



**9.1 THE STATE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES WITHIN COPP
ANNUAL REPORT 2021**

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 In line with the implementation of the Children's Services Policy, the State of Children's Services in CoPP Annual Report has been prepared to give a snapshot of Children's Services in the City.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Children's Services Policy, *Every Child, Our Future: Children's Services Policy* (the Policy) took effect on 1 July 2020.
- 2.2 When endorsing the Policy, it was agreed that an Annual Report of Children's Services would be prepared to understand the performance of Children's Services in Port Phillip and any additional factors impacting the implementation of the Policy.
- 2.3 This is the first annual report to be prepared since the adoption of the Children's Services Policy, delayed due to the impacts of COVID-19. (**see Attachment 1 City of Port Phillip State of Children's Services Annual Report, 2022**).
- 2.4 Key implementation actions undertaken since adoption of the Policy include:
- 2.4.1 In August 2020, Council confirmed that it is in the public interest for Council to continue operating early education and care centres. Noting that this finding will be reviewed annually.
- 2.4.2 In 2020 the Early Education Grant, that provides vulnerable children access to subsidised early education commenced.
- 2.4.3 Following a successful pilot program, the Early Years Assertive Outreach program commenced in November 2021. This program is designed to work with families and local organisations to increase participation in early education and care services.
- 2.4.4 In December 2021 Council commenced community consultation on the proposed sale of 3 childcare centres with the view to reinvest the sale proceeds in the redevelopment of the North St Kilda Childcare Centre. Consultation on this proposal is still underway with a final outcome to be determined later this year.
- 2.5 Key themes and challenges highlighted through the State of Children's Services Annual Report include:
- 2.5.1 The disruptions caused from COVID-19 have had a direct impact on service provision, service demand, children's development, health and wellbeing. This includes impacts such as: poorer mental health, poorer child health and potential learning and developmental delays. In turn these impacts have created an increased demand on services. Furthermore, there is a likely



disproportionate impact on children experiencing adversity, widening the disparities in child health and developmental outcomes.

- 2.5.2 COVID-19 has also caused delays in the implementation of the Children's Services Policy, as attention was focused on adapting service delivery to the changing pandemic conditions. The most recent pandemic impacts have caused significant staff availability issues and some temporary disruption to services.
- 2.5.3 The development of an implementation plan has also been COVID-19 delayed and while it is well progressed within the organisation, only informal consultation and engagement with stakeholders through ongoing partnership work has occurred so far.
- 2.5.4 The indirect impacts of the pandemic will likely have a broad and long-lasting implications for children. Data collection on the impacts of the pandemic on children is being undertaken globally and locally by a number of academic and service delivery agencies that will provide useful service planning data for the coming years.
- 2.5.5 The supply and demand of kindergarten and childcare places is being driven by two key factors: the introduction of funded 3 year-old kindergarten and the expected population growth. Supply and demand investigations show that there is likely to be an adequate supply of childcare and kindergarten places in the City of Port Phillip through to 2026. At the suburb level, demand and supply challenges are more nuanced. In particular, the residential development and population increases expected to occur at Fishermans Bend are likely to cause excess demand challenges in that area.
- 2.5.6 The community consultation for the proposed sale of 3 child care centres (which is still underway) has highlighted the community value placed on community managed services and the challenges faced with the aspiration to deliver safe, accessible, fit-for-purpose, sustainable facilities and environments in aging facilities. This process has also brought to the fore the question of Council's role in responding to the supply and demand of childcare in the municipality.
- 2.5.7 Supporting vulnerable children to access and participate in children's services is identified as a priority in the Children's Services Policy. The 2016 Census data identifies 659 (or 8%) of children aged 0-11 in the Port Phillip as living in households with incomes in the lowest quartile in Victoria. While two thirds live in households in the highest quartile. The commencement of the Early Education Grants and the Early Years Assertive Outreach programs are a direct result of the Children's Services Policy adoption, as these programs are focusing on engaging the most vulnerable members of our community. In addition to this, programs such as the Adventure Playgrounds, MCH and Toy Libraries all consider how their service can leverage participation through mechanisms such as targeted engagement, tailored programming or discounted fee structures for health care card holders.
- 2.5.8 The public benefit test regarding Council's ongoing role in direct service delivery has been measured through monitoring performance on how effectively services are supporting vulnerable children. This is the first year of data collection which demonstrates the quantum of vulnerable children participating



in Councils' services. The reporting shows that for each month in 2020/21 Council operated services supported:

- Between 4 and 6 children accessed inclusion support funding
- Up to 4 children accessing the Preschool Field Officer Program
- Between 27 and 78 children who were accessing the maximum Federal Government additional childcare subsidy (ACSS) of 85%
- Between three and 7 children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and
- Either 1 or 2 children in out of home care across most months of the year.

2.5.9 The National Quality Framework assessment of Council run services found that they are all meeting the national quality standards, with 3 services rated as Exceeding and 2 services rating as Meeting.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes the City of Port Phillip State of Childrens' Services Annual Report.
- 3.2 Notes that the Council's operation of childcare centres continues to meet the public interest due to the ongoing support provided for children and families experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 At the 4 September 2019 Ordinary Council Meeting, Council resolved to formally adopt *Every Child, Our Future: Children's Services Policy* which committed Council to:
 - 4.1.1 Greater support to the children and families that will benefit the most and are least likely to access the services by investing in assertive outreach, providing targeted grants to reduce financial barriers to access and supporting families and services to support positive outcomes for these children.
 - 4.1.2 Taking a strong role in the monitoring of community needs, the services available to meet these needs and planning for the future and supporting children and families to access services that meet their needs, regardless of provider-type.
 - 4.1.3 Advocating to other levels of government to increase investment and to ensure all children have access to high quality and accessible children's services.
 - 4.1.4 Continue providing support for volunteer-led, community-managed services that provide childcare, toy libraries, playgroups and kindergarten through appropriate funding and provision of facilities.
 - 4.1.5 Exclude transitioning Council-run services and Council-owned facilities to private for-profit providers.
 - 4.1.6 In developing a business case that assesses the benefits and costs of transitioning one or more of the four council run services to community organisations or alternatively retaining operation and ensuring competitive neutrality, officers undertake a review of costs and fees to ensure best value to



the community and effectiveness in meeting council objectives of quality, affordability and accessibility. This review will seek to address any financial loss issues pertaining to all operated Council centres, measures to ensure bad debts are managed, rooms are at capacity and the use of agency staff is reduced. The review should also explore the opportunity to implement a volunteer committee of management to enable many of the benefits and positive elements of Community run centres, including greater efficiencies. This review should also consider whether this might be addressed by a Section 86 committee.

- 4.1.7 That Council resolves to provide a transitional arrangement to all centres subject to the Statutory procedures required under Section 190 of the Local Government Act (the Act). This transitional arrangement will offer all centres a three year lease subject to aligning the dates of the leases to the same date on the acknowledgment that lease may be terminated in the event that the premises, building fabric or other unexpected exigency is deemed to be a risk to any person.
- 4.1.8 Request that officers prepare an implementation plan, in consultation with stakeholders that includes a long-term strategy for the future of Council-owned children's services facilities.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 The Children's Services Policy was developed through broad and diverse community consultation and engagement.
- 5.2 Delivery of the Children's Services Policy requires ongoing consultation and engagement with stakeholders and community. Recent and current engagement topics include:
- 5.2.1 The proposal to sell three Council properties is currently underway, outcomes of the results and an analysis of options will be reported to Council in the coming months.
- 5.2.2 The trialling of extended open hours at the Adventure Playgrounds was conducted from 26 September 2021 to 30 January 2022, an analysis of the results is underway and will be reported to Council in the coming months.
- 5.3 Planned community engagement to be conducted in 2022-2023 includes:
- 5.3.1 The redevelopment of the Adventure Playgrounds which will prioritise attention to engagement with children and young people.
- 5.3.2 An evaluation of MCH facilitated groups, including the Sleep and Settling program will be conducted this year with participant input gathered by online surveys. Results will be used to identify and inform service improvements.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The recommendations in this report are not considered to have any material legal or risk implications.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 The recommendations in this report have no financial impact. The draft 2022/23 budget has been prepared on the basis of continued service delivery for the suit of services



provided by Council as detailed in the attached State of Children's Services Annual Report.

- 7.2 Sound financial management of Council run childcare centres continues to be a focus, however COVID-19 has impacted negatively on the operating result with lower utilisation rates which dropped to 75.8% in 20/21, down from 87.1% in 2018/19.
- 7.3 Funding and grant seeking to support both service delivery and infrastructure development will require continual attention to support the community needs.
- 7.4 Every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood education returns between \$1.50 and nearly \$3, and the return grows to double digits for children from families experiencing disadvantage. Source: Victorian Government, Early Childhood Reform Plan, 2017 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/educationstate/ec-reform-plan.pdf>

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 The recommendations of this report are not considered to have any material environmental impact.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 The implementation of the Children's Services Policy is seeking to deliver on the following community impacts:
 - 9.1.1 All children living in Port Phillip are supported to develop their full potential.
 - 9.1.2 Parents, carers and families are supported to increase their capacity and capability.
 - 9.1.3 The effects of disadvantage on children's development are minimised.
- 9.2 The Annual Report of Children's Services seeks to outline the extent to which we are achieving these outcomes and assess the impact our Children's Services are having on children and their families in our community. This first report will form the benchmark or baseline data set that will be able to track impact over the life of the policy.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 10.1 The State of Children's Services first Annual Report aligns to the Council Plan 2021-2031 Community Vision: *Proudly Port Phillip: a liveable and vibrant City that enhances the wellbeing of our community.*
- 10.2 Council Plan's Strategic Direction *Inclusive Port Phillip: A City that is a place for all members of our community, where people feel supported and comfortable being themselves and expressing their identities.*
- 10.3 The CoPP Children's Services Policy describes Council's role in children's services and what we will do to support the wellbeing and development of children and families in our community.

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

An implementation plan has been developed internally to co-ordinate and document policy implementation for Council. Officers now need to work with external stakeholders



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over the next 12 months to consult and engage with them to further refine the implementation plan.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

The CoPP State of Children's Services Annual Report will be shared with children's services stakeholders and partners as a tool to be used to inform and further develop children's services in the City of Port Phillip.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any material or general interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS 1. **City of Port Phillip State of Children's Services Annual Report, 2022**  