

2.4 EARLY YEARS INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Responsible Director: Russell Hopkins

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

A draft Early Years Infrastructure Plan has been developed for Council's consideration which provides direction for Council's investment in facilities which support the development of children and families. It is also proposed that the City of Monash advocate to the State Government for increased funding for early years infrastructure required to meet the additional demand created by the introduction of three-year-old kindergarten.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS/ISSUES

- Based on the latest demographic data for 2020 – 2029, Monash does not have adequate early years infrastructure to meet the demand and expectations of the community, particularly to meet the State Government's phased introduction of 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten by 2029.
- The current early years infrastructure stock is ageing, being -
 - not fit for purpose in some instances;
 - on average 48 years old; and
 - not consistent with current best practice expectations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is expected that the cost of the provision of the recommended early years facilities within this Plan will be between \$66M – \$70M (as at 2021) over the period from 2020 to 2031. Some of this cost is expected to be offset by provision of Department of Education and Training's *Building Blocks* grants. It should be noted that the primary driver for the provision of additional kindergarten rooms (as opposed to upgrades or consolidation) is to meet the demand for the State Government's introduction of three-year-old kindergarten.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

Council consideration of the draft Early Years Infrastructure Plan is sought, along with advocacy to the State Government to meet the cost of the provision of kindergarten infrastructure to meet the demand for three-year-old kindergarten.

EARLY YEARS INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

(Author: Chris Thompson)

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RECOMMENDATION*That Council:*

1. *Endorse the draft Early Years Infrastructure Plan.*
2. *Advocate to the State Government for increased funding for early years infrastructure required to meet the additional demand created by the introduction of three-year-old kindergarten.*

INTRODUCTION

This report provides information on the development of an Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2021 and seek Council's endorsement of the Plan.

BACKGROUND

The State Government has introduced the option of a second year of kindergarten, including three-year olds as well as four-year olds. This will include a phased increase in weekly hours to 15 by 2029. All LGAs will need to provide additional infrastructure to accommodate this increase in places. While evidence clearly shows the value of this additional year of early years' education, the provision of additional rooms (as opposed to upgrades to or consolidation of existing kindergartens) brings with it a significant financial impost for local government, only part of which is offset by an increase in State Government grants.

Monash Council has made a significant investment in providing infrastructure for the delivery of early years services. This includes sessional kindergartens, maternal and child health, long day care, supported playgroups, toy libraries and occasional care. The estimated cost of the recommended infrastructure within this Plan is \$66M - \$70M (as at 2021).

The vision for early years in Monash is for all children and young people in the City of Monash to have the best opportunities to grow, learn and thrive in a strong and supported community, where they are nurtured by capable, confident families from the time they are born until early adulthood.

There are two key drivers for this plan: the ageing and not fit for purpose nature of the infrastructure along with the expected increased demand for funded three-year-old which commences in Monash in 2022. Officers and the State Government have worked collaboratively to develop a Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) (Attachment 2) which considers existing data, anticipated birth rates, the current condition of kindergarten places/infrastructure, plus the role of the private sector in

meeting some demand for kindergarten services. The KISP identifies those areas of the municipality which will require additional kindergarten places to meet the future demand generated by the introduction of three-year-old kindergarten. The KISP is not a funding document and does not define required infrastructure projects or commit Council to funding specific projects. It is expected that the KISP will support future investment requests through the Victorian Government's *Building Blocks* early years funding program.

The KISP has informed the development of the draft Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2021 (Attachment 1), along with assessments of the current condition of Council's kindergartens, site constraints, and the possibility of the utilisation of school sites. The outcome of this Plan is for the City of Monash to continue its significant investment in supporting infrastructure for the delivery of high quality early years services, that includes funded sessional kindergartens, maternal and child health centres, toy libraries, playgroups, allied health support and long day care facilities.

The Plan's Guiding Principles

Early years legislation, policy and practice are guided by several fundamental principles -

- the role social determinants play on health and wellbeing;
- the fundamental rights of the child;
- the significant impact the early years have on lifelong educational, health and wellbeing outcomes for the individual and society as a whole; and
- a 103% return on investment in the early years.

The following factors are of equal importance within the Early Years Infrastructure Plan.

Location

The location of early years infrastructure enriches connection within the community. The new spaces are specifically designed to enable a gathering place for children and families. There will be a co-location and collaboration between a range of services which are accessed by families of children 0-6 years.

Choice

The early years infrastructure will be designed to foster choice and diversity. The building stock will reflect the types of services families need to access now and in the future. It will consider the diversity of programs offered and reflect the different communities within Monash. The unique character of each neighbourhood will be reflected in the design of renovated and newly built infrastructure.

Environmental Consideration

Early years infrastructure will optimise environmental sustainability and efficiency through the application of Council's Environmental Sustainability

Strategy 2016-2026. This will extend to materials, placement on the site, design elements such as double-glazed windows, tinting, acoustics and the like.

The design will also support social and physical engagement with the natural environment. This is specifically to provide the opportunity for programming which educates and encourages children to engage in sustainable and environmentally responsible activity.

Centre of Families and Community

Where there is an opportunity identified to create an integrated building, the design will allow all services under one roof wherever possible to incorporate dedicated and multipurpose spaces to support partnership and community inclusion.

Accessibility for all ages will be considered and welcoming common spaces will be included in the design to nurture social inclusion and increase social capital.

DISCUSSION

The current early years infrastructure consists of 42 buildings on Council land comprising:

- 28 kindergarten buildings
- 4 early childhood education and care facilities
- 5 maternal and child health buildings
- 2 occasional care buildings
- 1 toy library building
- 2 playgroup buildings

The average age of the early years facilities is 48 years and the majority are standalone facilities. Given the current best practice model is for integrated service delivery from child and family hubs, the current infrastructure does not meet best practice service delivery and does not meet the needs or expectations of the modern community. Following analysis of the condition of the current early years buildings, the expected demand for early years services into the future, the most recent best practice principles for early years service provision, the requirements of government funding and the expectations of the community it is recommended that Council plan for the provision of -

- additional kindergarten rooms within or near to those of areas of highest demand;
- consolidation of maternal and child health rooms into hubs where possible as per best practice;
- additional community/playgroup rooms; and
- ancillary/allied health service consulting rooms.

Over a 12-year period, these additional facilities will be provided through the delivery of a range of child and family hubs, relocation of some

kindergartens onto school sites (where possible) resulting in the provision of additional kindergarten rooms to meet expected demand. The areas which have the greatest unmet demand for additional places are shown in priority order:

- Mount Waverley South (addressed in part through the development of the Pinewood Child and Family Hub)
- Oakleigh/Huntingdale
- Ashwood/Chadstone
- Glen Waverley West
- Glen Waverley East
- Wheelers Hill and Glen Waverley North

This Plan has been developed using a strong research and policy base that underpins positive child health and development outcomes across the life course. It also demonstrates that children in Monash are growing up in a place where they are highly valued, with strong communities and networks to support them to grow, learn and thrive from the time that they are born.

The estimated indicative cost of the capital works involved is between \$66M - \$70M (as at 2021). As previously outlined, the requirement to provide for additional kindergarten places within the municipality is driven primarily by the State Government's introduction of 15 hours of kindergarten for three-year-olds by 2029, with the phasing of this beginning in 2022. While this policy is evidence based and welcome, it creates expectations that local government will deliver and fund the majority of these additional kindergarten places/rooms.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of Council plans that provide an important basis for the Plan – the Council Plan and A Healthy and Resilient Monash. The draft Plan is consistent and aligns with each of these key documents.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The social implications of adopting and implementing the draft Strategy include:

- (a) Enhancing a sense of community through the provision of early years facilities which are welcoming of the whole community and actively promote integrated services for children and families.
 - (b) Improving the provision of a range of community services for the needs of all children and their families, including extended family members.
 - (c) Improving the community health and well-being of children and their families through the provision of local accessible health services and facilities.
 - (d) Improving education and skills development through the provision of access to additional early years facilities thus access to quality
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education options for children and their families and meeting local needs.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

The four core principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are -

- non-discrimination;
- devotion to the best interests of the child;
- the right to life, survival and development; and
- respect for the views of the child.

These principles strongly align with the UNICEF's foundations of building a child-friendly city.

CONSULTATION

Broad consultation is not required for this Plan, noting that it utilises the KISP as a data source which has been developed collaboratively with DET. However, once the Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2021 has been endorsed, community engagement will form a key part of the planning for each individual project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is expected that the cost of the provision of the recommended early years facilities within this Plan will be between \$66m – \$70m (as at 2021) over the period from 2020 to 2031. Some of this cost is expected to be offset by provision of Department of Education and Training's *Building Blocks* grants. However, it should be noted that the primary driver for the provision of additional kindergarten rooms (as opposed to upgrades or consolidation) is to meet the demand for the State Government's introduction of three-year-old kindergarten. While the State Government has increased grant funding for early years facilities, the majority of the cost of the creation of additional capacity will be carried by local government.

While this Early Years Infrastructure Plan provides guidance for the prioritisation and delivery of related infrastructure, funding for each project will be considered as part of Council's annual budget process, and support will be sought from the State Government in each instance.

CONCLUSION

This Plan has been developed using a strong research and policy base that underpins positive child health and development outcomes across the life course. It also demonstrates that children in Monash are growing up in a place where they are highly valued, with strong communities and networks to support them to grow, learn and thrive from the time that they are born.

Following analysis of the condition of the current early years facilities, the expected demand for early years services into the future, the most recent best practice principles for early years service provision, the requirements of government funding and the expectations of the community it is recommended that Council endorse the draft Early Years Infrastructure Plan. Further, it is proposed that the City of Monash advocate to the State Government for increased funding for early years infrastructure required to meet the additional demand created by the introduction of three-year-old kindergarten.