Children’s Services Reference Group

Summary of recommendations
July 2018 to March 2019
About the reference group

- The Children’s Services Reference Group held 8 monthly meetings between July 2018 and February 2019.
- The reference group was facilitated by an independent external facilitator.
- The group was made up of representatives from community-managed, council-run and privately/independent services including childcare, kindergarten, toy libraries and playgroups.
- There were 80 invitees to the reference group with attendance averaging 20 members each meeting.
- The reference group was formed to provide information and advice to inform Council’s decision-making on the development of the new Children’s Services Policy.
- Topics for each meeting were:
  - Support for community-managed models
  - Facilities
  - Integration of Services
  - Legislative and Regulatory Environment
  - Networked Service Support and Childcare waitlist
  - Places for Children in Children’s Services
  - Quality of service and service improvement and review of key recommendations to Council
Priority recommendations from members

In February 2018, members reviewed a summary of the recommendations they raised across all meetings so far. Members developed their priority recommendations or actions they would like to see Council commit to in the new Children's Services Policy. These are listed in priority order in the table below.

| **Mix of services:** Continue to provide a mix of services (Council-run, community-managed, private) to ensure accessible, affordable places, support for vulnerable families who do not receive other funding, and places for vulnerable children (with priority of access through Council’s centralised waitlist). |
| **Case management:** Provide additional case management support for services and direct support to help services manage the social issues they face. |
| **Staff support:** Provide support to staff in services to improve how they can work with vulnerable families and know the services they can refer families to. |
| **Financial support:** Continue to review and improve the financial support provided to services to work with vulnerable children. |
| **Support vulnerable families:** Council prioritises the needs of children and families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage. |
| **Provide better information:** Communication between Council and services can be improved with consistency (the same information to all services), clarity, access to information and listening to services. |
| Council could provide a central database and resources to support services. |
| **Provide networking spaces and opportunities:** Council could facilitate a resourced network/provide a space for a network of service providers to share information and training. Networking between Council and other services will also increase trust and support for services. Services would also benefit from the opportunity to network between them. |
| **Promote services:** Council to manage and make available current information about children’s services including what services exist (including toy libraries and playgroups) and what they offer. |
| Council should ensure outreach Maternal Child Health nurses have the best and current information about children’s services to provide families. |
| **Fit for purpose policy:** Council should consider the needs of individual services and not take a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. |
| **Accountability:** More transparency required around budgets for assets including levies collected, and maintenance performed for community-managed services. |
| **Support community-run services:** Continue to offer financial support for community-run services. |
| **Service accessibility:** Services would benefit from having more flexible spaces to accommodate different age groups. |
| Extend Toy Library hours of operation and make them accessible. |
Other recommendations to consider for the new Children’s Services Policy

The following issues and recommendations have been themed under the seven policy objectives for the new Children’s Services Policy that were set by Council and informed by community consultation including the Children’s Services Reference Group.

Objective 1: Council will work with partners to ensure that every child, regardless of their abilities or background, will have access to affordable, safe, accessible, quality Early Years services to support development to their full potential.

Training
- Provide support to staff in services to improve how they can work with vulnerable families and know the services they can refer families to.
- Support opportunities for mentoring and professional development for services to improve the quality of their service e.g financial mentoring, legal training.

Resources
- Provide additional case management support for services and direct support to help services manage the social issues they face.
- Community transport and/or public transport subsidy/private transport options could assist vulnerable families travel to services.

Funding
- Council could review and improve the financial support provided to services to work with vulnerable children.
- The group is concerned the new Federal Childcare subsidy disadvantages vulnerable families and high-income families.

Mix of services
- Continue to provide a mix of services (Council-run, community managed, private) to ensure accessible, affordable places, support for vulnerable families who do not receive other funding, and places for vulnerable children (with priority of access through Council’s centralised waitlist).
- A balance of community-run, council-run and privately-run services ensure community members have a choice and access to more affordable childcare and lessens the impact of possible market failure (e.g the collapse of ABC centres in the past).
- Services should be spread across municipality and where possible, near public transport.
Children’s Services Reference Group Key Issues

Certainty
- Services need certainty from Council that they will continue to be supported by Council to operate. The short term leases currently in place create uncertainty for services and inhibits long term planning.

Management model (eg cluster or Early Years Management)
- One model shouldn’t be preferred over another as there are other important factors such as the people involved and governance.

Waitlist
- Review waitlist and funding agreement as it currently limits the ability of services to be agile and no longer supports services as effectively as it could.

Objective 2: Council will understand current and future needs of families in the city and influence the provision of Early Years services to meet those needs.
- Start a playgroup for children with disabilities
- Extend Toy Library hours of operation and make them accessible
- The biggest impact on demand in the last 5 years has been the new Federal Government Childcare Subsidy which has impacted demand for places from high income families and vulnerable families.
- A utilisation survey of services would assist Council to understand current and future needs
- Kindergartens should be located on/near primary school sites for better integration (in line with government policy)

Objective 3: Early Years services will be financially sustainable and consistently aligned with relevant policies and legislation at the local, state and federal level.
- Support co-location and integration of services- bring services into childcare (and hubs) that help support vulnerable families
- Council could provide a ‘cheat sheet’ of legislation requirements and insurance to assist services
- Facilitate seminars and training sessions for services particularly on relevent legislation and new government policies
- Council can be a centralised resource of up-to-date information for services to guide best practice
Objective 4: Council will encourage collaboration across all Early Years services

- Kindergarten participation can be increased with early identification by MCH, GPs and agencies.
- Work with DHHS to identify vulnerable families and transient families and help them connect to services.
- Council can facilitate a resourced network/provide a space for a network of service providers to share information and training. Networking between Council and other services will also increase trust and support for services. Services would also benefit from the opportunity to network between them. The group felt a sector network would work best if Council facilitated it.
- Council could provide better contact information for services.
- Communication between Council and services could be improved with consistency (the same information to all services), clarity, access to information and listening to services.
- Support better connections between services eg childcare coordinators to visit new parent groups.

Objective 5: Families will have access to the services and information they need, at the times they need it, to make choices appropriate for their needs

- Council should ensure Maternal Child Health nurses have the best and current information about children’s services to provide families.
- Promote children’s services better and highlight the points of difference between services.
- Council to manage and make available current information about children’s services including what services exist (including toy libraries and playgroups) and what they offer.
Objective 6: Early Years services will be supported by safe, accessible, contemporary, fit-for-purpose, sustainable facilities and environments.

- More transparency required around budgets for assets including levies collected, and maintenance performed for community-managed services.
- Demand should drive the size of centres, financial modelling does not take into account a service’s history, position in the community and quality of the service they deliver.
- Accessibility for people with a disability is critical.
- Council should consider the needs of individual services and not take a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.
- Council should understand how each service is different and how policy impact is different for each service.
- Services would benefit from having more flexible spaces to accommodate different age groups.
- Council could consider the opportunity to re-imagine existing spaces.

Objective 7: Children will have access to natural environments which allow them to learn about and experience play in nature. This includes natural environments within Early Years services.

- The child has a right to play under the UN convention on the right of the child.
- The planning department could consider the provision of access to natural environments in planning permits and consider the new children’s services policy when making development application decisions.
- The sustainability team could also review planning developments to have input.
- Small spaces offer potential for playspace (not just open parks) eg pocket parks.
- Parks/Open Spaces department could consider positive “risk” in playground design.
- Children should be considered in design of natural environments.