.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

The Government **supports** this recommendation. **Sustainable Growth Strategies** for the Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo corridors are being developed by DSE in conjunction with councils, water authorities and infrastructure and services providers. While recommendations arising from the strategies are still in preparation, it is clear that in each corridor there is strong support for continuing to monitor and assess growth trends and impacts.

DSE along with other departments and agencies is also participating in and supporting the

preparation of the Geelong Regional Plan. The **G21 Regional Alliance of Councils** already recognises it has a role in growth monitoring and management in the sub-region – as exemplified by its leadership of the Geelong Region Plan, the sustainable growth strategy for the Geelong corridor.

Part 3AAB of the **Planning and Environment Act**, sets out the roles and functions of the GAA and describes its authority with respect to the 6 Growth Area Councils inside the metropolitan area. Included in the objectives of the Act is 46AR (g) To foster the development of communities in growth areas. Accordingly, the GAA has no role with respect to Peri-Urban and rural areas outside Melbourne growth areas.

10.4

The Committee recommends the Victorian Government consider providing assistance, such as guidelines and small grants, to encourage the establishment of **farmers' markets** in the Interface areas.

AGREE IN PART

Key elements of this recommendation are currently being undertaken by Regional Development Victoria (RDV) and the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC).

The Government **supports** the objective of this recommendation. RDV's **Community Development Program** for small communities in Interface councils funds events up to \$10,000 and funding is available through this program for farmers' markets. At least one farmers' market has been funded so far. Funding for such markets is also available through DVC's **Victorian Volunteer Small Grants**. Examples of a grant already provided is the Mornington Community Garden project part of which is a farmers' market.

In addition the Government has recently committed \$2 million in its **Provincial Victoria** policy to support farmers' markets as a community-based option for farmers to deliver their products direct to consumers. There are currently more than 30 such markets around the State. The Government will work with the Farmers Markets Association and Local Market Groups to help **grow markets** by working to achieve quality, improve standards, and help markets with small scale infrastructure. In addition, the Government has facilitated changes in legislation that simplified regulatory management of farmers markets.