



**9.1 IMPLEMENTATION OF EVERY CHILD, OUR FUTURE  
CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY**

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

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**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To provide an update and recommendations regarding the implementation of *Every Child, Our Future: Children's Services Policy* in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Council was scheduled to consider an implementation plan for *Every Child, Our Future, Children's Services Policy* prior to its implementation on 1 July 2020.
- 2.2 The operating environment has significantly changed recently as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This has resulted in changes to government policy concerning children's services and significant uncertainty for families and children's services operators.
- 2.3 This report provides an update on the implications arising from the global COVID-19 pandemic and the recommended next steps in the implementation of *Every Child, Our Future: Children's Services Policy*.

**3. RECOMMENDATION**

That Council:

- 3.1 Continues to operate its five early education and care services in the medium term and seeks to minimise any loss arising from the Federal Government's early education and care relief package through continued focus on efficiencies, applying for any available funding, advocating for the inclusion of local government in all federal government financial assistance programs and constraining costs where possible through changes to operations that do not impact on the quality of care for children in attendance.
- 3.2 Defers any preparation and consideration on a business case regarding whether it is in the public interest for Council to continue operating early education and care services by a minimum of one year (May 2021) but no more than two years (May 2022).
- 3.3 Notes that *Every Child, Our Future: Children's Services Policy* will be in effect on 1 July 2020 and that the extent to which some commitments are implemented will be subject to budget prioritisation and review of policy settings.

**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:
- 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.
- 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.
  - Advocating to other levels of government to increase investment and to ensure all children have access to high quality and accessible children's services.
  - Continue providing support for volunteer-led, community-managed services that provide childcare, toy libraries, playgroups and kindergarten through appropriate funding and provision of facilities.
  - Exclude transitioning Council-run services and Council-owned facilities to private for-profit providers.
- 4.2 At this meeting Council resolved to develop 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 and requested that 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.
- 4.3 Council resolved to provide a transitional arrangement to all community managed 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.
- 4.4 Council requested 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.
- 4.5 Since the policy was adopted, officers have:
- 4.5.1 Notified services of Council's intention to extend all current funding agreements and leases with children's services operating in a Council-owned facility to 31 December 2022.
  - 4.5.2 Reviewed the operation of Council-run early education and care services 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.
  - 4.5.3 Developed independently-reviewed criteria and parameters for the preparation of the business case for whether it is in the public interest for Council to continue operating early education and care services.



- 4.5.4 Sought expressions of interest from staff, care-givers and sector experts to participate in an advisory group that would provide input into the business case.
- 4.5.5 Progressed the development of the implementation plan for *Every Child, Our Future: Children's Services Policy*.
- 4.6 It was intended that the outcome of this work would be presented to Council in May 2020 however significant changes to Council's operating environment, particularly in early education and care service provision, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, have initiated a reprioritisation of the program of work.
- 4.7 The outcome of this is that officers have reviewed the commitments in *Every Child, Our Future: Children's Services Policy* against the Council agreed criteria for assessing and reprioritising the council plan and budget. Officers have made recommendations about the implementation of the commitments based on this assessment. A full list of recommendations is available in Attachment 1.
- 4.8 The following are the substantive recommendations this review:
- Defer preparation and consideration of business case for whether Council continues to operate early education and care services and the review of Council operations. Recent changes to federal government policy around early education and care (deeming child care an essential service and making child care free for families) alongside enduring market uncertainty regarding the economic impact on supply and demand for early education and care services has significantly reduced Council's ability to undertake an assessment of public interest in this matter (Policy commitment 7a).
  - Defer preparation of a children's services facility strategy until 2021 as the impacts on supply and demand of children's services facilities is uncertain (Policy commitment 13).
  - Monitor any further changes to Federal Government policy regarding access to childcare. The early childhood education and care relief package (applicable from 6 April 2020) has effectively reduced any financial barrier for families to enter childcare and there is no need for Council to intervene at this time whilst this package is in effect (Policy commitment 2).
  - Consider a proposal for assertive outreach in the 2020/21 budget development alongside other community relief initiatives (Policy Commitment 1)
  - Policy commitments will be contingent on available resourcing within a revised budget.

## 5. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 By deferring consideration of the business case, Council will retain a risk that a national competition policy complaint could be made against Council's operation of the services and that the Office of Better Regulation would undertake an investigation. This risk is mitigated because childcare has been deemed an essential service during the pandemic and Council is actively managing costs associated with the service.

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 6.1 Council officers are working to minimise the financial impact of the recent federal changes to early education and care services that have negatively impacted Council



## ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL 20 MAY 2020

services. This includes applying for a special circumstances grant and constraining expenses through service changes without impacting children and families utilising the service.

### **7. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST**

- 7.1 An officer involved in the preparation of this report have the following indirect interest in the matter. The officer who prepared this report has a child attending St Kilda Balaclava Kindergarten a community-managed kindergarten in the municipality

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**ATTACHMENTS** 1. Every Child Our Future Commitments May 2020