



9.1 CHILDRENS SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: TONY KEENAN, GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PREPARED BY: DANIELLE FRASER, PROGRAM MANAGER SERVICE TRANSFORMATION

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present to Council for endorsement the Children's Services Policy development service response – *Every Child, Our Future: Policy Issues and Options Paper* (Attachment 1 - 8).
- 1.2 To note the next steps in the Children's Services Policy development, which are:
 - 1.2.1 For the Policy Issues and Options Paper to go out to Stage 2 community consultation from 25 March to end of April 2019 (refer to Attachment 9 – Stage 2 Community Engagement).
 - 1.2.2 To return to Council with a new Children's Services Policy for endorsement in July/August 2019.
 - 1.2.3 The new Children's Service Policy once endorsed, will guide the development of an implementation plan, which will include a new Children's Services Facility Strategy.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report presents to Council for endorsement the Children's Services Policy development service response – *Every Child, Our Future: Policy Issues and Options Paper*, intended for community consultation and engagement to support the development of a final policy for presentation to Council in July/August 2019.
- 2.2 The Children's Services Policy service response includes options and recommendations from Council Officers that have been based on:
 - 2.2.1 Seven key policy objectives, endorsed by Council on 5 September 2018.
 - 2.2.2 Critical success factors and parameters for decision making, endorsed by Council on 5 December 2018.
 - 2.2.3 Stage 1 community consultation, conducted during June/July 2018, with further Stage 2 consultation to come in March/April 2019.
 - 2.2.4 Ongoing engagement with local service providers through the Children's Services Reference Group and the Independent Providers Focus Group.



2.2.5 An evidence base that includes extensive research into the challenges facing children in the city and opportunities to improve their outcomes based on best practice in early years services. Some of this includes:

- The importance of investment in the early years and the role of services in supporting optimal childhood development.
- Best practice and emerging/contemporary service and infrastructure settings that supports healthy childhood development.
- Commissioned research from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital (Attachment 10).
- An evidence review and future service model options analysis by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc (Attachment 12).
- Current and future demand for children's services.

2.2.6 Analysis of the childcare market, services, facilities and associated financial and regulatory issues, such as:

- *A growing city* - Our population is increasing (from 3,912 0-4-year old's in 2006, to an expected 6,348 by 2031). This will have impacts on infrastructure and services. Overall there are sufficient places and diversity in the market; however, there are some barriers to access, particularly for children and families experiencing vulnerability and/or disadvantage.
- *Policy & legislative changes* - Since the last Children's Services Policy (2006), there have been 19 state and federal legislative changes impacting the delivery of children's services. Key changes include the recent introduction of funded 3-year-old kindergarten; the Commonwealth Childcare Subsidy, the National Quality Framework; and the National Competition Policy (NCP).
- *A changing market* - Private and independent services have increased their percentage in the market, since 2006.
- *Financial and asset sustainability* - 59% of the children's services buildings are over 50 years old. 41% of buildings were purpose-built for children's services. The increasing cost of providing services is not sustainable under the current service model, including: meeting NCP requirements; maintaining and renewing assets; and meeting increasing demand for children's services stemming from population growth.

2.3 The Policy Issues and Options paper has been framed to:

- 2.3.1 help articulate a vision for children's services in Port Phillip;
- 2.3.2 explore the issues and challenges facing the municipality;
- 2.3.3 suggest a range of recommendations and options that could be employed to address the objectives, issues and challenges; and
- 2.3.4 help us to achieve the vision of all children and families reaching their health and wellbeing potential.



3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Endorses *Every Child, Our Future: Policy Issues and Options Paper* and associated attachments (refer to Attachments 1-8).
- 3.2 Endorses Children's Services Policy Stage 2 Community Engagement (refer to Attachment 9).
- 3.3 Notes the next steps in the Children's Service Policy development, specifically:
 - 3.3.1 that the Policy Issues and Options Paper will go out to community engagement and consultation from 25 March to end of April 2019.
 - 3.3.2 To return to Council with a new Children's Services Policy for endorsement in August 2019.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

Background

- 4.1 Council provides significant investment in early education and care services, and as such, commenced a review of children's services in 2015 which identified the need for a newly revised policy.
- 4.2 Council has had in place a Children's Services policy that was endorsed by Council on 22 February 2006. The policy no longer meets the needs of the community and does not reflect contemporary practice. It also does not include or address the valuable role of playgroups and toy libraries as complementary early years services.
- 4.3 There is significant service, financial, facility, equity and regulatory issues that need to be considered in developing a new Children's Services Policy that will be transparent, consistent, equitable, represent value for money and sound stewardship of Council assets and delivers on Council priorities.
- 4.4 There have also been significant reforms to the way early education and care services are funded. These were introduced by both State and Commonwealth governments in 2018. These included a move to sector neutral, unit based funding and the promotion of a market based response to deliver early education and care services.
- 4.5 In response to these changes, Council adopted an Interim Childcare Policy 2018/19 on 7 February 2018 until a new policy is in place. The Interim Childcare Policy responded to changes in Australian Government's funding policy.
- 4.6 Seven new policy objectives to guide the development of the Children's Services Policy were considered and endorsed by Council on 5 September 2018. These were based on the consolidated information Council officers collected from June to August 2018, from the community, feedback from the Children's Services Reference Group and the



Independent Service Providers Focus Group. The policy objectives focus on accessibility; responsiveness; financial sustainability; collaboration; information; facilities; and natural environments for children's services. The policy objectives are:

- 4.6.1 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.
- 4.6.2 Council will understand current and future needs of families in the city and influence the provision of early years' services to meet those needs.
- 4.6.3 Early years' services will be financially sustainable and consistently aligned with relevant policies and legislation at the local, state and federal level.
- 4.6.4 Council will encourage collaboration across all early years' services
- 4.6.5 Families will have access to the services and information they need, at the times they need it, to make choices appropriate for their needs.
- 4.6.6 Early years services will be supported by safe, accessible, contemporary, fit-for-purpose, sustainable facilities and environments.
- 4.6.7 Children will have access to natural environments that allow them to learn about and experience play in nature. This includes natural environments within early years' services.
- 4.7 Additionally, on 5 December 2018, Councillors endorsed the Critical Success Factors and Parameters to help narrow and focus the decision-making criteria for the policy and service options.
- 4.8 Council officers have since developed a service response – *Every Child Our Future, Policy Issues and Options Paper* using the endorsed policy objectives, critical success factors, and parameters as the basis to assess the data and evidence from the extensive research that has been undertaken.
- 4.9 Throughout the policy development process Council officers have engaged with stakeholders, including gaining input directly from children, parents, staff, volunteer committees and service providers when considering solutions to address and respond to the challenges and opportunities for children's services in the municipality.
- 4.10 The policy options and recommendations in the paper seek to clarify Council's future role in Children's Services. These are focused on delivering a sector neutral, market based response to delivering early education and care services; with Council funding targeted to provide best value for Council's investment in terms of improving long term outcomes for all children in the city.
- 4.11 The paper also suggests options for future investment for children's services across Council run, Community-managed, and private/independent providers - facilities, funding, quality, and sector support.



- 4.12 Please refer to Attachment 11 – for an executive summary of the policy paper and recommendations.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 Council promoted Stage 1 engagement to approximately 10,000 Port Phillip residents, including children, through various channels. 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.
- 5.2 Some of the key themes from Stage 1 engagement include:
- 5.2.1 Ensuring an adequate supply of childcare for children under three
 - 5.2.2 Supporting children and families experiencing vulnerability
 - 5.2.3 Supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - 5.2.4 Helping families find the services they need
 - 5.2.5 Making sure we have enough children's services for growth areas
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 Stage 2 community consultation and engagement will commence 25 March to end of April 2019 on the Policy Issues and Options Paper.
- 5.5 Outcomes of Stage 2 community consultation will inform the final policy and recommendations to be presented to Council for their decision in June/July 2019.

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:
- 6.1.1 Building Code of Australia
 - 6.1.2 Occupational Health and Safety Legislation
 - 6.1.3 Disability Discrimination Act 1992
 - 6.1.4 Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012 and Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010, including the National Quality Framework and Standards, and;
 - 6.1.5 National Competition Policy.



7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 The Children's Services Policy Development project is being delivered within the allocated budget.
- 7.2 The Children's Services policy options and recommendations are yet to be costed in detail, future financial impacts provided are indicative only at this stage.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 N/A

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 Councils have a defined function under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to seek to protect, improve and promote public health and wellbeing within their district, which includes creating an environment which supports the health of the local community and strengthens the capacity of the community and individuals to achieve better health. Health includes physical, mental and social wellbeing.
- 9.2 In accordance with this role Council has always maintained its commitment to equity and social justice and works to strengthen the social determinants of health that influence the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, play and age. Evidence has shown the first 1000 days of life is a critical time as there is significant potential to positively impact the long-term outcomes of children, especially those at risk.
- 9.3 In developing a new Children's Services Policy Council has considered the best interests of the child and Council's role in enabling them to achieve their full potential. This may include targeting of Council support to vulnerable members of the community who are impacted by:
 - 9.3.1 higher levels of drug and alcohol dependency, and mental illness
 - 9.3.2 increase in transitional housing
 - 9.3.3 issues with support in childcare centres
 - 9.3.4 difficulty for families experiencing vulnerability accessing children's services despite research saying they gain the most benefit
 - 9.3.5 difficulties associated with attending school without adequate English
 - 9.3.6 difficulties with access and support for children with special needs
- 9.4 There is a strong and passionate connection between the community and the children's services provided and supported by Council, with 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.



- 9.5 Council will continue to support vulnerable families and will seek the views of diverse sectors of the community, including their children, 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", particularly aligned with Council's commitment to "providing access to services that support the health and wellbeing of our growing community".
- 10.2 One of Council's current 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 the policy direction for children's services and have developed an evidence based service response for Stage 2 community engagement and analysis.
- 10.3 The Interim Childcare Policy 2018 was adopted by Council in July 2018. The new Children's Services Policy will replace the interim policy. The interim policy will be evaluated and considered in the future policy direction.

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

- 11.1.1 20 March 2019 – Council endorses Every Child, Our Future: Policy Issues and Options Paper.
- 11.1.2 25 March to end of April 2019 – Stage 2 community consultation and engagement.
- 11.1.3 June/July 2019 – new Children's Services Policy to Council.
- 11.1.4 2019 – Following endorsement of the new policy an implementation plan and facility strategy will be presented to Council.

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.
- 11.2.2 The stage 2 community engagement plan is available to read in Attachment 9.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

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

ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL 20 MARCH 2019



TRIM FILE NO:
ATTACHMENTS

16/17/13

- 1. Every Child Our Future - Policy Issues and Options Paper**
- 2. Appendix 1 - Stage 1 Consultation Summary**
- 3. Appendix 2 - Childrens Services Reference Group Summary Report**
- 4. Appendix 3 - Early Years Services Affordability Analysis**
- 5. Appendix 4 - National Quality Standards Ratings in Port Phillip**
- 6. Appendix 5 - Early Years Services Access Analysis**
- 7. Appendix 6 - Early Years Services Current and Future Demand Analysis**
- 8. Appendix 7 - Childrens Services Asset Summary**
- 9. Stage 2 Consultation for Childrens Services Policy**
- 10. Murdoch Childrens Research Institute Evidence Review**
- 11. Executive Summary - Every Child Our Future**
- 12. Future Service Model Options for Toy Library and Playgroup**