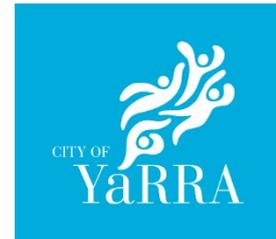


CHAS FARQUHAR PROJECT UPDATE

OFFICERS' REPORT TO COUNCIL

17 DECEMBER 2019



Purpose

1. To provide information and seek Council endorsement of the proposed management and service model of the Chas Farquhar community hub.

Background

2. The Chas Farquhar Complex in Richmond includes:
 - (a) The Cubby House;
 - (b) Richmond Kindergarten at 27 Duke Street; and,
 - (c) The Stables at 19-21 Duke Street.
3. The Cubby House at 92-94 Lord St is owned by Council and leased to the Richmond Community Learning Centre (RCLC). The facility is nearing the end of its building life.
4. Assessments for Council's Property Strategy (2018) found that the future of three facilities in Richmond should be considered collectively and as a precinct, called the Chas Farquhar Complex.
5. The Complex has several management arrangements. In addition to the Cubby House lease, the ground floor of the Stables is also licensed to the RCLC. The Richmond Kindergarten and the top floor of The Stables are managed by Council.
6. At its meeting on 4 June, 2019, Council resolved:
 - (a) In principle to transition the Chas Farquhar Complex into an integrated community hub offering complementary services for children and families and notes that Option A provides a building program to achieve this;
 - (b) Receives a further report following stakeholder and community engagement which includes –
 - (i) an analysis of the Neighbourhood House functions and services delivered by the Richmond Community Learning Centre from 92-94 Lord St as well as the future role and financial viability of the RCLC; and
 - (ii) details of a recommended future management model and preferred provider for the Chas Farquhar Community Hub for Council's consideration; and
 - (c) Requests that the report in [b] be provided in the fourth quarter of 2019 in order to progress the redevelopment of the Chas Farquhar Complex in the 2019-2020 financial year.
7. Officers provided a further report to Council that addressed the key elements Council was seeking to inform a decision about the Hub. The report included information about:
 - (a) Community consultation activities;
 - (b) RCLC perspective on the services and management of the Hub and including the potential impact of the integrated hub on their viability;

- (c) External policy changes and possible impacts on demand and management of occasional child care and kindergarten;
- (d) Five management options for the integrated Hub; and
- (e) Proposed next steps to progress the project.

External Consultation

- 8. Councillors Chen Yi Mei, Fristacky, Searle and Stone meet with representatives from the RCLC and officers on 10 December to discuss the project and the proposed management model.
- 9. It is noted that the report to Council on 3 December 2019 provided information about other consultations with the RCLC and local community that informed the development of management options for this report.

Internal Consultation (One Yarra)

- 10. Following the 3 December Council resolution, officers are working to progress works to the Richmond Kindergarten building in January in preparedness for further works.
- 11. Consultation with Buildings and Advocacy and Engagement has commenced to inform project planning and communications and engagement for the next stage of the project.
- 12. It is noted that the report to Council on 3 December 2019 provided information about other internal consultation with Children's Services, Community Partnerships, Governance and Arts, Culture & Venues teams.

Financial Implications

- 13. No specific financial implications were considered for this report.
- 14. Costs will be reviewed again when the scope of the project is finalised (community hub approach) and a detailed schematic design is undertaken.
- 15. The Chas Farquhar Hub management proposal does not directly impact on the level of financial support currently provided by Council to the RCLC for their neighbourhood house program.

Economic Implications

- 16. Investment in early childhood has significant economic benefits as it provides employment and enables parents / guardians to work, study and support family and personal interests while their children are attending kindergarten
- 17. There is evidence clearly linking kindergarten attendance to improved student results in numeracy, reading and spelling in primary school. In the long term, a longer duration of early childhood education and care is linked with improved academic outcomes for children.

Sustainability Implications

- 18. The project will include sustainable features in the design with the aim of optimising energy and water savings to reduce Council's overall environmental footprint.

Social Implications

- 19. There is an opportunity through this project to develop an integrated hub in readiness for future provision of 2 years of funded kindergarten programs for 3 and 4 year old children. This approach would in essence, future proof the service and align with the policy agenda of the Victorian government and Council.

20. Integrated hubs provide a consistent level of service and support to families to reduce barriers to accessing service. Integrated hub management provides a more efficient use of resources through removal of duplication and shared approach to supporting families with children.
21. Achieving DDA compliance at the upgraded Richmond Kindergarten will provide a modern learning environment for all children accessing services at that facility. The project proposes provision of kindergarten and occasional care at the upgraded Richmond Kindergarten. This will support children in occasional care to access high quality facility and learning program overseen by early childhood teachers. It will also enable families to enrol with the same provider.
22. Adequate provision of community infrastructure is essential so as to avoid costs associated with disadvantaged, disengaged and isolated communities. It plays a vital role in the social life of communities contributing to their sense of belonging and safety.

Human Rights Implications

23. Increasing participation and inclusion is consistent with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. Council has a responsibility to meet its obligations through appropriate and accessible community infrastructure. Residents and service users were invited to contribute their views for the first stage of the project. More community consultations are planned for future stages of the project.

Communications with CALD Communities Implications

24. No implications are considered in this report. The project has a community communications and engagement component for each stage.

Council Plan, Strategy and Policy Implications

25. This project approach follows a review of all Council properties considered in an assessment for the Property Strategy (2018) that identified the buildings in the Chas Farquhar Complex as a precinct and for further review.
26. The project is informed by the direction of Strategic Community Infrastructure Framework that asserts a Yarra approach in which importance is placed upon getting more out of existing infrastructure. This approach includes developing integrated services and facilities to deliver strong community benefits and maximise value to the community.

Legal Implications

27. The regulatory framework for Licensed Children's Services, which includes occasional child care services is governed by Victorian legislation. The Victorian government is considering reform of the Children's Services Act 1996 to align it with the Education and Care Services National Law.

OTHER ISSUES

Management Options

28. This section presents options for management of services and facilities aligned with the community hub proposal endorsed by Council on 4 June 2019 (in principle) and 3 December 2019.

Option A: Single Management Model – Council Manages Hub

29. Option A proposes that Council manages the Hub with community input via a stakeholder Reference Group. This option would result in:
 - (a) Council managing the integrated hub with two facilities including maintenance and responsibility for all aspects of the facilities, agreements for regular users and ad hoc or irregular bookings of community space;

- (b) The Family, Youth and Children's Services (FYC) branch providing hub management, and from within existing resources develop an integrated set of services, service standards, programs and room bookings. This would include ensuring community aspirations to continue access to space for children's activities;
- (c) Council continuing as a licensed education and care service provider and of all services located in the Richmond Kindergarten;
- (d) The Richmond Kindergarten providing two years of funded kindergarten programs, occasional child care (type 2, longer hours) and extended care for families needing a few hours of child care after the kindergarten program has ended;
- (e) In partnership with Venues and Events and in consultation with community including RCLC, this option would result in exploration of best method for handling room bookings in The Stables and providing an on-site presence, building on the successful Connie Benn Centre model:
 - (i) It is noted the room bookings for the Connie Benn Centre are managed by the FYC branch and the venues are promoted on Council's website under community venues for hire. Restrictions and further information relating to the Connie Benn rooms includes that priority is given to meetings relating to family and children services and group; the Connie Benn Centre is in a residential area and is a shared office space; noise levels must be monitored at all times;
- (f) The FYC branch in consultation with Venues and Events and the Hub Reference Group would consider how best to provide a mix of booking opportunities for smaller and larger groups;
- (g) A Hub Community Reference group established with RCLC, visiting services including MCH and playgroups, toy library and families and children as key stakeholders to support community ideas and inform programming to better respond to community needs and interests:
 - (i) A similar group is set up at the Connie Benn Centre that includes Brotherhood of St Laurence and successful activities from that group include professional development program for staff, Voice of the Child Project and strengthening pathways to employment for families through delivery of pilot projects with key stakeholders such as digital literacy workshops for parents.

Option B: Single Management Model – Early Years Manager / Partnership

30. Option B proposes that Council tender management and service provision for the Hub. This option would result in:
- (a) similar to Option A – one organisation responsible for managing delivery of education and care services and agreements with regular users and venue bookings for irregular users of the Hub;
 - (b) tender to specify applicants' must be either be DET registered Early Years Manager by DET or have a partnership with an approved Early Years Manager to deliver education and care services from the Richmond Kindergarten;
 - (c) withdrawal of Council from direct service provision of kindergarten programs and room bookings at the site.

Option C: Dual Management Model – Council / Not for Profit community organisation

31. Option C presents a dual management model with Council delivering the licensed education and care services, including occasional care, in the Richmond Kindergarten and a Not for Profit Community Organisation managing The Stables. This option would result in:
 - (a) similar to options A and B in the scope and allocation of service functions for each facility - licensed services integrated under one roof in a DDA compliant Richmond kindergarten and neighbourhood house, community programs and space for hire in The Stables;
 - (b) separateS managers from functions and provides separate space under the control at the site; and
 - (c) promotes opportunities to work together in the programming of outdoor space and activities.

Option D – Dual Manager Model with an Approved Early Years Provider and Not for Profit Community organisation

32. Option D presents a different dual management model with an Approved Early Years Manager delivering education and care services including kindergarten and occasional care in the Richmond kindergarten and the Not for Profit community organisation managing provision of community activities and bookings in The Stables.
33. Proposes a tender process for the Richmond Kindergarten with specifications of the service outcomes Council is seeking from the Hub.

Discussion

34. A community hub approach includes developing integrated services and facilities to deliver strong community benefits and to maximise value to the community. Integrating all the licensed early years' services into one facility provides scope to provide a programmatic response to changes in policy, funding and demand for services.
35. A single management model has proven to be the most effective and efficient method for managing hubs and facilities with different services. Officers' are recommending to Council to adopt Option A (Council act as sole Manager) to develop the Chas Farquhar site as a community hub as it offers the best proposal for meeting community needs and developing a viable, integrated hub for central Richmond.
36. Further information about the neighbourhood house program delivered from Lord St (Cubby House) shows that whilst this project will impact on the program, there is also continued opportunity for the RCLC to continue delivery of programs in the new Hub, should they choose to do so.
37. The Hub management has to consider programming for a range of different services and opportunities to attract visiting services and other activities relevant to community interests and needs. The proposal to offer a licence to RCLC rather than a lease is to provide a balance to allow space for other services.
38. Continuation of managing the occasional care service is considered important to the RCLC. However, it is likely that demand for occasional care will be impacted by the introduction of three year old funded kindergarten programs.

39. It is unknown to what extent the provision two years of funded kindergarten will impact upon demand for childcare but it seems reasonable to assert that demand for child care will be significantly impacted. Families with concession cards will eventually be able to access free kindergarten program of 15 hours in the two years prior to commencing primary school. The introduction of universal access to 4 year kindergarten changed demand for child care. There is far less demand for child care places in the year immediately before school and we would expect the introduction of funded 2 years of preschool to continue this trend.
40. Information from the community consultation undertaken in September – October suggests that the community feel, continued provision of current services and outdoor space is important and Option A can deliver those elements for the community. For children in particular providing a variety of indoor and outdoor learning and play spaces is important.
41. The detailed schematic design will provide further opportunity to consider how the different service and program functions including outdoor spaces will work together.

Next steps

42. Regardless of the direction Council determines to take on the service model and future management of the Hub, the upgrade building works are currently scheduled to commence in the second half of 2020. Those works will require closure of The Cubby House as the area will be part of the construction site.
43. Decanting and transition of services and activities currently delivered by the RCLC has to be considered in the next stage of project planning and execution.
44. The Stables will be available for programs and activities but there will no outdoor space available. Outdoor space may be available when the Kindergarten is not operating, which is usually one afternoon a week, early evenings and weekends.
45. There is no known option for a facility in central Richmond that could be licensed by RCLC for provision of occasional care. RCLC may wish to consider options before the Cubby House has to close due to the construction works.
46. For families, Council can offer affordable casual care which is similar to the occasional care offered by RCLC in the interim.
 - (a) Council's recent evaluation of casual and occasional care found that families are very interested in flexible service options and as suggested in the community feedback for this project. The Yarraberg Children's Centre in Richmond are working towards establishing 2 hour blocks of casual care that families will be able to book; and
 - (b) Subject to availability, families could choose to book 1 or more 2 hour blocks of care. There is opportunity to consider how Yarraberg places could be utilised to support families' who were accessing the RCLC occasional care service in the first half of 2020.
47. Weekend party hire and an outdoor playgroup will also not be possible at the Cubby House once building works commence at the site. Further discussion with RCLC and other areas of Council is required to determine if Council could offer an alternative venue for weekend party functions.
48. Weekend party hire was a popular element in the recent Have Your Say survey for the project.
49. Further consideration should also be given to the timing of the demolition of the Cubby House particularly if part of the current site could be incorporated into the outdoor space design for the Hub.

Conclusion

50. The driver for considering a community hub approach at the Chas Farquhar site is to develop integrated services and facilities to deliver strong community benefits and to maximise value to the community. The proposal also recognises the significant current issues facing the Cubby House building and the opportunity for integration of similar service offers in Richmond.
51. This report provides information about the management options to transition the Chas Farquhar Complex into a community hub with integrated services for children and their families, and general community activities and spaces for hire, all from modern and compliant buildings including a heritage listed building.
52. Officers advise that option A provides the best feasible option for meeting a number of community needs at the site whilst also enabling RCLC to develop their programs.
53. Option A provides a sustainable management model that supports a precinct approach to provision of services and builds on Council's experience of managing the Connie Benn Centre.
54. Community feedback suggests support for improved provision in the proposed Hub for the Chas Farquhar precinct whilst keeping all the community components and services.
55. Option A outlines a proposal for Council to manage the Hub. Council has a proven record in management and delivery of integrated early childhood and family services including licensed and auxiliary services such as community and supported playgroups, family support parenting programs and immunisation.