

City of Melton community meeting space - engagement summary report

October, 2024



Timbertop Community Centre pictured

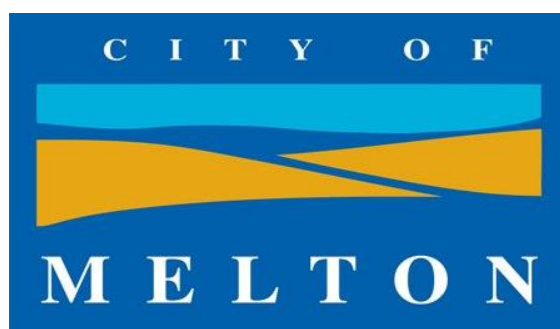


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Introduction

In the first two weeks of September, 2024 Melton City Council undertook community consultation in relation to how the community experiences community meeting spaces within the city. This included a survey and online webpage. Flyers with QR codes linking to the survey were also placed at community meeting spaces around the City.

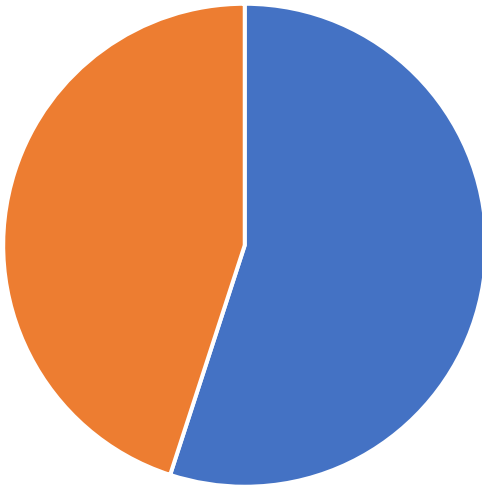
The survey forms part of a wider review on the way that Melton delivers community meeting space. Melton has a standard design for these spaces within a community centre setting, with the design typically for 150sqm of floor space (+ storage) within level 1 community centres and 200sqm for level 2, as well as a smaller meeting room and a community kitchen. Level 3 centres, which would include a specialised use such as library or youth/seniors centre typically include meeting rooms as well as IT training rooms.

There is a significant amount of public resources invested in these spaces, therefore it is pertinent for Council to monitor the extent of their use over time and to make an ongoing effort to understand how the community are finding them so that modifications to designs, or relevant investigations can be made where appropriate.

Community members are thanked for providing their time to complete the survey. Participation rates were considered moderate - 10 people responded to either most or all of the questions, there were also a number of partial responses. The responses are not enough to be considered a broad representation of community sentiment, though they are nonetheless insightful and warrant future investigation of certain matters that could lead to changes.

Key insights from community survey responses

Most of the completed responses were from members of community groups including cultural, social and church groups. Although there were 20 surveys submitted, the amount of people responding to each question varied. Insights are mentioned in terms of the number of people responding to each question.

Question 1: <u>Do you currently use a community centre within the City of Melton?</u>	11 of 20 respondents indicated they currently use community meeting space in Melton. Users of community meeting space  ■ Users ■ Non users
Question 2: <u>Name/Community Group</u>	Responses were received from a variety of members of community groups including social, cultural and church groups.

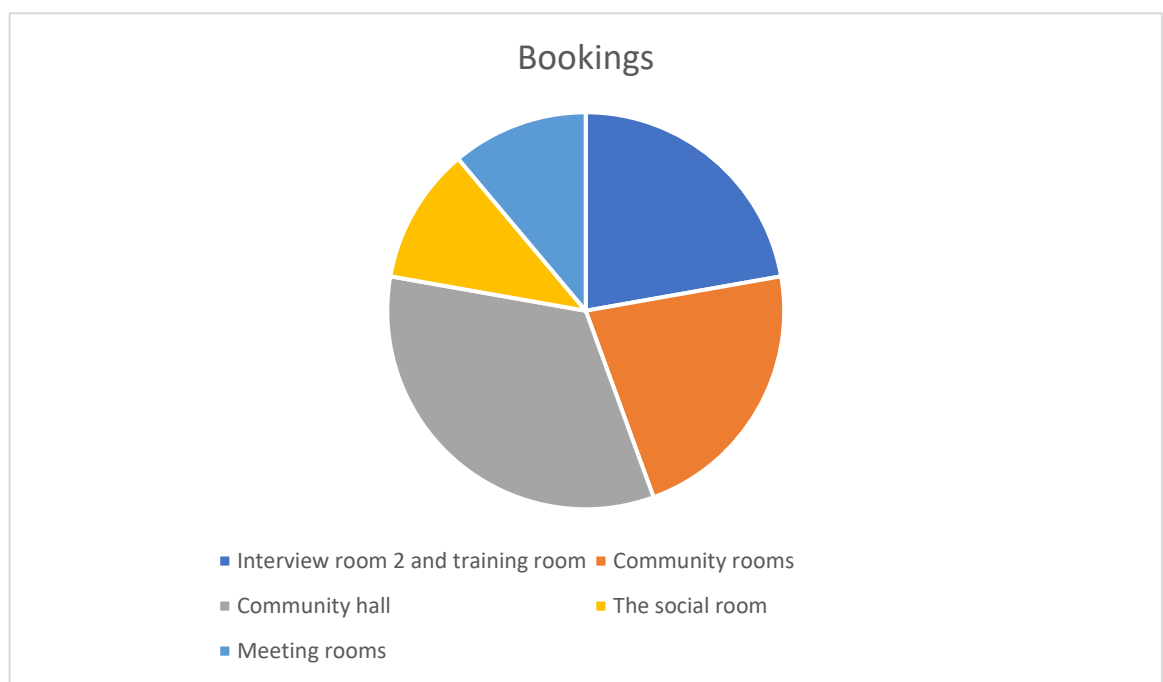
Question 3:
The Centre
that you
usually book
at

9 respondents indicated the particular centre that they booked at, 2 indicated that they typically booked space at Taylors Hill Youth and Community Centre, whereas all others had bookings at diverse spaces around the municipality.



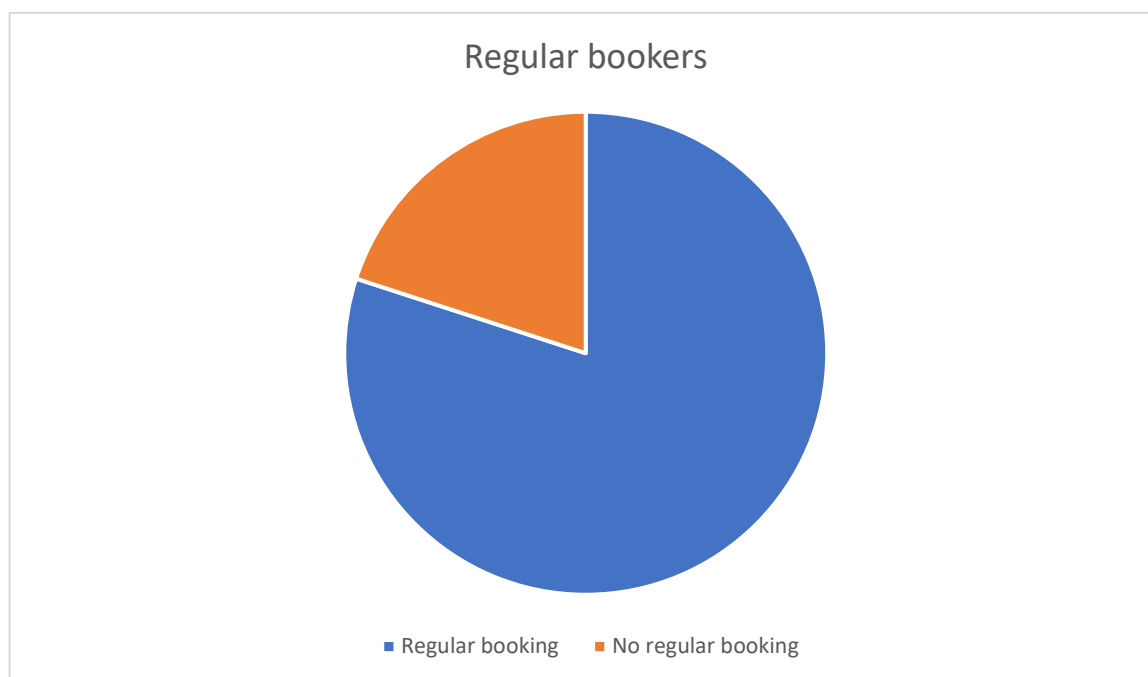
Question 4:
The specific
community
meeting
space that
you book

There were 9 responses. Spaces booked included community rooms, interview rooms, the “Social” room, small meeting rooms and community halls (including kitchen).



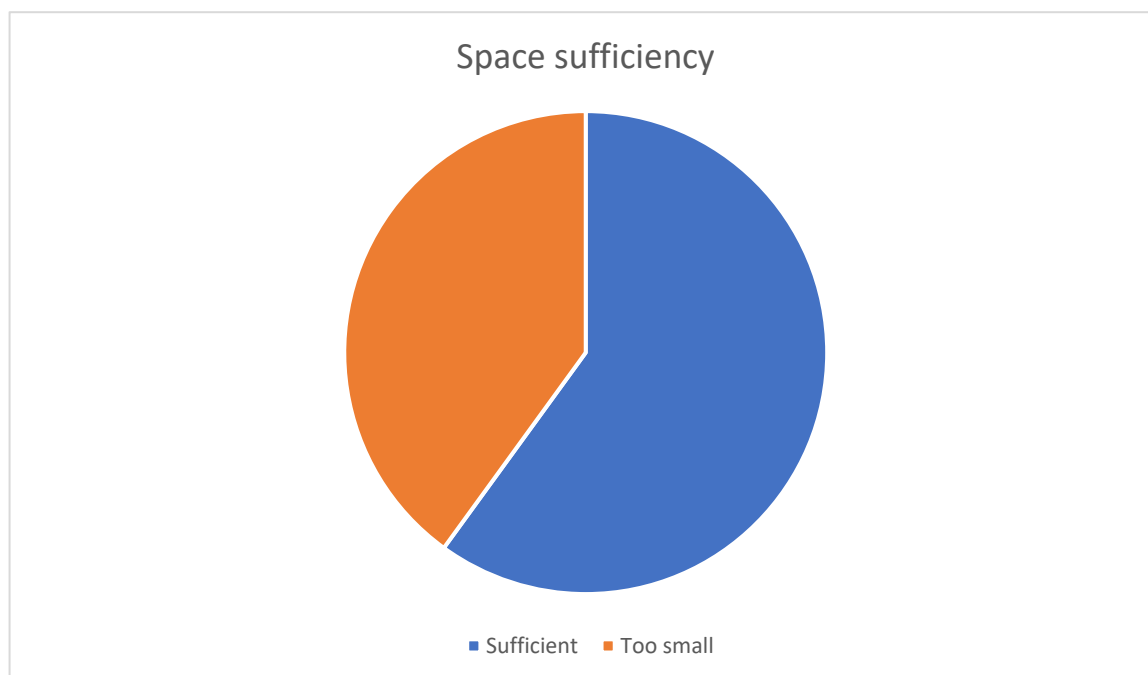
Question 5:
Do you have a regular booking?

8 indicated they had a regular booking and 2 indicated that they do not.



Question 6:
Is the size of this space you usually use suitable for the needs of your group?

6 of 10 respondents said that the space was sufficient for their groups needs, whereas 4 said that the space was too small. The four people who said that the space was too small gave suggestions for bigger spaces including 25% bigger, "much bigger" hall to fit 150-200 people and training rooms to fit 20-40. One said enough for 250 people.



Analysis

This highlights a potential issue with Councils community meeting spaces, that delivering a fixed quantity of space does not necessarily suit the needs of all groups - with some groups requiring more space than current designs provide for, and some finding current designs OK. It is also understood from a past consultation that seniors may need more space for their activities.

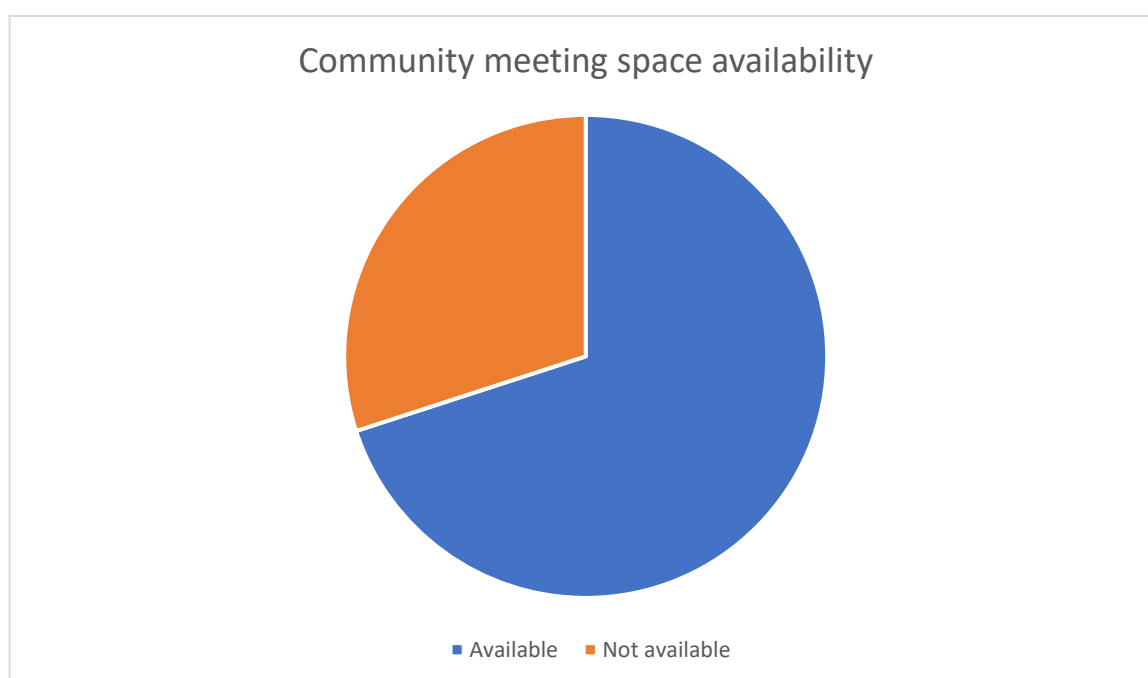
Cost is a key consideration, because construction costs have outpaced the general rate of inflation for many years, reducing Councils overall ability to pay for space. Going forward, it will only be obviously possible to simultaneously address the need for more space in some areas, with the need save money by:

- Providing more space in some future community centres and proportionately less in some others, in order to offset costs overall.
- Providing more space in some centres by improving the cost effectiveness of construction, such as through relying on modular facilities for spaces – which entail a trade-offs to aesthetics.
- Swapping insulated storage spaces for sheds connected to the building – with a trade off to aesthetics.

Question 7:
Is
community
meeting
space
available
when you
need it?

A total of **10** people responded to this question.

- **7** said generally available.
- **3** said generally not available.



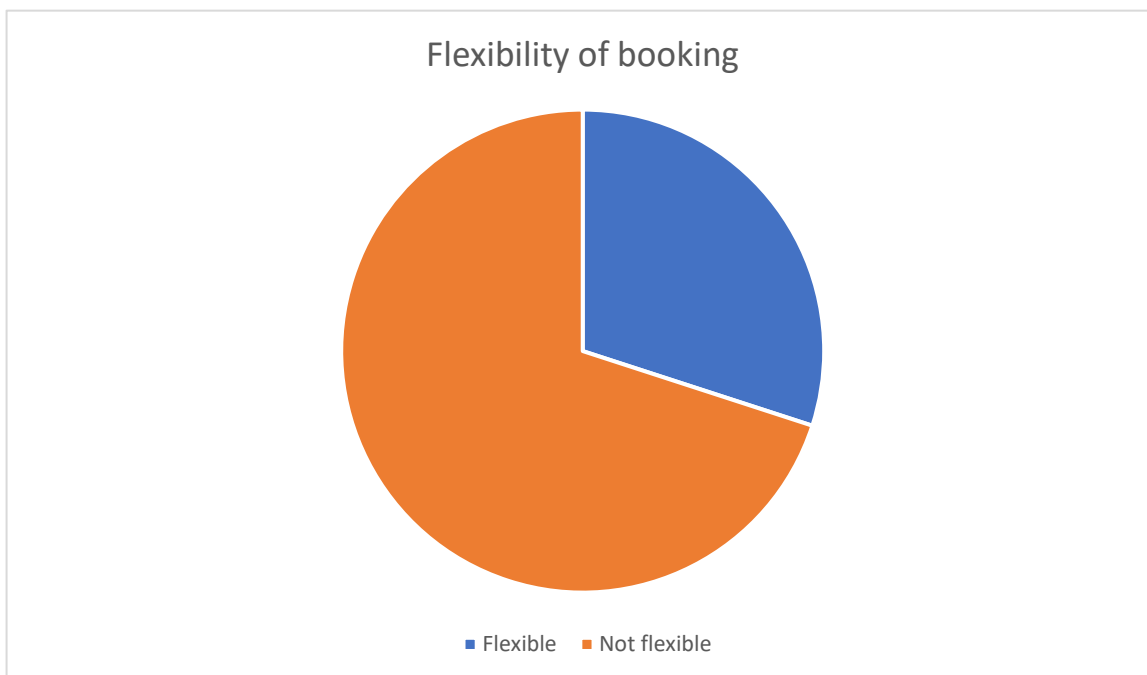
Analysis

This highlights an issue that although the average level of utilisation of community meeting spaces is not particularly high as revealed through data, the level of utilisation varies by area and it is likely to vary by time of day, type of facility and the day of the week. For instance plausibly more people would book community meeting spaces on weekends than Mondays.

Question 8:

Are your bookings flexible?
That is, if you cannot book at the centre during one time of day, are you able to book at another time/day?

A total of **10** people responded to this question, with 7 indicating that their booking is not flexible and 3 indicating that it is.



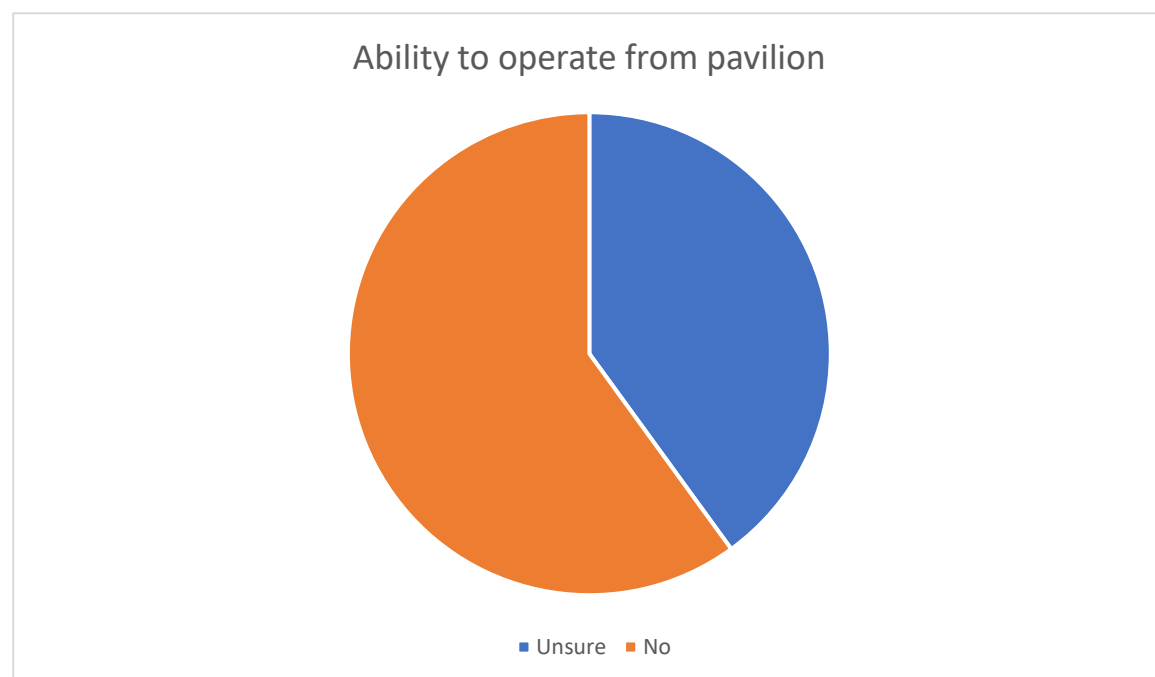
Analysis

The extent of inflexible bookings would potentially mean that when bookings can't be swapped to another time of day and can't be swapped for an equivalent room type elsewhere (if it is booked out for instance), the consequence could be more significant – such as being unable to run a community group at all.

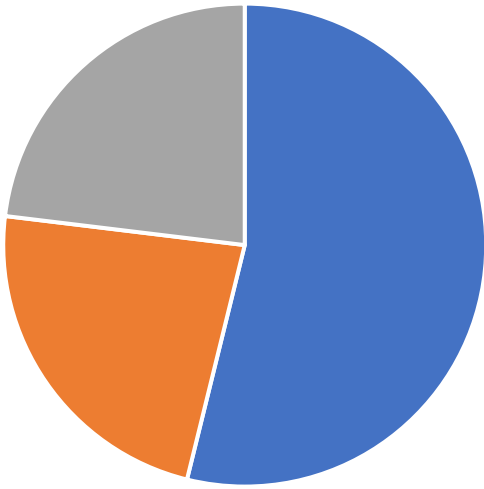
Question 9:

Could your group run from the community meeting area of a pavilion?
Note: Most pavilions in Melton are able to be booked from 8am to 3pm on weekdays only.

From 10 respondents who answered this question, 6 said **no** and 4 said unsure.



	<u>Analysis</u> With 40% of responses indicating they were unsure and no responses confident that a pavilion could be used, the answers highlight that the potential to use pavilions for community functions is not fully understood. Whilst there is already a reasonable amount of information about the bookable pavilions on the website, Council could review its website information to ensure it is all clear. Booking pavilions is also harder than booking most spaces, as it requires an email or call to venues as a starting point whereas many other facilities can be automatically booked. It is understood that most Council pavilions, except for 2, are already available to the public before 3pm. Typically the sports clubs who utilise them do not require them for use in this timeframe. Council could consider a standard policy ensuring that pavilions are always available to the public before 3pm - which has the potential to ease pressure on other community meeting space. Any renewed licences/leases could then accord with this policy.
Question 10 is there an <u>expandable</u> <u>room divider</u> <u>in the space</u> <u>that you</u> <u>book?</u>	5 out of 10 respondents said that there was and 5 said there wasn't. Of people who answered a sub question about whether it was difficult to use, 2 said that noise is an issue, 2 said that the divider was difficult to open/close and 0 said that privacy was an issue. <u>Analysis</u> Although there is limited evidence from the small response pool, the venues team have indicated that noise/privacy is an ongoing issue with hirers and that room dividers potentially should not be included at all. However removing room dividers would significantly reduce the overall availability of community meeting space, as providers would more often be booking areas that are larger than they need. Council needs to carefully select room dividers so that: 1. They effectively muffle noise and 2. They are easy to open/close.
Question 11 <u>Are there</u> <u>any specific</u> <u>locations</u> <u>where you</u> <u>would like to</u> <u>see new</u> <u>community</u> <u>meeting</u> <u>spaces built?</u>	Question 11 responses comprised: 1. Rockbank – due to lacking a modern community centre. 2. Rockbank East sport precinct, Rockbank future town centre for a library. 3. New library between Melton township and Caroline springs. 4. Thornhill Park and Cobblebank. 5. Refers to the Melton North precinct structure plan and the lack of open space and community centre development, despite the provision trigger that is mentioned in the DCP being passed. 6. Library in Aintree. 7. Diggers Rest. 8. Diggers Rest 9. Caroline Springs 10. Between Mt <u>Atkinson</u> and Grandview Estates, Truganina. 11. Deanside. 12. Diggers Rest 13. Melton or Caroline Springs 14. Melton South 15. Deanside <u>Analysis</u> The majority of the areas mentioned have new community centres being planned within planning documents that commit Council to their eventual provision - including Rockbank East, Rockbank South, Thornhill Park, Cobblebank East, Diggers Rest, Mt Atkinson West and two community

	centres planned in Deanside. A community centre for Melton South is under consideration. There are also future libraries for Aintree North and Fraser Rise to be provided. There is a level 3 community centre in in Rockbank required to be provided, which is anticipated to include a specialised component such as seniors/youth space or library. With regard to Melton North Community Centre and active open space, it is understood that this infrastructure will be provided beyond the indicative provision trigger within the Melton North DCP. The Zone applying to where the land is located requires that than an Urban Design Framework is approved before land can be subdivided, which is necessary to support development. The land must subdivided before construction – because Council will need to own a suitable parcel for the development. The situation is expected to resolve within the medium term.								
Question 12 <u>Are you happy with the sizes of community meetings spaces currently available?</u>	A total of 13 people responded to this question – 7 said no, 3 said don't know/unsure and 3 said yes. Happy with the size of community meeting spaces <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Response</th><th>Count</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>No</td><td>7</td></tr><tr><td>Yes</td><td>3</td></tr><tr><td>Don't know</td><td>3</td></tr></tbody></table> Analysis: Even from this small cohort of responses, it is clear that the typical size of spaces are not meeting the needs of all users.	Response	Count	No	7	Yes	3	Don't know	3
Response	Count								
No	7								
Yes	3								
Don't know	3								

Question 13:

Which of the following options would you be willing to accept to allow bigger community meeting spaces in new facilities?

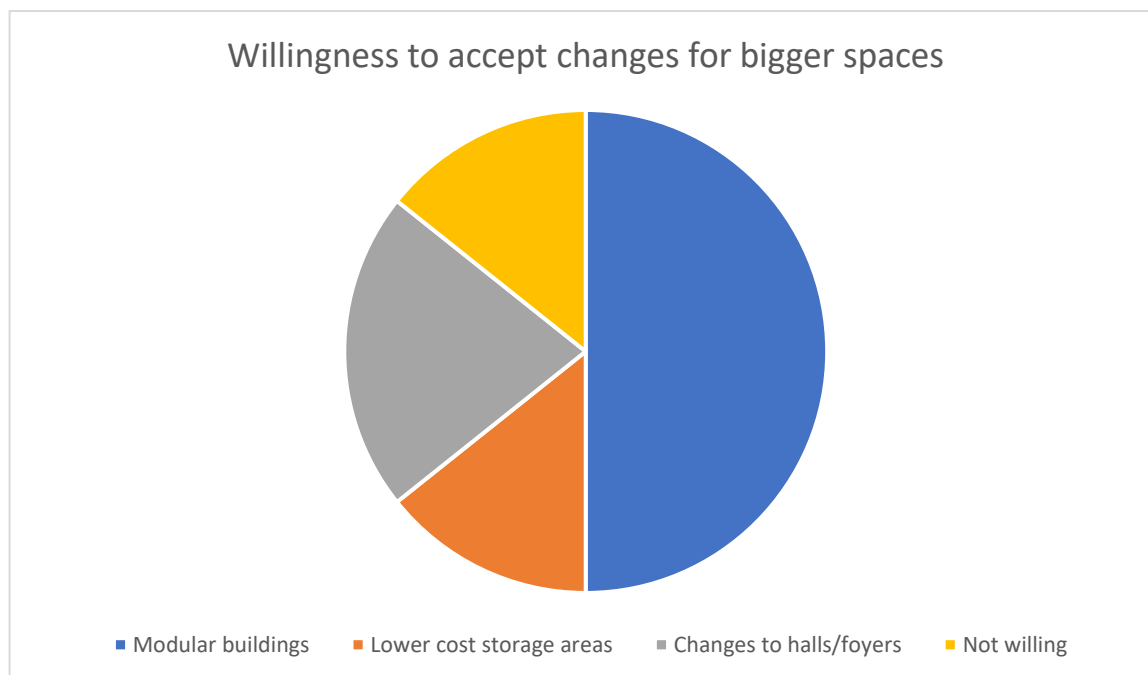
Specific options were given.

7 people indicated modular buildings.

2 people indicated lower cost storage areas e.g shedding.

3 people indicated changes to halls/foyers e.g make them semi outdoor with shade sails or tin rooms.

2 people indicated that there shouldn't be a compromise - specifically build bigger meeting spaces without compromising on other things. One person said that Council should deliver what was promised.



Analysis: Most people responding indicated some acceptance of alternative building methods for more space, particularly modular buildings.

Two people indicated that there shouldn't be a compromise for more space, however the reality is there is a finite level of money available, and as of 2024 the financial environment is significantly more challenging than it has been with construction cost increases outpacing the growth in community infrastructure funding sources. There is a need to review methods of delivery to ensure responsible stewardship of Council finances and reduce costs where reasonably practicable.

Melton could investigate the possibility of delivering larger spaces in at least some instances, to suit the needs of some groups, amid a constrained fiscal environment. This may be possible with modular or other facilities.

Key insights from positive ageing

The positive ageing area of Council also provided information from past consultation with seniors, on the sorts of spaces preferred.

Representatives from around 20 local Seniors Groups were involved in five workshops, one outcome was the development of priorities for the development of a new facility that meets their specific needs and aspirations.

Priorities:

1. **Capacity to accommodate 200 seated guests** – for social events, indoor bowls, flooring appropriate for dancing
2. **Commercial kitchen** – seniors can cook together as a part of their activities, better for event catering, hold cooking classes/demonstrations
3. **Multi use rooms** – for computer classes, committee meeting space, arts/crafts activities
4. **Storage** – accessible out of hours, caters for Seniors Group administration/resources to be kept onsite
5. **Acoustics** – soundproofed meeting rooms, acoustics in hall suitable for lots of seniors to communicate with each other
6. **Outdoor areas** – bocce, gardens, contemplative areas

Other design considerations:

- Better signage
- Computers for Senior-to-Senior learning
- Parking, more accessible, closer to entrance & policed
- Reception area so people can be welcomed and directed to what is on offer, get information about Council and other services
- Possible playground area for senior carers with children /grandchildren
- Foyer/informal space
- Access to admin facilities (photocopier, computer)
- Furniture design: stackable, OHS, storage

Participants also highlighted what they wanted a seniors focused facility to achieve:

- A place to go and make friends
- I can get the information I need
- A place to belong, relax and be myself
- I can be in a safe learning environment
- Fellowship

Analysis and recommendations

Whilst responses to this survey are not considered extensive enough to broadly represent the community, there was still a moderate amount of responses which should be considered in the context of future work around community meeting space planning going forward, including the timing and make up of community meeting spaces.

Consultation has raised a need to consider matters for investigation.

Notably there was a **preference for larger spaces** from some groups, which would meet a wider array of needs. At the same time, there is a need to lower Councils costs for community centres.

Below are matters recommended for investigation:

- Designing future community centres to have varying amounts of community meeting spaces, to make some with bigger spaces and others with smaller spaces to suit a wider array of user group needs.
- Investigating the feasibility of partnering with schools to provide additional meeting areas during peak times.

The level of community meeting space across the city is not the same and some community members highlighted a lack of community meeting space in their area, and that they were unable to book space when they needed it. In the long run it is desirable to optimise the **equity of community meeting space allocation**. The quantity and quality of community meeting space provisioning is understood to vary across the LGA.. Some parts of the city – particularly some growth areas, are poorly provisioned.

To address this, the below matter is recommended for investigation:

- Over the long run, Council could aim to achieve similar levels of provisioning per 1000 residents across the different parts of the city. This could mean building more space in the areas that have relatively less space, and less space in areas that have relatively more.

With infrastructure costs increasing faster than funding sources over a long period, there is a strong need for **more cost effective space**. The survey attempted to test community tolerance for different methods of saving money on community centres – because the financial reality of the day means that cost saving efforts are essential. 7 people indicated that modular buildings may be worth pursuing if it allows for more space.

The below matter is recommended for investigation:

- The cost savings, long term maintenance costs and the pros and cons of modular construction in particular, as well as other ideas to save money, need to be properly understood before being pursued.
- The level of provisioning could be modified so that it is based on an expected level of infrastructure utilisation as per the methodology at **Appendix 1**. The general idea is to try to understand the amount of space that needs to be provided per 1000 residents to enable a targeted level of community meeting space utilisation e.g. 5 hours per day. In theory providing more space per 1000 residents will lower the average utilisation level (as the bookings would be spread out across more spaces), whilst providing less space per 1000 residents would increase the level, with more residents booking across lesser amounts of space. Council could target a level of provisioning for each area that is neither too much (as this would cause inconvenience to residents) not too little (to ensure value for money for the space that is provided).

Possible seniors spaces. The current Melton seniors hall is an older facility showing signs of wear and tear, the facility is also one of the best utilised in Melton. The population is known to be ageing rapidly, therefore Council needs to adapt to better accommodate the potential for residents to age in place:

- Investigate the possibility of a seniors priority community space, useable by all – but with seniors groups given priority over long term bookings. The infrastructure could be tweaked according to the needs of seniors.

Room dividers Whilst only two respondents indicated that room dividers are a problem, Councils venues team – who regularly deal with those who book community meeting space, have indicated that the room dividers are a common issue for the users of community meeting spaces. It is considered problematic to entirely remove the room dividers because it would significantly reduce the number of bookable spaces, therefore the potential to invest in superior quality room dividers that A.) Properly muffle noise and B.) are easy to use, needs to be investigated.

Appendix 1: Methodology for a utilisation-based approach to determining the level of community meeting space provisioning

A methodology for determining future provision levels based on supply and demand

The project aims to establish a **dynamic equilibrium** where the amount of community meeting space available adequately meets the needs of the population without excessive underutilisation or overutilisation of these spaces (such as a situation where large amounts of people are unable to book venues). To do this, the amount of space provided in future will need to be based on a chosen/targeted level of utilisation – the below research will help to understand this.

A methodology to enable this project is provided below.

1. Understand peak demand and current utilisation by type of space:
 - Categorise community meeting spaces by type (e.g., large meeting rooms, IT training rooms, kitchens, dedicated seniors space, lecture hall type presentation venues).
 - Identify peak usage periods (days, times) from booking data from a recent sample month that did not have public holidays.
 - Track instances where all similar facilities in an ID forecast area were booked during peak times.
2. Establish Utilisation Targets
 - Define a targeted level of utilisation for each facility type, taking into account the particularities of use for each type of space.
 - Example Targets:
 - Average utilisation across the whole week: 5 hours/day.
 - Weekend utilisation: Facility booked an average of 8 hours/day (where it is available for 16).

Establishing the target would involve consideration of:

- The analysis at 1.
- An understanding of the gaps between bookings that are too small to run a group e.g 15 and 30 minutes. These gaps are expected to mean that facilities can never be fully utilised and may mean that a facility that is available for 12 hours but booked for 10 is at full utilisation.
- A focus on non-business hours (particularly weekends) will be important because not everybody has the opportunity to book facilities in business hours - however some flexibility on behalf of the community to book in non-peak times, or to drive to other suburbs where space is available in peak times, could potentially be expected.
- Community meeting spaces are expensive and there is a need to balance the community desire for optimal availability with the need for financial sustainability/responsible stewardship of public funds.
- The targeted/chosen level will be a level that Council is comfortable with, with recognition of the pros and cons of providing that level of space.

3. Establish Current Provision

- Gather data on the size (sqm) of all community meeting spaces per ID forecast area by category of community meeting space.
- Calculate the existing per capita provision for space in each ID forecast area on a per 1000 population scale e.g 5sqm of IT training rooms per 1000 people.

Note: Council already understands the number of spaces it owns but needs to ensure that it has the exact size of all spaces.

4. Plan for Future Provision

- Work out relationship between community space utilisation and the level of provisioning.
 - Determine the existing relationship between facility utilisation and the provision of community meeting space for each category of facility, for instance if facilities are booked 4 hours per day with current provision of 25sqm of space provided per 1000 people, then the relationship is 25sqm of space per 1000 sqm: Is equivalent to 4 hours per day of use per facility.
 - Assume that this relationship will hold constant, for instance if provisioning is doubled to 50sqm of provisioning per 1000sqm, then it could be assumed there would be half the average amount of use for that type of facility per day, because presumably the same amount of bookings per capita will be spread across twice the amount of facilities per capita.
 - Based off the existing relationship between facility utilisation and provision ratio, work out the amount of provisioning per 1000sqm people that would meet Councils *targeted* hours of utilisation, as defined at 2.
- Population Projections & Future Needs:
 - Obtain population projections for each ID forecast area at 5 year intervals up to 20 years into the future.
 - Multiply projected population by the target per capita provision to estimate required community meeting space for each ID forecast area.
- Plan future spaces for each area.
 - Considering the timing/location of future community meeting spaces that need to be provided and the existing space available, determine the amount of space for each future community centre will reasonably accommodate the targeted level of utilisation, taking into account forecast population growth.
 - For each community centre design, check to see if there is a specific design in the Infrastructure Contributions Plan or Development Contributions Plan. Although Council is able to change these designs to some extent, they should be considered in any relevant decision.

5. Monitor and Adapt

- Regular Review: Periodically reassess utilisation of spaces, utilisation targets, provision ratios and community preferences at least once every 2 years.