PRESCHOOL POLICY

Policy Reference No. POL/187
File No. HCC10/599
Strategic Objective 1.1: Support and Enhance skill development and educational opportunities to reduce disadvantage, improve employment prospects and quality of life.
Adopted by Council 11 July 2016
Re-Adopted
Date for Review December 2021
Responsible Officer Coordinator Children’s Services
Department Family, Youth & Children’s Services
1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Hume City Council's Preschool Services care and educate children aged 4-6 years in the year prior to formal schooling.

1.2 Eligibility for Preschool also extends to 3 year-olds who are eligible to access preschool through the Early Start Kindergarten and 5-6 year-olds who are eligible to access a Second Year of preschool.

1.3 Preschool services offer play-based programs that focus on developing the social, emotional, cognitive, physical and language skills of children. Attending preschool improves the quality of children's experience of school and life-long learning.

1.4 Council makes a financial contribution to these programs in conjunction with the State Government who provide regular funding including the Kindergarten Per Capita Grant, Kindergarten Fee Subsidy, Kindergarten Cluster Management Funding, Early Childhood Teacher Supplement, Early Start Kindergarten Funding and Funding for a Second Year of Kindergarten.

1.5 Council is committed to providing all eligible children with the opportunity to experience an inclusive and diverse program that recognises the needs of the community. (Hume Early Years Framework and Action Plan 2014-18).

1.6 The existing service system in Hume City is characterised by a range of Preschool/Kindergarten providers including Council. Council is a cluster manager currently supporting and operating 24 preschools in various locations across the municipality with 1775 preschool places.

1.7 Council welcomes children with additional needs into its Preschool Services. Dependent upon eligibility children with additional needs will have access to existing program resources and funding such as the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Subsidy (KISS).

1.8 It is a community expectation that young children are developed into confident learners from birth and have access to high quality education (Hume Horizons 2040 community expectation 1.1.2)

2 PURPOSE

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to guide and direct the planning, delivery and operations of Council as a provider of Preschool Services, and in its role as a Kindergarten Cluster Manager and ensuring Hume residents have the continued opportunity to access a high quality preschool program that is well managed and supported, accessible within the municipality through Council's provision of this important service.
2.2 The legislative and regulatory context that governs the provision of preschool services in Hume City includes:

- The Local Government Act requires Council to plan and provide for wellbeing within the community.

- The Federal Government has the primary responsibility to ensure that preschool is accessible, affordable and of a high quality.

- The National Early Childhood Reform Agenda aims to improve the health, safety, early learning and wellbeing of Australia’s children.

2.3 The licensing and operation of children’s services in Victoria are regulated by the State Government through National legislation, namely, the Education and Care National Law Act 2010 and Education and Care National Law Regulations 2011.

2.4 This policy should be considered in conjunction with the Hume City Council Preschool Enrolment Policy.

3 POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 Council’s commitment to continue to operate Preschool programs is in alignment with the Hume Early Years Framework strategic priorities, Council Plan strategic objectives and Hume City’s community plan Hume Horizons 2040 strategy – A well-educated and employed community in which council will advocate for high quality education facilities and learning programs that are locally accessible for people of all ages.

3.2 Family and Children’s Services will conduct annual reviews of the delivery of Council’s Preschool services, with the aim of improving service delivery and ensuring resources are allocated appropriately. On occasion, dependent upon community need, this may lead to a change in a service. A change in service may include a decrease or increase to the number of groups at that service location or a decision to cease offering a service at a particular location.

4 SCOPE

4.1 This policy applies to funded preschool programs delivered by Council. Council works in partnership with other Preschool service providers and gives consideration to the service demand and provision throughout the municipality.

4.2 The following principles underpin Council’s approach to preschool services in the municipality and are to be considered at all times when implementing this policy:

4.2.1 Early years services directly improve a child’s social, emotional, learning and employment opportunities throughout different life stages.
4.2.2 Quality is critical to achieving the broader benefits of early years services.

4.2.3 Council’s service provider role strengthens Council’s planning role and its capacity to deliver social justice outcomes for Hume residents.

4.2.4 Preschool providers who offer ‘value add’ opportunities due to their broader organisational missions are preferred providers of preschool.

4.2.5 Partnership with early years’ service providers is critical to effective Council planning for preschool.

4.2.6 Parent engagement in preschool service planning and delivery strengthens quality outcomes.

4.2.7 Access to preschool is essential to support children’s preparedness and participation in school.

4.3 Council will undertake planning for the adequate provision of preschool in the municipality through:

4.3.1 Identifying infrastructure requirements to support preschool service delivery including new services in growth areas and modernisation in established areas of Hume City.

4.3.2 Providing leadership with local Early Years Partnerships and the community to influence State and Federal Government policy directions.

4.3.3 Collaboration with key stakeholders to develop enhanced preschool models and programming and maximise integration opportunities.

4.3.4 Identification of relevant social trends and emerging community needs through research and community engagement to ensure planning is robust and evidence-based.

4.3.5 Identification of critical industry issues and strategies (workforce capacity).

4.4 In its role as a lead agency in ensuring high quality service provision in Hume City, Council will:

4.4.1 Facilitate best practice service provision in a number of ways including:

4.4.2 Model ‘industry best practice’ in service delivery and facilitate best practice forums in Hume City.
4.4.3 Provide information and support that builds the capacity of other service providers to deliver best practice services.

4.4.4 Host annual events to share research findings.

4.4.5 Support the professional development of Council staff in the early years services.

4.5 Provide leadership and advocacy with local early years partnerships and the community to influence future State and Federal Government policy directions and initiatives including:

4.5.1 Development of innovative service models.
4.5.2 Infrastructure funding.
4.5.3 Improved and/or new services for the community.
4.5.4 Funding to reduce the cost for families.

4.6 Facilitate and encourage the development of appropriate infrastructure that supports the delivery of high quality preschool services in Hume City, through activities including:

4.6.1 Fund and construct new preschool infrastructure where: Council resolves that Council infrastructure is required to meet community need and infrastructure costs are reflected in Council’s Capital Works Program.
4.6.2 Collect appropriate developer contributions for the construction of required facilities.
4.6.3 Ensure that Council-owned preschool facilities meet Children’s Services Regulations and other relevant standards.

4.7 Promote Preschool services and their benefits to families in Hume City, including:

4.7.1 Disseminate information regarding available preschool services within Hume.
4.7.2 Inform community of the value of preschool services.
4.7.3 Promote collaboration across preschool and other relevant services.

5 OBJECTIVE

5.1 In the delivery of preschool services to children and families, Council will endeavour at all times to provide a service that is:

5.1.1 Accessible: easy to reach, supportive of all participants, embracing of diversity, promoting acceptance and aware of people’s different needs.
5.1.2 Integrated: well connected with other early years and community services.
5.1.3 Strength based: focused on strengths of families and children.
5.1.4 Collaborative: providing opportunities to develop relationships with, and between families, communities and other service providers.

5.1.5 Building Capacity: maximising potential to build capacity within families, individuals and organisations to enhance participation in preschool.

5.1.6 Sustainable: implementing actions which are sustainable in terms of environmental, social and economic sustainability; and

5.1.7 Compliant with Relevant Legislation, Quality Standards and Funding Agreements.

6 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Council’s Preschool programs and facilities will comply with the National Quality Framework administered by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority and relevant legislation.

6.2 Council’s Preschool programs will operate in alignment with Council policies and procedures. These cover issues such as privacy of personal information, access and equity, staff code of conduct, human resource management, health and safety, finance and asset management.

6.3 Council’s Preschool programs will operate in alignment with the Hume Social Justice Charter and Bill of Rights Policy to ensure that all protective care requirements are met.

6.4 Council’s Preschool staff will have access to, maintain and use policies and information included in the Children’s Services Family Handbook, the Children’s Services Staff Manual and the Children’s Services Procedure Manual to guide their actions in program delivery.

6.5 A range of principles guide the implementation of this policy, with the aim of providing opportunities for the best quality Early Years Services for children and families in Hume City

6.6 This policy will be implemented by the Children’s Services Leadership team as follows.

- Informing staff through induction and training processes.
- Placing this policy on the noticeboard at all program locations.
- Placing this policy on Council’s Internet site and Family & Children’s Services team site.

6.7 This policy will be reviewed in consultation with key stakeholders in 2021.
7 DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

7.1 Preschool – Is also referred to in Victoria (frequently by the Victorian Government) as Kindergarten.

7.2 Preschool eligibility- Children who are eligible for a funded year of preschool as determined by eligibility criteria in The Kindergarten Guide 2015, and its successor documents.

7.3 Kindergarten Cluster Management – A model that groups individual preschools under one single body responsible for the management of the preschools.

8 RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Hume City Council Plan 2013-2017
- Hume Horizon's 2040
- Preschool Enrolment Policy
- Education and Care National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care National Law Regulations 2011
- National Quality Framework
- Relevant organisational policies, plans, strategies and procedures.
- Hume Social Justice Charter and Bill of Rights Policy
- Children’s Services Family Handbook
- Hume Early Years Framework 2014-2018

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