

# PLAYGROUP SUPPORT POLICY

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<b>Policy Reference No.</b>	POL/186
<b>File No.</b>	HCC15/190
<b>Strategic Objective</b>	1.1 Support and enhance skill development and educational opportunities to reduce disadvantage, improve employment prospects and quality of life.
<b>Adopted by Council</b>	11 November 2013
<b>Re-Adopted</b>	November 2021
<b>Date for Review</b>	October 2024
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Manager Family, Youth and Children's Services
<b>Department</b>	Family, Youth and Children's Services

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## 1 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 It is Council policy to support and guide the development of universal and targeted playgroups in Hume City.
- 1.2 It is Council policy to conduct regular review of the availability of playgroups, with the aim of ensuring community access to a range of universal and targeted playgroups across the municipality. On occasion, this analysis may lead to a change in the role of Council in support of a playgroup including where it administers external funding.
- 1.3 It is not Council policy to provide or support all playgroups in Hume City; but to provide support to these services when and where it is most appropriate for Council to do so, based on the principles and scope outlined in this policy.
- 1.4 Hume City Council is a child safe organisation with zero tolerance for child abuse. Council adheres to the Victorian Child Safe Standards and related legislation. Council acknowledges the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of all children, especially children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and those with a disability.

## 2 PURPOSE

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to guide Council's role in ensuring Hume residents have access to a range of universal and targeted playgroups and ensuring equitable and appropriate allocation of Council resources which supports the role of playgroups.
- 2.2 The policy outlines Council's roles and responsibilities in the context of its social justice commitments and the existing strong evidence to support the role of playgroups.
- 2.3 The legislative and regulatory context that supports Council's role in supporting playgroups is limited to:
  - 2.3.1 The Local Government Act that requires Council to plan and provide for wellbeing within the community; and
  - 2.3.2 The National Early Childhood Reform Agenda which aims to improve the health, safety, early learning and wellbeing of Australia's children and is used as a guide in the support of playgroups but does not govern playgroups.
- 2.4 A range of principles guide the implementation of this policy, with the aim of providing opportunities for best quality early years services for children and families in Hume City. In facilitating high quality playgroup opportunities across the municipality, Hume City Council plays a number of key roles, which are outlined in this policy.
- 2.5 Planning for playgroup provision including regular monitoring of opportunities across the municipality and identification of gaps in response to changing or emerging community need.

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- 2.6 Providing playgroups where appropriate and applicable.
- 2.7 Providing access to Council owned and managed community facilities for the delivery of playgroups with the expectation of a return on costs directly associated with the permitted use and formal usage agreements in place.
- 2.8 Providing a support role through the provision of targeted information to playgroup facilitators.
- 2.9 Advocating for enhanced playgroup funding or targeted support where need is identified in planning process.

### 3 SCOPE

- 3.1 The following principles underpin Council's approach to playgroup provision in the municipality and are to be considered at all times when implementing this policy:
  - 3.1.1 Early years services, including playgroups, directly improve a child's social, emotional, learning and employment opportunities throughout different life stages.
  - 3.1.2 Playgroups provide an environment for parents and carers to build social capital, create friendships and social support networks that enhance their quality of life.
  - 3.1.3 Quality is critical to achieving the broader benefits of all early years' services including playgroups.
  - 3.1.4 Integrated and partnership models deliver the best possible outcomes for children and families.
  - 3.1.5 Council's various roles in supporting playgroups strengthens Council's planning role and its capacity to deliver social justice outcomes for Hume residents.
- 3.2 Council will undertake planning for the adequate provision of playgroups in the municipality through:
  - 3.2.1 Identifying infrastructure requirements to support playgroup provision across the municipality, including creation of appropriate space in new Council facilities in growth areas and modernisation in established areas of Hume City.
  - 3.2.2 Where Council is responsible for the allocation of external funds it will do so in a manner consistent with the requirements of the funding body and in a targeted manner according to the following priorities. Playgroups which support the following targeted groups:
    - a) Children of Hume City residents who are identified by parent, carer or guardian as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent;

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- b) Families with children with identified additional needs;
- c) Culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families, with a particular focus on recently arrived families;
- d) Children residing in Hume City who are considered to be at risk (referrals) or identified as having complex needs; and
- e) All other community groups.

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

3.2.4 Provide leadership and advocacy with local Early Year's Partnerships and the community to influence future State and Federal Government policy directions and initiatives including encouraging other providers to promote access to facilities for the provision of playgroup, such as schools.

3.2.5 Promote playgroups and their benefits to families in Hume City, including:

- a) Disseminate information regarding available playgroups within Hume to families and encourage complementary services to refer families to established playgroups;
- b) Inform community of the value of playgroup participation; and
- c) Promote collaboration across playgroup providers and other relevant services.

## 4 OBJECTIVE

4.1 Council's implementation of this policy will support the development and enhancement of a robust platform of playgroups across the municipality which:

- 4.1.1 is sustainable;
- 4.1.2 offers choice;
- 4.1.3 offers quality;
- 4.1.4 is accessible - culturally, geographically and financially;
- 4.1.5 is integrated with other relevant services and provides an access point to complementary child and family support services, and
- 4.1.6 supports playgroup provision at times and in locations that align with community needs.

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- 4.2 This policy is aligned to the Council Plan Strategic Objective 1.1: 'Support and enhance skill development and educational opportunities to reduce disadvantage, improve employment prospects and quality of life'; and focuses on:
- 4.2.1 Provision of high quality education facilities and learning programs that are locally accessible for people of all ages.
  - 4.2.2 Council's role in planning, service delivery and advocacy to enable families to access support services and increase participation rates in early year's programs.
- 4.3 This policy is also aligned to the Council Plan Strategic Objective 3.1 'Foster socially connected and supported communities' and focuses on building community capacity and connectedness.

## 5 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 5.1 Council will respond to community need for playgroups within the limitations of the scope, as identified in this Policy, through:
- 5.1.1 Planning;
  - 5.1.2 Advocacy;
  - 5.1.3 Active participation in partnerships with community service providers;
  - 5.1.4 Providing expertise and support to non-Council playgroup providers and facilitators through the employment of Playgroup Support Officers; and
  - 5.1.5 Provision of access to Council owned and managed community facilities for the delivery of playgroups at a nominal fee set as part of the annual budget process.
- 5.2 The Policy will be available on Council's Internet site and available upon request.
- 5.3 The Policy will be reviewed in October 2024 or sooner if required.

## 6 DEFINITIONS AND BBREVIATIONS

### DEFINITIONS

- 6.1 **Playgroup** - A playgroup can be described as a gathering of parents, carers and children who join together in a supportive environment to enable participants to develop valuable social and family support networks to empower families to support young children's development through a variety of developmentally appropriate play experiences and activities. The playgroup may be facilitated by an Early Childhood professional (a supported or facilitated playgroup) or be managed by the participating parents and carers (a community playgroup).

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- 6.2 **Viable** - A viable model of service delivery is a model that allows the service to operate in a financially sustainable way without Council subsidy.
- 6.3 **Access** - A family is considered to have 'access' to playgroup when a place is available in a quality program where neither distance nor cost presents a barrier to attendance.
- 6.4 **Industry leading practice** - Practice that is aligned with contemporary early childhood policy and international and national research determining a model of practice that achieves the best possible outcomes for the community.
- 6.5 **Strategic Objectives** - Refer to Council's adopted strategic objectives including the Council Plan and other strategic plans as detailed in the related documents section of this policy.

### ABBREVIATIONS

- 6.6 **DET** - Department of Education and Training (State Government)
- 6.7 **DFFH** – Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (State Government)

## 7 RELATED DOCUMENTS

- 7.1 Hume City Council Plan 2017-2021
- 7.2 Local Government Act (2020)
- 7.3 Supported Playgroups – Policy and Funding Guidelines 2021
- 7.4 Roadmap for Reform: Stronger Families, Safe Children 2016 (DFFH nee DHHS)
- 7.5 Early Childhood Reform Plan 2017 (DET)
- 7.6 Hume City Council 0-24 Framework 2019-2029

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