

# Tensions rising within council

By Esther Lauaki

Tensions are showing at Brimbank council with accusations of gagging and “sweeping things under the carpet” following a failed vote of no confidence in mayor Georgina Papafotiou.

At last week’s council meeting, Harvester ward councillor John Hedditch requested a review of the Local Government Inspectorate’s recent investigation into a complaint which cleared the mayor of any misconduct.

But the motion, which was supported only by Cr Virginia Tachos, was voted down by the majority of councillors without debate.

“toxic culture that is there is being swept under the carpet”

- John Hedditch

Cr Hedditch followed up with a vote of no confidence in the mayor which was also voted down.

“Cr Tachos and I were gagged,” he told *Star Weekly*.

“I was not even 60 seconds into my speech when I was shut down by the factional group.

“There was no opportunity for the public to

hear what is really going on in this council.

“The toxic culture that is there is being swept under the carpet and there is a clean up needed of the people that are doing this.”

*Star Weekly* previously reported that Cr Tachos had raised a complaint with the inspectorate, claiming she was ordered to take a COVID-19 test by the mayor following receipt of an anonymous email.

Cr Tachos missed a council meeting and an important confidential vote while taking the test on April 29.

The Local Government Inspectorate later informed the council that no further action

would be taken in relation to the complaint.

Cr Papafotiou said earlier this month that she was the victim of a “politically motivated attack”.

“I can tell you now that the actions of some, however hurtful, misdirected, and destructive they might be ... will not distract me from my work,” Cr Papafotiou said.

“Rather, those acts of distraction and subversion only strengthen me to call them out, to keep going and, where appropriate, to push back.

“There is simply no place for this type of behavior and attitude.”



Asha and husband Michael Vesikko welcomed their first child, son Hunter, on September 17. (Supplied)

## Brimbank’s baby boom

Brimbank is in the midst of a baby boom.

Joan Kirner Women’s and Children’s Hospital welcomed a record 579 babies in August and about 300 more in the past three weeks.

Maternity services operations manager Maree Comeadow said that last month was more hectic than usual, with up to 27 babies born on one day.

Ms Comeadow said the boom indicated that Brimbank was growing rapidly.

“The area is going to continue to grow and our facilities are beautiful for families to come

to,” she said.

Visitation restrictions as a result of COVID-19 impacted greatly on families in the maternity ward, Ms Comeadow said.

“It’s been tough with restrictions but there have been pros and cons with so many babies being born [throughout August] with COVID-19,” she said.

“The staff have been great ... and in a way it’s been really very quiet [without visitors] and our midwives have been able to focus on the mothers and their partners and the babies.”

She said September births seemed to be slowing, with 296 babies born so far, averaging about 18 babies a day.

“There are peaks and troughs here all the time and traditionally September and October are busy months being nine months after the Christmas and New Year period,” Ms Comeadow said.

“I’m not sure if we are going to have quite the boom that we had in November but you never know.”

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## Help to lower energy bills

A new webinar series aims to take some of the stress out of rising energy bills as lengthy lockdown restrictions continue.

The Consumer Policy Research Centre is hosting webinars explaining consumer rights for those struggling to pay energy bills.

Chief executive Lauren Solomon said the free Energy Simplified program would explain four simple steps toward more affordable energy bills followed by a live question and answer session.

Ms Solomon said the program would help to make complicated price comparisons easy and reveal which appliances might be contributing most to driving up bills.

“There are people that have lost jobs or are on steady incomes, that might have never had to worry about their energy bills before,” she said.

“And others, already under financial strain, are now finding it even tougher to make ends meet.”

Program manager Karl Barratt said participants would leave with a clearer picture of what can be done easily, right now, to cut their electricity and gas bills.

“We’re making it simple for people to understand four fast ways they can significantly cut their bills,” Mr Barratt said.

“By knowing what to ask your energy company, lower energy bills can be just a single phone call away.

“Our team will also take your questions during the session, so you can ask about what that confusing number on your bill actually means, what’s causing your bills to go up, or the best ways to use less energy while staying warm and comfortable at home without breaking the bank.”

Energy Simplified webinars will run until December.

Register: [www.energyinfohub.org.au](http://www.energyinfohub.org.au)

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## Grants to help make a difference in the community

Brimbank organisations are being invited to apply for up to \$2.5 million in grants to support the physical and mental health of Victorians, as a new survey shows the impact the coronavirus pandemic is having on the community.

A Victorian Health Promotion Foundation survey looking into health and mental wellbeing during the first lockdown found significant increases in feelings of social isolation, food and financial insecurity and decreases in physical activity compared with February this year.

VicHealth last week announced up to \$2.5 million in Reimagining Health grants to

support Victorians to create meaningful social connections, get active while staying safe from coronavirus, and access healthy, affordable food.

Chief executive Sandro Demaio said in the midst of the global coronavirus pandemic, it’s vital that we work quickly to support Victorians to achieve better health and wellbeing.

“During the first lockdown, we asked Victorians about their physical health and mental wellbeing to really understand how the pandemic is affecting them,” Dr Demaio said.

“Many Victorians were already fighting an

uphill battle before the pandemic hit, but now they are facing even greater challenges when it comes to putting healthy food on the table, keeping active and staying connected to others in their community – a precursor for mental wellbeing.

“These grants have been designed to give local organisations the support they need to continue making a difference to the health of their communities, as soon as possible.”

Dr Demaio said local organisations, such as sports clubs and leagues, arts organisations, community gardens and theatre and community groups, were key to the coronavirus

recovery.

“Our grants will help support Victorians facing the greatest health challenges, such as young people and families on low incomes,” he said.

“These grants complement other funding offered by state and federal governments to help support people through this challenging time.”

Applications close 11.59pm on October 27.

Apply: [vichealth.vic.gov.au/funding/reimagining-health-grants](http://vichealth.vic.gov.au/funding/reimagining-health-grants).

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