



Every child our future

Children's Services Policy information pack

Stage 2 Community Consultation

March and April 2019



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Introduction

Council is working closely with families, children and the early years' sector to understand how we can collectively shape the future of childcare, kindergartens, playgroups and toy libraries in Port Phillip as part of our new Children's Services Policy.

This policy will address the longer-term challenges associated with growth in our City, the changing legislative framework, and trends in contemporary practice to enable all children in the City to reach their full health and wellbeing potential.

In June and July of last year we consulted with the community to determine high-level objectives for the new policy. As a Child Friendly organisation, we recognise the need for increased participation by children and young people in decision making. Feedback from children helped inform the policy objectives.

In September 2018 Council endorsed seven policy objectives. Now we have developed draft policy options and recommendations to achieve those objectives and we would like your feedback between 25 March and 23 April 2019. This information pack has been developed to help you understand *Every Child Our Future - Policy Issues and Options Paper*.

No decisions have been made yet on these options and recommendations. Council will review community feedback and is expected to decide on which recommendations to include in the new policy in mid-2019. The policy will then be developed with an implementation plan for final approval by Council.

This consultation is an important step in creating the best new policy for Children's Services in the City of Port Phillip and we appreciate your involvement and the wealth of knowledge and expertise you bring.



Why do we need a new policy?

Council's previous Childcare Policy was adopted in 2006 and is outdated. New legislation relating to children's services has come into effect since then, such as the Federal Government's new Family Assistance Package, the National Quality Framework and National Quality Standards. There have been major changes to the way children's services are funded and delivered. We also need a policy that plans for our growing population, supports members of our community that need it most, and ensures services are appropriate for our community.

How were the recommendations and options in the paper developed?

The recommendations were developed by Council officers and were informed by:

- Stage 1 community engagement findings from June and July 2018
- Children's Services Reference Group recommendations
- Murdoch Children's Research Institute "Early Childhood, Family Support and Health Care Services: An Evidence Review" (Council commissioned report)
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc "Future Service Model Options for Toy Libraries and Playgroups" (Council commissioned report)
- Other evidence, data and consultation outlined in "Every Child Our Future Policy Issues and Options Paper"

What does the evidence tell us?

- The early years of a child's life are critically important, particularly from pregnancy to age two
- Quality of care within service settings and home learning environments is crucial
- Health and development are strongly shaped by the social, economic and environmental conditions into which children are born and grow
- Investing in early years is cost effective, moderating the impact of social disadvantage, reducing later demand for services and promoting health and wellbeing in adulthood
- Disadvantaged families can experience barriers to accessing children's services, including trust, proximity, availability and cost
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have disproportionately positive outcomes when they receive quality early childhood education

What are the challenges?

These are some of the challenges we are looking to solve together:

Changing community needs such as supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children with additional needs, children experiencing vulnerability, or without English as their first language. Port Phillip also has one of the lowest kindergarten participation rates in Victoria (82.1% of 4 year olds participate in Kindergarten (compared to state average for attendance 96.2%))

Population growth – in addition to the growth experienced throughout Port Phillip since the Childcare Policy 2006 was adopted, an estimated 80,000 people will move into Fishermans Bend over the next 30 years. The population of 0-4 year olds is forecast to increase by 30% by 2031 (from 4,888 to 6,348 children)

Changes to Australian and Victorian Government legislation since Council's Childcare Policy 2006 was adopted, the National Quality Framework and National Quality Standards have been introduced and changes made to the Federal Government subsidies for childcare.

Ageing and not fit-for-purpose buildings – 59% of children's services buildings are over 50 years old. Many of them need updating to ensure accessibility and provide flexible programs that meet contemporary practice.

What services does Council provide?

Council currently provides:

- five Council-run children's services (four childcare and one kindergarten)
- eight community-run centres supported by Council through facilities and subsidies
- facilities for four kindergarten centres
- subsidies for 10 kindergarten centres
- a combination of facilities and subsidies for four toy libraries
- support staff and facilities for approximately 80 playgroups per year

Who operates childcare in Port Phillip?

	Council-run	Community-run	Private	Independent Not-for-profit
Centres	5	8	14	1
Places	362	580	1148	55
Average fees	\$125	\$123.75	\$145.33	\$137
Cost to Council	\$2.04m ¹	\$1,078,520 ²	\$0	\$0

Council also provides a centralised childcare waitlist which costs \$145,000, including overheads.

How does Council currently support playgroups?

Connection to Maternal and Child Health – encouraging new mothers to join a playgroup

Playgroup coordination – providing advice, assistance and referrals to playgroups

Facilities – providing community groups with free access to space in Council buildings

How does Council currently support toy libraries and kindergartens?

Council supports toy libraries and kindergartens with facilities, discounted rent and subsidies.

¹ Indicative as of June 2018.

² Centres pay for their own utilities. Most of the cost is associated with Quality and Affordability Subsidies. The costings assume that the infrastructure and maintenance levies paid by centres cover council's costs

Options and recommendations being considered for the new Children's Services policy

Policy Objective 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.

One of the topics highlighted by the community in the first stage of community engagement was the importance of supporting children facing disadvantage or vulnerability to access services.

Disadvantaged families are the least likely to use children's services despite research indicating they benefit the most.

We also heard the cost of care is one of the key issues for parents returning to work, particularly for families with children who have multiple and complex needs, or where parents require a place for more than one child in Early Years' Services.

There is also a lack of clear and accessible information that is easy to navigate about the services available, fees and specialised care available to the community.

Policy recommendations

Policy recommendation 1.1

Create a new grant program to provide a financial subsidy for families experiencing ongoing and situational vulnerability and disadvantage. This subsidy will be available for all eligible City of Port Phillip community members accessing any Early Years' Service in the City.

Policy recommendation 1.2

Support Child Safe Standards implementation across all early years' services (especially toy libraries and playgroups) through an education and capacity-building program.

Policy recommendation 1.3

Fund an early intervention outreach role to work with relevant service providers in the City (child protection, homelessness, mental health, family violence) to increase participation of vulnerable children in early childhood education services, especially kindergarten services.

Policy recommendation 1.4

Develop a Children's Services website that will provide information on all children's services in the City. This will include services provided, vacancies, specialist expertise, fee levels, educational approaches, target groups served and more. Participation in the website should be a condition for services to receive Council grants.

Policy Objective 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.

During the first stage of community engagement, we heard the community and service operators want more flexible services, more sessional kindergarten, a better spread of services across the municipality and better data about demand to help services plan for the future.

Port Phillip is expected to grow by more than 25,000 residents by 2027. The City needs to meet not only the current demand for Children's Services, but also plan for future needs.

Demand differs for each of the different services available, which Council will also take into consideration.

Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendation 2.1

Review and update the service model for toy libraries to include:

- Review funding model and operating subsidy to increase operating hours at current toy library sites to increase access and availability to services for residents now and into the future in existing Port Phillip areas.
- Develop one new toy library site in Fishermans Bend to service the growing population, as part of an integrated hub.

Policy recommendation 2.2

Monitor, track, encourage and report on the market response to childcare demand.

Policy Recommendation 2.3

Review and update the service model for playgroups to include:

- A dedicated, or several functional multipurpose, playgroup space/s to be considered in Fishermans Bend, as part of an integrated hub.
- An additional playgroup or children's multipurpose space in the north end of Port Phillip to be considered (South Melbourne or Port Melbourne neighbourhoods).
- Make available the playgroup rooms in Bubup Nairn Family and Children's Centre across five days of the week and transition other programs into other Family Services Rooms in the building to increase availability and capacity.

Policy recommendation 2.4

With the addition of funded three-year-old Kindergarten, consider transitioning current Council assets into kindergarten facilities to meet future demand where relevant, especially where the private market is meeting the demand/need for childcare services in that area.

Policy Objective 3: Early Years services will be financially sustainable and consistently aligned with relevant policies and legislation at the local, state and federal level.

The Children's Services Reference Group recommended Council continue to support a mix of Council-run, community-run and private services. This group also suggested more accountability and transparency around budgets for assets including levies collected, and maintenance performed for community-managed services.

The National Competition Policy (NCP) is an Australian Government program to ensure government services do not have a competitive advantage over privately owned competitors. Under the NCP, Council would be required to reduce the amount of subsidies it provides for Council-run childcare centres and make operational improvements, or alternatively increase charges to cover the subsidised amount at these centres to be NCP compliant. Council is compliant with the NCP in subsidising community-managed centres as they are not-for-profit.

Policy recommendations

Policy recommendation 3.1

Council to decide the future service model for childcare services from five policy options (A, B, C, D, E).

A. Council continues operating and subsidising childcare services as is

- This option is likely to be in non-compliant with the National Competition Policy.
- It is unlikely Council will be able to maintain and renew all existing assets to meet current and future demand, functionality and compliance issues.
- Council subsidies will continue to be untargeted and not based on need.
- Some assets will not be fit-for-purpose or compliant with legislation.
- Could explore co-funding or lease-to-own opportunities with tenants of council-owned facilities.

B. Council continues operating services, but at full cost recovery

- This option is likely to meet National Competition Policy requirements.
- Requires a review of infrastructure and maintenance levies to ensure they cover all renewal and utility costs.
- Will require increased fees at Council-run childcare services to allow for cost recovery (\$5-\$15 per day).
- Explore co-funding or lease-to-own opportunities with tenants of council-owned facilities.
- Continued support for community managed centres.

C. Council ceases operating Council-run childcare services and transition services to not-for-profit providers

- This would include full cost recovery rental arrangements, and utilities at cost to new owner.
- Meets all industrial obligations under relevant agreements and legislation.
- This could include purchase, co-funding or lease-to-own opportunities with not-for-profit providers.
- Operational savings to Council
- Asset sales to support transition arrangements

D. Council ceases operating Council-run services and sells or transitions assets for other Council purposes

- This assumes that the market will meet current and future demand.

- Uncertain as to how market failures will be overcome.
- Operational savings to Council.
- Asset sales to support transition arrangements

E. Council chooses a hybrid model based on above options

Policy Recommendation 3.2

Review all funding, subsidy and levy arrangements to ensure return on investment and KPI deliverables for acquittal purposes

Policy Objective 4: Council will encourage collaboration across all Early Years' services.

The Children's Service Reference Group reported on the importance of Early Years' services in Port Phillip working together to share information, training opportunities and support each other through a facilitated and resourced network.

Policy recommendations

Policy recommendation 4.1

Facilitate collaborative and collegiate relationships with early years' networks.

- Identify professional development needs for educators (including assistance in sourcing bulk discounts for training and providing free training room space).
- Childcare staff to visit and learn from centres in the municipality or within Melbourne that are consistently receiving an 'Exceeding' or 'Excellent' NQS rating, encouraging a 'community of practice'.
- These recommendations to apply to all providers, including independent and private providers.
- Support of Educational Leaders and networking across services.

Policy recommendation 4.2

Support the development of a kindergarten network to provide collaborative practice and integrated services that inform pedagogy and practice, for example approved provider responsibilities, professional development, quality referrals and transition to school programs.

Policy Objective 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.

In Stage 1 community engagement we heard that families need more help to find the services they need. In particular, information could be improved about services available, their fees, how to access them and how the Children's Services Waitlist works.

The Children's Services Reference Group told us better information about services would help promote how services are different and unique.

Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendation 5.1

Proactively create and promote opportunities for families with children to meet other families and develop social connections through such things as community events and parents' workshops.

Policy recommendation 5.2

Improve communications about the availability of, and access to, all early years' services, especially kindergarten to culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Policy Recommendation 5.3

Utilise approved state funding to scope the creation of an effective and centralised municipal-wide enrolment system for community-run and independent kindergartens in Port Phillip. This will require significant consultation with service providers.

Policy recommendation 5.4

Develop a Memorandum of Understanding for playgroups with guidelines regarding:

- Size and inclusion
- Available support for volunteers, committees and parents
- Sustainability, including sharing of resources between groups and recycling

Policy recommendation 5.5

Develop a centralised portal and communication strategy as part of the Customer Experience and Technology Transformation project, and work with children's service providers and families to establish the best way for families to receive the information they need, in the way they need it, when they need it.

Policy recommendation 5.6

Improve the current childcare waitlist and investigate expanding it to include private and independent centres in order to provide families with better information about places for children under the age of three, as well as to inform short- and medium-term planning for childcare.

Policy Objective 6: Early Years services will be supported by safe, accessible, contemporary, fit-for-purpose, sustainable facilities and environments.

In Stage 1 community engagement participants identified the need to update old buildings as one of their key issues as well as ensuring children with additional needs have access to services. Participants also said sustainable practices should be incorporated into all Early years' services with family and community participation.

The facilities used for Children's Services have a varied history with 59% of buildings over 50 years old, with only 41% purpose-built as early years' services facilities. Much of the portfolio of assets requires significant work and expense to comply with both the National Construction Code and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Some of the current facilities are not available to everyone in the community because they do not allow access for people with a disability.

The state government's Children's Facilities Capital Program provides a funding opportunity for Council to improve existing assets and build new early years' facilities. The funding is focussed towards increasing infrastructure capacity for kindergarten programs, promoting integrated service delivery, improving access to services for children from vulnerable and/or disadvantaged families and establishing early childhood infrastructure on or near school sites.

Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendation 6.1

Develop an Early Year's Services Facility Framework that will deliver the following outcomes:

- All assets to meet legislative and building compliance over the life of the strategy.
- All assets able to receive co-contribution funding from state government. This will require all assets to meet a minimum of 66 places.

Policy recommendation 6.2

Work with all community-managed services over time to implement the framework outlined above.

Policy Recommendation 6.3

Ensure additional facilities for services and consolidate existing services if required to meet functionality and compliance are incorporated into integrated facility hubs to address multiple service demands. Council will optimise opportunities for Major Capital Works grant applications available from Department of Education and Training for the building of integrated service hubs, especially on any new school sites, such as in Fishermans Bend.

Policy Objective 7: 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.

In Stage 1 of community engagement one of the topics highlighted by the community was the need for bush/natural outdoor areas and a connection to nature and the natural environments was one of the key priorities for parents.

Children who were consulted in Stage 1 also talked about elements of nature as being part of their ideal kindergarten.

Participants identified a need for a balance of services that provided both for indoor, wet-weather play, as well as outdoor bush and nature areas as well.

Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendation 7.1

Develop model for optimising access to existing assets in the city such as parks, beaches, and adventure playgrounds.

Policy recommendation 7.2

Advocate for the promotion of outdoor learning environments and programs that promote children's connection to nature and environmental sustainability practices, for example Clean up Port Phillip Day, Be Out There, Let's G.O (Get outside), and Indigenous nature-based cultural programs

Policy Recommendation 7.3

Develop a minimum design guideline for future playground works/upgrades at childcare centres that can be tailored for each site and implemented in stages, including investigating the development or suitability of nature and sensory play environments within open space settings for excursion purposes, for example developing bush kindergarten setting/s in the municipality.

Policy recommendation 7.4

Work with early years' networks to consult and promote the range of opportunities to incorporate nature and sensory play into their service settings with supported funding opportunities.

How can I get involved?

Between 25 March and 23 April, Council invites you to have your say on the policy recommendations and options being considered for the new Children's Services Policy.

Visit portphillip.vic.gov.au/haveyoursay to find out how you can have your say online, or participate in a workshop.

Download and read "Every Child Our Future - Policy Issues and Options Paper" on our website portphillip.vic.gov.au/haveyoursay for a more comprehensive look at the issues relevant to developing a new Children's Services Policy.

For more information please contact ASSIST via:

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- 03 9209 6777
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