

# ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL 1 AUGUST 2018



## 9.1 CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:** CAROL JEFFS, GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### 1. PURPOSE

1.1 To seek Councils endorsement of the Child Safe policy.

### 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 The Victorian Government introduced the Child Safe Standards (CSS) and the Reportable Conduct Scheme (RCS) as a result of recommendations made during the Betrayal of Trust inquiry into the handling of child abuse allegation by religious and other non- government organisations.

2.2 The City of Port Phillip (CoPP) must comply with the CSS and the RCS. CoPP must create a child safe organisation that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

2.3 All City of Port Phillip, Councillors, employees, volunteers, contractors and community representatives have a responsibility to understand and take an active role in preventing, detecting, responding and reporting any suspicions of child abuse to the relevant authorities and maintaining a child safe culture.

### 3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

3.1 Endorses the Child Safe Policy (attachment 1) and supports a whole of organisation approach to the safety of children and young people.

### 4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

4.1 The Victorian Government introduced the Child Safe Standards(CSS) and the Reportable Conduct Scheme (RCS) as a result of recommendations made during the Betrayal of Trust inquiry and evidence of what works to prevent child abuse.

4.2 The seven (7) CSS standards ensure organisations have comprehensive and visible policies and practices in place that will improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

4.3 The CSS are underpinned by the understanding that all children are vulnerable. However, there are groups of children and young people that are particularly vulnerable to being victimised and face additional challenges in reporting an incident



of abuse. The CSS include three overarching principles that require organisations to consider the increased vulnerability of:

- 4.3.1 Aboriginal children
  - 4.3.2 those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
  - 4.3.3 children with disabilities.
- 4.4 Organisations are required to consider how welcoming they are to children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and what the organisation can do to make it more inclusive and culturally responsive.
- 4.5 The RCS requires organisations to respond to allegations of child abuse (and other child-related misconduct) made against their workers and volunteers, and to notify the Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission) of any allegations and resulting actions. The head of an organisation is the person who is primarily responsible for an organisation's compliance with the scheme. While heads of organisations can seek internal support and assistance from within their organisation, it is ultimately their responsibility to ensure the Commission is notified of any reportable allegations they become aware of.
- 4.6 The CoPP must comply with the CSS and the RCS and must create a child safe organisation that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- 4.7 The draft Child Safe policy- attachment 1, clarifies our organisations expectations regarding child safe practices and holds all staff and the organisation to account. The Child Safe policy addresses all recommendations as outlines in Standard two (2) of the CSS framework.
- 4.8 We understand that having a policy in place does not guarantee child safety. A culture of child safety must exist throughout the organisation, not just for those who work directly with children. A child safe culture will have strategies in place to prevent, detect, report and respond to abuse including: sexual abuse, grooming, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.
- 4.9 Extensive work has been undertaken over the past 12 months to ensure CoPP has policies and procedures in place to guide the ongoing work and influence a culture of child safety.
- 4.10 Overview of the work undertaken to ensure CoPP is a child safe organisation:
- 4.10.1 Statement of Commitment to Child Safety endorsed by Council in November 2017
  - 4.10.2 Comprehensive training program for all Council staff that aims to increase skills and confidence of all staff in preventing, detecting, reporting and responding to child abuse.



4.10.3 Operational procedures implemented across Council to ensure we have a whole of-organisation approach to keeping children and young people safe. Some of these procedures include:

- Recruitment and screening templates to ensure we engage the right people for our organisation
- Responding and reporting frameworks to ensure timely, confidential and prompt handling on any allegations or suspicions of child abuse

4.11 Clearly defined reporting lines for any allegation or suspicion of child abuse made against any staff member to ensure compliance with the RCS.

## **5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS**

5.1 An internal CSS advisory group and working groups were established to inform and develop the draft Child Safe policy that clearly outlines the role all staff have in ensuring CoPP is a child safe organisation.

5.2 Internal consultations and information sessions have been conducted over the past 12 months to ensure the draft Child Safe policy and related procedures are well informed and appropriate for all teams and departments. There is a continuous improvement process in place to regular review and update the policy and procedures to ensure they remain valid.

5.3 The Child Safe policy and relevant procedures will be made available to the community and we will seek regular feedback to ensure they are understood and accessible to everyone.

5.4 Ongoing work is being undertaken with families, children and young people accessing CoPP services or programs to ensure everyone understand their rights and how to report or access support in relation to the CSS and the RCS.

## **6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Council and all staff that represent the CoPP have a legal obligation to do their best to keep children and young people safe. The Commission is the authorised body that oversees and enforces organisations' compliance with the Child Safe Standards. The Commission focus on:

6.1.1 working with organisations to build their capacity to be child safe

6.1.2 making inquiries with the organisation if they have concerns about whether they are child safe

6.1.3 taking compliance action liaising with entities and regulators to provide specific education and advice.

6.2 The draft Child Care policy outlines a continuous improvement approach to child safety that ensures child safety remains a priority and is embedded across the organisation.



- 6.3 Council takes all allegations of abuse seriously and will report and investigate all allegations following due process and ensure procedural fairness for all parties involved.
- 6.4 Council will continue to work with the local law enforcement authorities to monitor trends and ensure any risk to the community is managed in an appropriate and timely manner.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPACT**

- 7.1 There are financial implications associated with becoming a child safe organisation. Most of the additional costs have been incurred during the implementation phase (2017/2018). These have included:
  - 7.1.1 the development and ongoing delivering a comprehensive training program
  - 7.1.2 auditing and improving recruitment processes
  - 7.1.3 engaging a CSS Project Officer to oversee the implementation phase and to assist all of Council, not just in the service areas that work with children and young people, to operationalise the CSS and RCS.
- 7.2 Following the implementation phase (due to formally conclude at the end of 2018), ongoing costs such as staff training will be embedded in annual operating budgets.
- 7.3 The second half of the implementation phase (July- December 2018) will involve working with teams to operationalise the policy and ensure we are doing are best to keep children and young people safe. It is envisaged there may be a spike in reports and the need for people to discuss their safety concerns. The Child Safety Officer will monitor the potential increase in work load and seek advice from the Advisory group about the long-term management of any increases to certain job roles. There may need to be a budget allocation for resources to meet this demand, however this cannot be quantified yet.

## **8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 8.1 No environmental impact has been identified.

## **9. COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 9.1 CoPP has a long history in advocating and supporting the right for children and young people to have access to safe and child friendly space. As an early adopter of the Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter, CoPP remains committed to ensuring we are a friendly and safe community for children, young people and their families.
- 9.2 CoPP will be implementing a public awareness raising campaign that emphasises keeping children and young people safe is everyone's responsibility. Posters and postcards (see attachment 2) will be displayed in all Council facilities and services to boost the communities' awareness of child safety.



- 9.3 Visible information about child safety and the role everyone plays in responding and reporting any concerns has been shown to have many benefits including:
- 9.3.1 An improved sense of safety for the community
  - 9.3.2 A deterrent to potential perpetrators from accessing services and programs
  - 9.3.3 Visual cue for children and young people that there are responsible adults looking out for them.
- 9.4 It is also acknowledged that these visual cues may raise concerns for some people, particularly if they have been victims of abuse. We have information and support structures in place to ensure our staff and our community can access timely and appropriate support.
- 9.5 CoPP will host community information sessions for services, clubs and groups that utilise CoPP facilities or seek funding from Council. There is an expectation that these groups comply with the CSS and understand their obligations under this new State legislation. Understanding and complying with the CSS will vary depending on the level of contact services, clubs and groups have with children and young people. However, as a child safe organisation CoPP is working towards a community that understands that everyone has a role in keeping children and young people safe.
- 9.6 CoPP is partnering with other local Councils to deliver a variety of information session for parents and professionals. To date these sessions have included:
- 9.6.1 A community forum for services and community professionals to increase their skills and confidence in preventing, responding and reporting child abuse.
  - 9.6.2 A series of parent information sessions on “Body Safety” aimed at giving children and young people the skills to keep themselves safe in the community and in online environments.
- 9.7 It is envisaged that there may be a spike in the numbers of reports made to the authorities as people maybe be over-vigilant or concerned if they don't say anything they are breaking the law. Council will continue to take any allegation or suspicion of abuse seriously and will following due process in every instance. Council will continue to work with local authorities to monitor trends and ensure the most appropriate information and education is made available to staff and the community.

## **10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY**

- 10.1 This report aligns with strategic direction one (1) – We embrace difference and people belong. It supports the delivery of safe and active communities and services that support the health and wellbeing of our growing community.



**11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

**11.1 TIMELINE**

- 11.1.1 Following endorsement, a public awareness raising campaign about the role we all have in keeping children and young people safe will commence.
- 11.1.2 Ongoing training and information sessions will be held across the organisation to continue to create a culture of child safety.
- 11.1.3 To ensure Council continues to actively work toward compliance, the CSS has been flagged for review in the 2018/2019 internal audit program. This review will consider the implementation of the seven Child Safe Standards and where appropriate will consider management's implementation plan for the requirements that have not been fully implemented. The review is scheduled for quarter 4, 2019.

**11.2 COMMUNICATION**

- 11.2.1 The endorsed policy will be published on the Council's website along with relevant procedures.
- 11.2.2 Ongoing consultation and feedback will be welcomed from the community, with a key focus on engaging with children and young people, to ensure the policy and procedures remain relevant and accessible.

**12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST**

- 12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any direct or indirect interest in the matter.

**TRIM FILE NO:** 36/01/192

**ATTACHMENTS** 1. Child Safe Policy