

# AGENDA



## Meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee of Council

To be held at the

Civic Centre

511 Burwood Highway

Wantirna South

On

Monday 10 August 2020 at 7:00 pm

**Order of Business**

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Tony Doyle  
Chief Executive Officer

1 Apologies and Requests for Leave of Absence

2 Declarations of Conflict of Interest

3 Confirmation of Minutes

Confirmation of Minutes of Strategic Planning Committee Meeting on Monday 13 July 2020

## 4 Considering and Ordering Upon Officers' Reports

### 4.1 Child Care Service Model

**SUMMARY:** Acting Head of Strategy, Learning and Evaluation, Liz Stafford

**This report summarises the outcomes of a project to ensure that Council's long day and occasional education and care services are compliant with the National Competition Policy and recommends Council adopts Guiding Principles for the operation of these services.**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Committee:**

- 1. Agree to adopt the same set of Guiding Principles for the operation of its centre-based early education and care services that were recently approved for Council's funded kindergarten services, and that Council's Executive Management Team approve an Operational Service Plan on an annual basis for Council's centre-based early education and care services to operate in alignment with the principles:**
  - **High quality;**
  - **Inclusive and accessible;**
  - **Integrated;**
  - **Flexible and responsive;**
  - **Operationally viable and sustainable.**
- 2. Notes that the Operational Service Plan incorporates business modelling to ensure that future advice to Council relating to fees and charges is compliant with the relevant National Competition Policy.**
- 3. Note that the 2006 decision about the service becoming cost neutral by 2010 has been superseded by a combination of government policy and Council fee decisions implemented since 2011.**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report summarises the outcomes of the work that examined options for a sustainable business model for Council's centre-based long day and occasional education and care services. This work covered the introduction of the Commonwealth Government's Child Care Package legislation in July 2018, the establishment of the two early years hubs, and an assessment against the National Competition Policy. A key output of the work was the development of a financial modelling tool that allows for the adjustment of interdependent levers to examine a range of operating scenarios and understand the thresholds for levels of utilisation, parent fees and staffing levels. Officers have used this tool in further work to ensure that advice to Council on fees ensures compliance with the National Competition Policy.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

### **2.1 Council as a Service Provider**

Council recognises the importance of the early years by investing in the provision of direct services for children to support and enhance their healthy learning and development; to support families; as well as supporting access to purpose-built facilities for services not directly provided by Council, including playgroups and allied health services.

Research demonstrates that co-located and integrated delivery of early years services can better support children and families, particularly those who may be experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. The benefits of integrated early years hubs are considered a best practice model and are an increasing policy and funding platform for all levels of government.

### **2.2 Legislative Requirements**

Council's centre-based long day and occasional education and care services operating in the early years hubs must comply with a range of legislation, including the National Quality Framework, and the National Competition Policy because these services are considered a significant business within the context of the National Competition Policy.

Therefore, all modelling has been undertaken in accordance with Victoria's Competitive Neutrality Policy and has involved a calculation of the budget required to operate these services considering the commercial advantages and disadvantages that Council has as a government body.

### **2.3 Service Delivery Model**

Council's long day education and care services currently operate Monday to Friday, 7.00 am to 6.00 pm, 49 weeks a year. Families hold permanent bookings and may also use the long day service for additional day/s as needed and if vacancies allow.

Council's occasional education and care service is a highly flexible and casual service available (prior to the Pandemic), Monday to Friday, 8.30 am to 4.30 pm at the Knox Children and Family Centre (Wantirna South) for 49 weeks a year. The operating model for both service types had remained largely unchanged for several decades reflecting compliance with the legislative, policy and funding context prior to the introduction of the Child Care Package in 2018.

Council resolved in 2006 to increase its fees by a maximum of 10% each year until cost neutrality was achieved by 30 June 2010 (i.e. fees fully fund the service). Advice confirms that Council's budget decisions post 2010 have superseded this time limited resolution. The decision taken 14 years ago to work towards cost neutrality differs from the current Government requirement for competitive neutrality. The proposed recommendations for guiding principles inclusive of "operationally viable and sustainable" discussed in Section 2.8, in tandem with Council's recently approved FY20-21 budget, meets the requirements of the National Competition Policy and reflects a contemporary approach that is compliant with policy and service obligations.

### **2.4 Commonwealth Government Child Care Package**

Australian centre-based education and care services operate in a competitive market. The intent of the Child Care Package is to increase flexibility for parents, reduce out-of-pocket costs for families and achieve efficiencies in systems such as reporting on children's attendance.

The Commonwealth Fee Subsidy (CCS) each family receives is determined by the Commonwealth's eligibility criteria. Eligible families can receive fee subsidy for Council's long day and occasional education and care services.

The significant changes to note from the legislation associated with the Child Care Package relevant to this project include:

- The Commonwealth Government’s policy objective to provide families with more flexible options for child care;
- Removal of the distinction between long day care and occasional services. This means that any approved provider can offer a mix of long day and casual sessions in facilities that have historically only provided long day services;
- A maximum hourly rate cap for subsidised hours that increases annually in line with CPI; and
- A cap on hours of subsidy per fortnight with a maximum of 100 hours for some families (including those eligible for Additional Child Care Subsidy). This cap may not align with service hours of operation and result in some families paying “full fee” for some hours, which increases their out of pocket expenses.

Families’ eligibility for Child Care Subsidy is assessed against an income-based Activity Test (employment, seeking employment, study or volunteer work) and determines how many subsidised hours they can receive each fortnight.

Families receive fee subsidy for eligible fortnightly hours based on a percentage of an hourly rate set each year by the Commonwealth Government. This hourly rate is expected to increase in line with CPI each year. If services charge more per hour than the Commonwealth hourly rate, families are responsible for paying the difference.

Financial Year	Commonwealth Hourly Rate for All Service Types	Council’s Long Day Hourly Rate	Council’s Occasional Hourly Rate
2018/19	\$11.77	\$12.37	\$15.30
2019/20	\$11.98	\$12.98	\$16.80
2020/21	\$12.20	\$13.37	\$17.00

Under the Child Care Package, the interaction between hours of subsidy per fortnight, the Commonwealth hourly rate, a service’s operating hours, and a service’s fee policy, directly impact the out of pocket fees for families.

## 2.5 National Competition Policy Analysis

An assessment against the National Competition Policy has been completed which included the development of a modelling tool customised for Knox City Council. It was used to develop the fees for the FY20-21 budget and operating model for Council to comply with the National Competition Policy and be a sustainable and competitive provider. The examination of different operating models confirms:

- A sustainable and competitively neutral long day service that reaches cost neutrality is achievable within the first five years of operation (based on an average utilisation of 80% at both sites);
- Utilisation is the most critical factor in operating a sustainable service; and
- Alternative models of delivering the occasional education and care service may lead to a more sustainable service that meets community need.

The Commonwealth Hourly Rate and maximum hours of subsidy families are eligible for must be factored into recommendations for future fees and charges.

## **2.6 Affordability and Sustainability**

It is important to note that utilisation levels are sensitive to fees and if families cannot afford to pay, they often leave the service. This is a particularly important consideration in the context of the Commonwealth's Hourly Rate Cap.

The analysis confirmed that Council can comply with the National Competition Policy through fully cost-reflective pricing, and that the level of annual fee increases can maintain an alignment between Council's hourly fee and the Hourly Rate Cap set by the Commonwealth Government. This alignment is necessary for Council's services to remain competitive within the childcare market.

Long day fees can be incrementally increased by 8% in total over the next four years to reach fully cost-reflective pricing (based on an average utilisation of 80% at both sites). As the services are considered new businesses in this context, this is a reasonable timeframe to achieve competitive neutrality. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic must now be factored into this timeframe.

As utilisation levels are critical levers in maintaining a competitively neutral service, an annual review of utilisation will inform proposed fee increases which Council will consider as part of the annual budget process.

In response to this modelling, the Fees and Charges in the FY20-21 Budget have been agreed as follows:

- Long day care fees have been raised by 3%;
- Weekly and daily fees are replaced by an hourly fee; and
- Occasional care fees have been raised by 20 cents per hour.

## **2.7 Impact of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has disrupted the community's use of the childcare services. Prior to the Pandemic, the utilisation rate for the combined service in early March 2020 was 67% and building towards the target of 80%. This rate dropped to 58% in early April as parents withdrew their children from services because of the pandemic. Demand for Council's occasional care service is so low that the service has been temporarily closed since early April.

The Commonwealth's introduction of "free" childcare for families, as a mechanism to keep childcare providers operating during the pandemic was successful in retaining and increasing utilisation of childcare centres. For commercial childcare operators this financial support to the value of 50% of the pre-Pandemic fee income was augmented by another Commonwealth initiative, JobKeeper. However, the increase to 75% utilisation experienced by Council's services was marred by the impact of the JobKeeper Scheme which excluded Local Government. This resulted in Council's childcare service receiving only 46% of the expected income that would have been available from such a boost to utilisation through both the full amount of CCS and any parent gap fees. Given that "free" childcare ceased from 13 July 2020, utilisation rates may decline as families adapt to the evolving difficult economic and social circumstances.

In response to the Commonwealth Government's transition plan following 13 July cessation of free childcare, and associated transition grant funding requirements, Council resolved on 22 June 2020 to:

1. Approve a temporary freeze of fees for centre-based long day and occasional care, and charge the following fees as approved in Council's 2019-2020 Adopted Budget from 13 July 2020 to 27 September 2020:
  - a. Long day care daily fee: \$142.80;
  - b. Long day care weekly fee: \$698.25;
  - c. Occasional care hourly fee: \$16.80;
2. Charge fees as approved in Council's 2020-2021 Adopted Budget from 28 September 2020.

In terms of service delivery, irrespective of the Pandemic, Knox Children and Family Centres Bayswater and Wantirna South have continued to provide high quality education and care to children and families. Both services have responded swiftly in implementing changes to enhance the health, safety and wellbeing of children, families, staff and community including, but not limited to; temperature checking of over 300 people every day, cleaning high touch areas throughout reception, classrooms, hallways, dining room, staff room, offices and of course, equipment used by children. Children and families have learnt to wash hands on arrival, have their temperature taken and families communicate with staff every day in a variety of ways to keep themselves up to date. Staff continue to receive positive feedback from families about the high regard they have for these Council services.

## **2.8 Guiding Principles**

It is recommended that Council approves a set of principles that will guide the operation of Council's long day and occasional education and care services, and that Officers develop an Operational Plan for endorsement by Council's Executive Management Team (EMT) on an annual basis. This will be integrated with the annual Operational Plan presented for EMT's endorsement for the funded kindergarten service provided by Council as an Early Years Manager. It should be noted that Council will not be asked to set a minimum or maximum level to increase fees because the Operational Plan would also assist in considering and recommending annual service fees for families, which would then be included in formal annual budget processes.

The Guiding Principles would be the same as those for the operation of Council's funded kindergarten service, and include:

- High quality;
- Inclusive and accessible;
- Integrated;
- Flexible and responsive; and
- Operationally viable and sustainable.

Adoption of these principles progresses work to integrate related services to reduce duplication and maximise resources to achieve the best outcome for families and young children in Knox.

## **3. CONSULTATION**

A communication and engagement strategy was deployed in line with the FY20-21 Budget consultation and approval processes regarding proposed changes to Fees and Charges.

As occasional care provision was suspended early in the pandemic, further investigation and consultation with families is underway to confirm when this service can be offered.



#### **4. ENVIRONMENTAL / AMENITY ISSUES**

The two early years hubs are specifically and carefully designed to house integrated early years services in a quality environment.

The design of the hubs incorporates environmentally and economically sustainable design principle to significantly lower overall lifecycle and operating costs for the facility particularly in terms of water and energy use. The design also embraces the principles of universal access to enable members of the community and users of the facility to have unrestricted access.

#### **5. FINANCIAL & ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

This is discussed in the body of the report and agreed in FY20-21 Budget.

#### **6. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Co-located and integrated services can help achieve better outcomes for children and families, especially those experiencing vulnerability.

In integrated facilities, families feel more connected to each other, the community and early childhood services.

Accessible, quality early childhood services set the stage for life-long learning, provides children with a solid foundation for acquiring skills, and supports mental, emotional and physical growth. Further, parents who can access affordable and quality services are supported to take advantage of employment, training and educational opportunities.

#### **7. RELEVANCE TO KNOX COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL PLAN 2017-2021**

##### **Goal 5 - We have a strong regional economy, local employment and learning opportunities**

Strategy 5.4 -Increase and strengthen local opportunities for lifelong learning, formal education pathways and skills development to improve economic capacity of the community.

#### **8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Under Section 80c of the Local Government Act 1989 officers providing advice to Council must disclose any interests, including the type of interest.

Author – Acting Head of Strategy, Learning and Evaluation, Family and Children's Services, Liz Stafford – In providing this advice as the Author, I have no disclosable interests in this report.

Officer Responsible – Director, Community Services, Tanya Scicluna – In providing this advice as the Officer Responsible, I have no disclosable interests in this report.

#### **9. CONCLUSION**

Council's longstanding provision of high quality integrated early education and care services is based on the recognition of the importance for children in their early years to access services that support and enhance their learning and development. The work undertaken now positions Council's services to be fully compliant with legislative and policy obligations, offers enhanced

planning and budget tools for service provision and creates opportunities for further integration of services to the benefit of the Knox community.

#### **10. CONFIDENTIALITY**

There are no items of a confidential nature in this report.

**Report Prepared By:**                    **Acting Head of Strategy, Learning and Evaluation, Liz Stafford**

**Report Authorised By:**            **Director, Community Services, Tanya Scicluna**

#### **Attachments**

Nil

## 4.2 Early Years Advisory Committee - Appointment of Members

**SUMMARY: Team Leader Policy, Learning and Quality, Robyn Renkema**

**The role of the Early Years Advisory Committee (EYAC) is to provide advice to Council on early years issues and to promote greater awareness and understanding in the local community of early years services through the lens of Council’s Key Life Stages Implementation Plan 2017-2021.**

**The membership term for six members of the Early Years Advisory Committee concluded at the end of June 2020. An expression of interest process was conducted in accordance with the Knox City Council Committees Policy. This report seeks approval to appoint the recommended Committee Members as outlined in the Confidential Attachment 1.**

### RECOMMENDATION

**That the Committee:**

- 1. Thank outgoing Committee Members for their contribution over the last four years.**
- 2. Appoint the following applicants to the Early Years Advisory Committee for the period July 2020 – June 2022 as presented in Confidential Attachment 1:**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Category:</b>
1.	Community Representative
2.	Community Representative
3.	Community Representative
4.	Community Representative
5.	Professional Representative
6.	Professional Representative

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Early Years Advisory Committee (EYAC) was formally established in April 2010. The role of the EYAC is to provide advice to Council on emerging early years matters and to promote greater awareness and understanding in the local community of early years services.

The Knox Community and Council Plan (2017-2021) sets the vision for the City of Knox through eight community and Council goals that includes the needs of children and families as an important focus.

The Key Life Stages Implementation Plan focuses on the key life stages of early childhood, youth and older age and recognises that intervention during these key life stages has the greatest benefit for individuals, families and the community.

The EYAC Term of Reference requires that members are renewed through a selection process, inviting community and professional representatives to submit expressions of interest. In this round of recruitment there were six vacancies.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

### **2.1 Role of the Committee**

The current objectives of the EYAC are to:

1. Provide advice and recommendations to Council on the implementation of the Key Life Stages (early years) focus areas as incorporated in the Key Life Stages Plan 2017-2021.
2. The advice and recommendations in relation to this plan will include:
  - a. Agreed priorities;
  - b. The ongoing outcomes and achievements of the Key Life Stages Plan (early years) focus areas; and
  - c. Effective communication and consultation strategies to facilitate engagement with the community and other key stakeholders on the development and implementation of the Key Life Stages Plan (early years) focus areas.
3. Provide advice to Council on matters impacting families and children and the related services within the Knox community.
4. Identify emerging key research, policy and legislative issues that might impact on the implementation of the Key Life Stages Plan 2017-2021.
5. Consider advice and information made available through other Council advisory and community consultation processes related to families and children and/or local early years services.

Council receives an annual report on the key discussion topics and achievements of the EYAC.

### **2.2 EYAC Membership**

Membership of EYAC consists of a maximum of six community members and four professional members comprising a total of ten members and two Councillors. Further details are outlined in Confidential Attachment 1.

#### **2.2.1 Recruitment Process**

It is a requirement that appointment to a Council Advisory Committee be in accordance with the Knox City Council Committees Policy. This Policy requires that every effort be made to ensure a representative cross section of people from the municipality is selected to the Committee as appropriate.

Recruitment for the six EYAC positions was promoted through the following:

- Current EYAC members and Council Officer networks with community and service providers;
- Knox City Council website;
- Customer Service, early years hubs and digital TV screens;
- Accessing Knox e-bulletin;
- Council's Facebook page; and
- An advertisement in Volunteer Seek.

Seven expression of interest applications for new members were received and a further three expression of interest applications were received from existing members (see Confidential Attachment 1). The expressions of interest period for the community and professional member positions was open for three weeks from 18 May until 7 June 2020.

A selection panel comprising, Councillor Adam Gill as Chair and two Council officers was conducted on 19 June 2020. The following criteria was used when interviewing applicants:

- Reside/work in Knox;
- Personal experience and knowledge of early years issues;
- Effective communication and consultation within the community and with other stakeholders;
- Ability to identify issues and solutions and provide advice to Council; and
- Ability to work collaboratively.

Three existing members, two professional and one community, provided expressions of interest to extend their term. The selection panel recommends that these members be appointed for a further two-year term to EYAC (Confidential Attachment 1).

Three of the seven applications, comprising of three community members, were recommended by the selection panel for a two-year appointment to EYAC (Confidential Attachment 1).

Should Council approve the nomination of six Committee members, it is anticipated that an induction process for the new Committee members will take place in August 2020.

### **3. CONSULTATION**

Information about EYAC and the recruitment process was promoted on Council's website, through Council community email networks and social media.

### **4. ENVIRONMENTAL / AMENITY ISSUES**

The Early Years Advisory Committee continues to play a key role considering issues and advising Council in terms of child friendly spaces, which promote the health and wellbeing of Knox children and families into the future.

### **5. FINANCIAL & ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

The Family and Children's Services Department supports the administration of Council's EYAC. Officer time of approximately ten hours each month is absorbed within the Department budget in addition to an annual catering and supplies allowance of \$2,600.

### **6. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Research clearly states that when a community places a child as a central concern in the context of the family, community and its culture then significant and lifelong benefits will result for the community.

Children between the ages of 0-11 years represented 14% of the municipality's population, and this equates to 21,634 children (Census 2016). The period of birth to eight is a critical period in a child's life. It is the time when children acquire essential foundation skills and knowledge and when brain development is at its optimal level.

The Key Life Stages Plan continues to build on the opportunities to strengthen further partnerships with non-Council service providers and community organisations. These partnerships will benefit all children and families across Knox, irrespective of the early years services they access within the community.

The establishment and continuation of the EYAC has been a positive step towards achieving greater engagement and a maintenance of respect for Knox's long and proud history of pioneering the way in supporting and providing early years services for its community.

## **7. RELEVANCE TO KNOX COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL PLAN 2017-2021**

The Knox Community and Council Plan 2017 – 2021 identifies the key goals and strategic objectives to achieve desired health and wellbeing outcomes for the Knox community.

The goal of particular relevance to the EYAC is:

### **Goal 7 - We are inclusive, feel a sense of belonging and value our identity**

Strategy 7.3 - Strengthen community connections

Strategy 7.4 - Promote and celebrate the contribution of our volunteers

EYAC works across the additional seven Knox Community and Council Plan goals to provide input and feedback to achieve outcomes from an early years perspective.

## **8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

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Officer Responsible – Director, Community Services, Tanya Scicluna – In providing this advice as the Officer Responsible, I have no disclosable interests in this report.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

Between May and June 2020, Councillor Adam Gill and two Council Officers conducted a recruitment process for three existing members extending their term and three new members to EYAC. Recommendations from this process are outlined in Confidential Attachment 1.

## **10. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidential information is contained in Attachment 1 in the confidential agenda, in accordance with Section 89(2) of the Local Government Act 1989, as the information relates to personnel

matters and premature disclosure of the information could be prejudicial to the interests of Council or other persons.

**Report Prepared By:** Team Leader Policy, Learning and Quality, Robyn Renkema

**Report Authorised By:** Director, Community Services, Tanya Scicluna

### **Attachments**

Confidential Attachment 1 has been circulated under separate cover

5 Motions for Which Notice has Previously Been Given

6 Supplementary Items

7 Urgent Business

7.1 Urgent Business

7.2 Call Up Items

8 Confidential Items

8.1 Acquisition of Sites of Biological Significance – VicTrack Land

A confidential report has been circulated under separate cover