



9.2 CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY - DRAFT POLICY OBJECTIVES

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1. PURPOSE

1.1 To provide Council and the community with the outcomes of Stage 1 consultation and proposed key policy objectives for the Children's Services Policy.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 In 2017, as part of Strategic Direction 1: "We embrace difference, and people belong," Council endorsed a review of children's services as a key priority to determine Council's future role in children's services.

2.2 The former Childcare Policy adopted in 2006 no longer meets the expectations of community; is no longer aligned to the changing legislative framework; and will not support population growth statistics and forecasts, trends in contemporary practice or the changing needs of working families.

2.3 An interim policy came into effect on 2 July 2018 for a 12-month period, to coincide with the new Australian Government childcare funding scheme while the new Children's Services Policy is being developed.

2.4 The Children's Services Policy is based on a review of children's services and will aim to define Council's role in relation to four services: childcare, kindergartens, toy libraries and playgroups. The policy development process is intended to be finalised by February 2019.

2.5 On 6 June 2018, Council resolved for officers to commence community engagement on the Children's Services Policy Development process. Council endorsed the engagement approach that facilitated broad and diverse input from families, service providers and the wider community.

2.6 The engagement approach selected is aligned with Council's goal to be a trusted, agile and future-ready organisation.

2.7 This report provides a summary of the engagement outcomes and the proposed, draft policy objectives developed during the engagement process. The data and submissions collated during the engagement process are located at Attachments 1-5.



3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 hears and considers submissions from the community on the draft policy objectives.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 On 6 June 2018, Council resolved for officers to engage with the community on the Children's Services Policy development process. Council endorsed the engagement approach that enabled broad and diverse input from families, service providers and the wider community. The engagement process is being implemented in two stages:
 - 4.1.1 Stage 1: Development of key policy objectives for children's services, and
 - 4.1.2 Stage 2: Development of a draft service response that outlines Council's future role in children's services in the City of Port Phillip.
- 4.2 Stage 1 engagement was delivered from 15 June to 17 July and is now complete. The community was engaged through a combination of drop-in sessions and targeted workshops (12 in total), including a final workshop. The community was also engaged via the Divercity magazine, the Have Your Say online engagement platform, postcards, social media, direct mail and the Council website.
- 4.3 During the engagement period, Council identified the need for a targeted engagement forum specifically to engage Council-supported service providers from the four (in scope) service areas. This group, the Children's Services Reference Group, has been established and will meet monthly until the Children's Services Policy is adopted.
- 4.4 A focus group of independent service providers is also being organised to enable Council to fully understand the children's services landscape as it relates to independent private and not-for-profit providers.
- 4.5 During engagement, all (adult) participants were encouraged to:
 - 4.5.1 review the evidence gathered by Council during the review of children's services,
 - 4.5.2 provide their feedback on the information provided,
 - 4.5.3 explore the opportunities and challenges for children in the City of Port Phillip, and
 - 4.5.4 volunteer ideas and potential solutions for ways the opportunities and challenges might be addressed.
- 4.6 A total of 72 children and 212 families, educators and community members participated in the engagement sessions.



- 4.7 The Stage 1 engagement process directly informed the proposed policy objectives contained in this report. A future report will provide options and recommendations for achieving these objectives. Both reports will together inform the development of the Children's Services Policy which will replace the Interim Childcare Policy 2018.

Opportunities and challenges

- 4.8 Council's research while reviewing children's services in the municipality identified a number of opportunities and 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:

4.8.1 *Changing community needs*

- a) Helping families find the services they need – We know that 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.
- b) 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.
- c) Proficiency in English when starting school – 2.2 per cent of children in 2015 were not proficient in English.
- d) 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.
- e) Supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds – Compared to other municipalities in our region, Port Phillip has a much higher percentage of people using services for mental illness, alcohol and drug issues.
- f) 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).
- g) 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.
- h) Supporting families experiencing vulnerability – Families associated with Child Protection and Child First who are using Port Phillip's childcare centres aren't always adequately supported by state agencies, leaving childcare staff trying to support them without the necessary qualifications and experience of professional social workers.



- i) Supporting children experiencing vulnerability – Often the Australian Government does not provide ongoing childcare funding to families associated with Child Protection and Child First, despite evidence that shows these children benefit the most from attending childcare. As the Victorian Government shifts the use of public housing more towards transitional use, more children will experience unstable home environments.
- j) 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.

4.8.2 *Population Growth*

- a) Meeting the needs of a population boom – An estimated 80,000 people will move into Fishermans Bend over the next 30 years.
- b) Other areas within Port Phillip are already experiencing and will continue to experience growth. More children’s services will be required to meet this population growth.
- c) Changes to Australian and Victorian Government legislation, including reduced access to Australian Government subsidies for childcare for some – Families who don’t meet the childcare Activity Test will now have reduced eligibility for Australian childcare subsidies.

4.8.3 *Ageing buildings*

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

What was learnt from the engagement

4.9 Council engaged primarily with three and four-year-old children to understand what is important to them, including how they like to play and interact in educational settings. We also engaged with parents, families, carers, grandparents, service providers and staff on opportunities and challenges, and ways to improve services. A summary of the results is presented below.

4.9.1 *Children*

- a) Children were invited to talk about what they most enjoyed about kindergarten during two sessions. They were asked to imagine what their favourite character would do in their favourite place within their kindergarten in a third session.
- b) Children frequently mentioned animals (sea and land), fish, birds and the outdoors. When children at Barring Djinang were asked where their favourite character wanted to play, 10 out of 13 children chose outdoors. Children were highly imaginative in describing their ideal kindergarten, requesting access to water for play, and including aspects such as edible castles, gigantic hippopotamus buildings, and tea parties with butterflies. Small places where one or a small group of children could partially hide from adults and play privately were also popular.



4.9.2 *Families and community*

Families and the broader community discussed a wide range of ideas which have been summarised under four themes:

1. Places for all children

Of the 212 adults who participated, 32 identified that access to high quality services should be available to all children who live in the municipality. Participants also identified service types and needs including:

- a) More childcare places for children aged three years and under.
- b) More flexible hours of operation, including the potential for 24-hour care and shorter sessions of 2 to 4 hours to support parents to undertake shorter activities.
- c) The provision of kindergarten places for three-year-olds (consistent with recent research that shows the benefit of kindergarten for three-year-old children).
- d) Access to more sessional kindergarten options.
- e) Playgroups for specific groups such as fathers and greater availability in the number and location of playgroups, and a request for funding to support these groups.
- f) Expansion of the hours, spaces and toys available for toy libraries, including funding to support their administration.

2. Assistance to Enable Access

- a) There was strong support (48 participants) in the number of comments and in the ratings given by respondents to support children experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability to access all services.
- b) Respondents identified opportunities for improving affordability, increasing the understanding of the needs of families by service providers, and ensuring that funding and policy changes by federal or state government do not disadvantage families.

3. Buildings and Infrastructure

Sixty-two participants commented on the building and infrastructure requirements to support children's services. This included identifying additional infrastructure needs or aspirations including:

- a) more outdoor play areas and/or the provision of beach/bush/nature/garden spaces for play.
- b) the provision of indoor play areas, particularly where families have reduced access to play locations and for access and weather.
- c) some comments about improving the quality of older buildings.



- d) appreciation of infrastructure which supports the location and integration of different services.
- e) the provision of infrastructure to support access including children with disabilities.
- f) forward planning, particularly in relation to the potential of three-year-old kindergarten being funded in the future.

4. Joined up Sector

Fifty-four participants talked about navigating the service system, with suggestions about how this might be improved. The themes in this section included:

- a) reducing the administrative requirements for accessing services, including the management of service waitlists and greater transparency about how they operate
- b) greater transparency and assistance to educate the community about how the children's services sector operates, what services are available, how they are funded and how families can both access services and transition between different services
- c) greater transparency about where Council resources are allocated.
- d) making it easier for parents to access services through co-locating or visiting between services. For example, having allied health professionals and/or Maternal Child Health nurses visit playgroups; and sharing information about transition to school requirements with parents of children in kindergarten.
- e) supporting parental involvement in services, with evidence quoted from recent research that supports the achievement of better outcomes for children when parents are involved.
- f) building community partnerships across the sector, helping to build transitions and better integration between services.
- g) workforce professional development opportunities being developed across the sector; and consistent approaches to workforce across Council services, including standardised position descriptions and greater capacity to move between services.

What are the draft policy objectives of Children's Services?

- 4.10 The draft policy objectives are reflective of the analysis work conducted by the community in the Culminating Workshop. The policy objectives communicate the aspirations for children, families and infrastructure (services and buildings) in the City of Port Phillip. The Children's Services Reference Group has also provided input into developing the policy objectives. Their feedback is outlined separately below.



- 4.11 These objectives will inform the next step in policy development which will provide recommendations and options for how Council can achieve the objectives in the future.
- 4.12 Council officers will aim to draft a service response that reflects the objectives identified while also including measurable outcomes so the impact of the policy can be evaluated at regular intervals.

Draft policy objectives

- a) 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.
- b) Sustainability should be embedded into early years services, including options for family and community participation.
- c) Early years services will be supported by safe, accessible, contemporary, fit-for-purpose facilities.
- d) Families will have access to the information they need at the times they need it in order to make choices appropriate for theirs' and their children's needs.
- e) Early years services will be available at times that suit the diverse needs of families.
- f) Families should be supported to understand and locate the range of services they and their children might need.
- g) Children and families of all abilities should be supported to participate in all early years services.
- h) 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.
- i) Early years services will work collaboratively to achieve the policy objectives.

Feedback from the Reference Group includes the following amendments and additions:

- a) Addition - Council will use its leadership and planning role to consider the needs of families in the municipality and influence the provision of Early years services to meet those needs.
- b) Addition - Early years services will be consistently aligned with relevant policies and legislation at the local, state and federal levels.
- c) Reference Group members identified that the older centres may not be considered contemporary but are fit-for-purpose. It was suggested that the word contemporary be removed from the policy objective.

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- d) Members felt the term ‘sustainability’ was ambiguous and confusing and suggested changing it to viability or removing the objective completely.

Next steps:

4.13 Officers will review the draft policy objectives against the submissions from the community. A final draft of the policy objectives will be presented to Council for endorsement on 5 September 2018. The next steps include:

- 4.13.1 Development of a service response to the key policy objectives for endorsement on 7 November 2018. Council officers will aim to draft a service response that reflects the objectives identified while also including measurable outcomes so the impact of the policy can be evaluated at regular intervals.
- 4.13.2 Commencing Stage 2 community engagement on the draft service response 8 November 2018.
- 4.13.3 Revising the draft service response outlining the future policy direction of Children’s Services based on engagement.
- 4.13.4 Council endorsement of the draft Children’s Services Policy in February 2019.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

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

5.2 Face-to-face engagement occurred through a combination of drop-in sessions and targeted workshops (12 in total). The activities and the number of people involved 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	-
Skidders 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	-

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Activity	Date	No. of adult participants	No. of child participants
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	-

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Legislation has changed since the adoption of the substantive Childcare Policy in 2006. Current legislative requirements regarding children's services are outlined in the table below.

Table 1. Government Responsibility for Children's Services in Victoria

	Federal	State	Local
Childcare	Funding Quality standards	Quality checks	None
Kindergarten	Funding	Funding Quality standards	Facility provision*
Playgroups	None	Funding (for Playgroup Victoria)	Facility provision^
Toy libraries	None	None	Facility provision^

Local government's responsibilities are based on an informal agreement with the state government.

^ Local government has traditionally provided facilities for these services, without which, the services would not exist.

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

- 6.2.1 Building Code of Australia
- 6.2.2 Occupational Health and Safety Legislation
- 6.2.3 Disability Discrimination Act
- 6.2.4 National Education and Care Centre Regulations
- 6.2.5 National Education and Care Quality Standards
- 6.2.6 National Competition Policy



7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 A communications and engagement plan is under development for the next stage of community engagement. The project already has received funding for this purpose.

8. COMMUNITY IMPACT

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

8.1.1 Higher levels of drug and alcohol dependency, and mental illness.

8.1.2 Increase in transitional housing.

8.1.3 Issues with support in childcare centres

8.1.4 Difficulty for families experiencing vulnerability accessing children's services – despite research saying they gain the most benefit

8.1.5 Difficulties associated with attending school without adequate English.

8.1.6 Difficulties with access and support for children with special needs

- 8.2 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.

- 8.3 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.

9. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

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

- 9.2 This report progresses Council's commitment to providing access to children's services that support the health and well-being of our growing community.

- 9.3 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."

10. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

- 10.1 A timeline of the proposed process for developing a Children's Service Policy was submitted at the 6 June 2018 Council Meeting.

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



11. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

11.1 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.

TRIM FILE NO: 36/09/11

ATTACHMENTS

1. Analysis of all community engagement
2. Star Health Submission on Port Phillips Children Services Policy
3. BW FCC Submission A Better Future for Port Phillip Children
4. Childrens Services - Summary Data Report
5. Culminating workshop 17 July 2018 Report