



9.2 CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: MARY MCGORRY, INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Council with a progress report on the Children's Services Policy development project.
- 1.2 To seek Council approval to revise the policy development timeline. More time is required to fully consider and synthesise the data collected to develop the draft service response for Stage 2 consultation.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 On 5 September 2018 Council endorsed the key policy objectives that will underpin the new Children's Services Policy. The policy objectives were developed by the community and providers of children's services.
- 2.2 Since then, Council officers have continued to engage with stakeholders including the Children's Services Reference Group and the Independent Providers Focus Group to gain input directly from service providers when considering solutions to address and respond to the challenges and opportunities for children's services in the municipality.
- 2.3 Additionally, extensive research is underway to gain an understanding of the childcare market within the municipality and how it is performing in relation to the changing expectations of families, changing legislative landscape and population growth. Council officers are collating data to understand factors including:
 - affordability of services for all families;
 - supply and demand in relation to the growing population (including Fishermans Bend) to enable Council to be future-ready;
 - distribution and geographic location of services to enable access to childcare throughout the municipality, and support planning;
 - participation rates (particularly in St Kilda and South Melbourne) to ensure children experiencing vulnerability are supported to meet developmental milestones, and;
 - the impact of Council-run services and subsidies on the overall childcare market.
- 2.4 Council officers are seeking additional time to analyse and synthesise the data to develop a strong evidence-base to inform the draft service response for Stage 2 engagement with the Port Phillip community.
- 2.5 It is proposed that the draft service response is submitted to Council in December 2018 for approval to progress to Stage 2 community engagement in February 2019, following the school holiday period.
- 2.6 Council officers will seek endorsement of the new Children's Services Policy in May 2019.



3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Note the progress report on the development of the Children's Services Policy.
- 3.2 Approve the revised policy development timeline which includes:
 - submission of the Children's Services draft service response to Council in December 2018
 - commencement of Stage 2 community engagement on the draft service response in February 2019
 - submission of the new Children's Services Policy for endorsement in May 2019.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 From June to August 2018, Council officers collected, reviewed and synthesised feedback from the community, the Children's Services Reference Group and the Independent Service Providers Focus Group to provide Council with consolidated draft policy objectives for endorsement.
- 4.2 On 5 September 2018, Council endorsed seven policy objectives. Those policy objectives are:
 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.
 2. Council will understand current and future needs of families in the city and influence the provision of Early Years services to meet the those needs. Early Years services will be financially sustainable and consistently aligned with relevant policies and legislation at the local, state and federal level.
 3. Council will encourage collaboration across all Early Years' services.
 4. Families will have access to the services and information they need, at the times they need it, to make choices appropriate for their needs.
 5. Early Years services will be supported by safe, accessible, contemporary, fit-for-purpose, sustainable facilities and environments.
 6. 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.
- 4.3 During Stage 1 community engagement Council officers worked with the community to identify the challenges for children in Port Phillip. This research was provided to the community in an information pack and summary document during the engagement process. The opportunities and challenges were themed, and included:
 1. Access, equity and participation
 - Helping families find the services they need – the level of knowledge children's service providers have about each other needs improvement, so that they can refer parents to other services they might need, or find useful for their children.



- Ensuring an adequate supply of childcare for children under the age of three – There is a shortage of places for children under the age of three. This is a common problem across Australia.
- Proficiency in English when starting school – 2.2 per cent of children in 2015 were not proficient in English.
- Accessing children’s services if a child has additional needs – The number of children with a special need has risen from 2.1 per cent to 3 per cent in 2015. Another 7.9 per cent of children were reported as requiring assessment.
- Supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds – Compared to other municipalities in our region, Port Phillip has a much higher percentage of adults using services for mental illness, alcohol and drug issues.
- Appropriate child developmental rates – Children in South Melbourne and St Kilda have lower rates of development than the state average, despite the number and diversity of children’s services in the municipality (source Australian Early Development Census).
- Meeting our target for kindergarten participation – Kindergarten participation is reported as much lower than the Australian target rate of 95 per cent for four-year olds. In 2017, the kindergarten participation rate was 85.6 per cent.
- Supporting families experiencing vulnerability – Families associated with Child Protection and Orange Door (formerly Child First) who are using Port Phillip’s childcare centres require additional support and childcare staff are trying to support them without the necessary qualifications and experience of professional social workers.
- Supporting children experiencing vulnerability – some service providers have reported that families are not receiving ongoing childcare funding from the Commonwealth when they need it.
- Ensuring children experiencing vulnerability access services – Disadvantaged families are the least likely to use children’s services despite research indicating that they benefit the most.

2. Ageing buildings

- Many of Council’s early years’ facilities need updating to meet to provide better accessibility and flexible programs that meet contemporary practice.

3. Population growth

- We are already Victoria’s most densely populated municipality, and resident growth is projected to increase by 23% by 2027.
- Meeting the needs of a population boom – An estimated 80,000 people will move into Fishermans Bend over the next 30 years.
- Other areas within Port Phillip will also experience growth. More children’s services will be required for this population growth.



4. Legislative and policy influence

- Changes to Australian and Victorian Government legislation – there have been 19 state and federal legislative changes since 2006. The most recent being changes to the Commonwealth subsidy.

4.4 To address these challenges, Council officers have been working to understand:

- The role of each level of government as it relates to children's services
- The history of children's services, buildings and funding in the municipality since the 1970s
- The changing legislative landscape and compliance with relevant legislation
- The municipal childcare market and how Council subsidies may impact on the independent, not for profit and private providers of childcare and kindergarten
- The performance of all Port Phillip childcare centres and kindergartens against the National Quality Standards and options for Council to support all centres to 'meet' or 'exceed' expectations
- The demographic profile of families in the municipality to understand the prevalence of disadvantage and develop options to support low-income families and families involved with Child Protection and Orange Door.
- Population growth and understanding how quickly and where additional places will be required to match population growth
- Why kindergarten participation is the lowest in the state and what options are available to improve this
- What level of investment is required to ensure children's services buildings are safe, compliant and fit-for-purpose
- The current service model, its strengths and limitations, and what alternative service models and levels have the potential to ensure value for money for ratepayers.

4.5 Council officers are developing service options and recommendations using the policy objectives as the basis to assess the data and evidence.

4.6 Council officers are developing service options using the policy objectives to assess the suitability of recommendations. To ensure that the new Children's Services Policy delivers on the objectives, Council officers are developing critical success factors to identify priority actions and measurable outcomes.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 Council promoted Stage 1 engagement to approximately 10,000 Port Phillip residents through various channels.

5.2 Council officers have continued to engage with community, families and service providers to develop the draft service response. All stakeholders are encouraged to provide feedback throughout the policy development process via the Children@portphillip.vic.gov.au email account or through the HaveYourSay portal.



5.3 Face-to-face engagement occurred through a combination of drop-in sessions and targeted workshops (12 in total) in Stage 1 engagement and has continued with service providers. The activities and participation rates are shown in the table below.

Activity	Date	No. of adult participants	No. of child participants
Drop in sessions			
Bubup Womindjeka (Dutch playgroup)	22 June	10	5
Elwood Toy Library	23 June	40	1
Albert Park Library (2 storytime sessions)	25 June	50	8
St Kilda Library	29 June	40	-
Skinners Playground	5 July	7	3
Port Melbourne Library	12 July	4	-
Facilitated workshops			
Community workshop – Bubup Nairn	26 June	24	-
Community workshop – Port Melbourne Town Hall	27 June	17	-
Staff workshop – St Kilda Town Hall	3 July	20	-
Children’s engagement			
Pre-school Story Time at St Kilda Library	26 June	-	33
Clarendon Children’s Centre	6 July	-	9
Barring Djinang Kindergarten	10 July	-	13
Reference Group			
Meeting 1	19 July	21	-
Meeting 2	20 August	18	-
Meeting 3	11 September	23	-
Meeting 4	18 October	TBD	-
Independent Service Providers Focus Group			
Meeting 1	21 August	5	-
Meeting 2	13 November	TBD	-

6.LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The new Children’s Services Policy will aim to ensure compliance with a range of legislative and regulatory requirements, including:

- Building Code of Australia
- Occupational Health and Safety Legislation
- Disability Discrimination Act
- National Education and Care Centre Regulations

ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL 17 OCTOBER 2018



- National Education and Care Quality Standards
- National Competition Policy

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

7.1 The Children's Services Policy Development project is being delivered within the allocated budget.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

8.1 Not Applicable.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

9.1 Council has always maintained its commitment to social justice and continued support for vulnerable members of the community who are impacted by:

- Higher levels of drug and alcohol dependency, and mental illness.
- Increase in transitional housing.
- Issues with support in childcare centres
- Difficulty for families experiencing vulnerability accessing children's services despite research saying they gain the most benefit
- Difficulties associated with attending school without adequate English.
- Difficulties with access and support for children with special needs

9.2 There is a strong and passionate connection between the community and the children's services provided and supported by Council, with the many of these services being delivered through a community managed model. Council is committed to genuine community engagement to ensure the impact of any decision on community is fully understood.

9.3 Council will continue to support vulnerable families and will seek the views of diverse sectors of the community to inform any decisions made in relation to the development of a new policy.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

10.1 This report aligns with Strategic Direction 1 in the Council Plan: "We embrace difference, and people belong."

10.2 This development of the Children's Services Policy is aligned with Council's commitment to providing access to services that support the health and well-being of our growing community.

10.3 One of Council's priorities is to "Complete the review of children's services to determine Council's role in early childhood education and care." Council officers are reviewing all children's services to develop an evidence-based service response for Stage 2 community engagement.

10.4 The Interim Childcare Policy 2018 was adopted by Council in July 2018. The new Children's Services Policy will replace the interim policy.

ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL 17 OCTOBER 2018



11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

- 11.1.1 A timeline of the proposed process for developing a Children's Service Policy was submitted at the 6 June 2018 Council Meeting. This report is seeking a revision of the timeline to enable robust data analysis to inform the options and recommendations in the service response. A revised timeline is located at **Attachment A**.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

- 11.2.1 A strategic communications plan is in place to ensure the community and all relevant stakeholders are kept informed throughout the process.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

- 12.1 The Program Director involved in the preparation of this report has a direct interest in the matter with a child attending one of the Council-run services.

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ATTACHMENTS 1. Children Services Review Timeline