Ambos identify high-risk zones

By Ben Cameron

Brimbank ambulance crews are regularly refusing to attend incidents in some areas without a police escort, a local paramedic says.

Morgyn McCarthy, based in Melton, said Sunshine and St Albans had numerous problem areas where paramedics had refused to attend without police back-up.

She said paramedics worked off a file of “locations of interest”, or places and addresses known for aggressive or threatening behaviour. An Ambulance Victoria report revealed 11 locations in the Albion and Sunshine areas, eight in St Albans and three in Deer Park where violence had been identified as an issue.

One on occasion at St Albans, Ms McCarthy and a colleague left the scene of an overdose when the drug-affected friend of the victim tried to steal her medicine bag.

“We refused to go back in until the police arrived,” she said. “We had to leave the scene for our own safety.”

Police escorts usually arrive within 10 minutes of a request, but crews have been known to wait for nearly an hour for back-up.

“One one occasion, we had to wait about 50 minutes. However, it was not a critical incident,” McCarthy said. “It’s usually not too bad; it’s dependent on resources and what’s happening on the day.”

Ambulances often parked “around the corner” or several streets away from a violent call-out scene until police arrived.

“Otherwise you might have a family member come out and say, ‘You have to come in,’” she said.

Ambulance Victoria acting general manager of emergency operations, Mick Stephenson, said no paramedic was expected to enter a scene where violence is “likely or suspected”.

“We are continually reviewing our systems to provide the safest possible work environment for paramedics,” he said.

“Paramedics can flag addresses in our special patient information system to allow for specific instructions to be given to triple-0 call-takers and dispatchers, managers and paramedics in our communications centre and any future crews called to those addresses.”

“The system is also used to flag addresses where there are safety concerns. We work with Victoria Police to increase information-sharing to better identify danger spots, including where individuals may be violent, have mental health issues, use drugs or own a firearm.”

Quitting Keilor condemned

A disgruntled council candidate has confronted Brimbank administrators over what he describes as a “short-sighted” decision to axe meetings in Keilor.

The council’s three-year experiment with fortnightly council meetings has ended, with administrators set to meet once a month from April.

The council will continue to alternate between Sunshine and Keilor offices for meetings until the new civic centre in Sunshine opens mid-year.

The first monthly council meeting will be held on April 19 in Keilor.

The final Keilor meeting will be on June 21.

Richard Carthew confronted the administrators at the end of last Tuesday’s meeting.

“Alternating council meetings between Keilor and Sunshine has been the practice since the creation of the Brimbank City Council in 1994,” he told the council.

“And I believe it would be short-sighted in not continuing this practice … it would only further alienate and disenfranchise the people of northern Brimbank.”

Council corporate and community relations director Helen Morrissey said the decision was based on a February review that looked at other councils and considered the imminent return of democracy to Brimbank in the October council elections.

The decision to hold monthly meetings will be reviewed in 18 months.

Council chambers in Keilor will be used as a community space once the new civic centre is opened.

Ben Cameron

School’s no picnic? Yes, it is!

A St Albans school is throwing open its doors for an evening of fun, food and friendship. Holy Eucharist School at St Albans South will hold a free family picnic on Wednesday, March 16, from 5pm, with food, song and activities for the young and young at heart. “For new families at the school, it’s a good way to get to know the community,” music co-ordinator Michael Bonnici said. “It’s open to everyone, like an open day.” Details: 8312 0900