

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Position Paper: Council's Role in the Early Years



Hassett Street Preschool

Prepared 25 October 2022



South Gippsland
Shire Council

Purpose of the Position Paper

The purpose of this Position Paper is to define the role and level of service Council will provide in supporting early years services and infrastructure in South Gippsland Shire. The Position Paper will guide Council's decision about:

- The early years services where Council has a direct service delivery role.
- Investing in early years infrastructure.
- Seeking funding from the Victorian State Government.
- Advocating for improved early years services, infrastructure and funding in South Gippsland.



Mossvale Park

Proposed Future Direction

Council's future role in the early years will focus upon four key areas:

- **Direct service delivery** for Maternal and Child Health (MCH) (including enhanced MCH), immunisation and supported playgroup services.
- **Provision of infrastructure** to support kindergarten, childcare (Korumburra, Leongatha and Foster), Maternal and Child Health and playgroups.
- **Sector coordination and capacity building** including coordinating Kindergarten Central Registration, facilitating networking and training opportunities for services and the preschool field officer.
- **Capacity planning for the service system** to ensure the community has access to early years services in the right locations and in facilities which support the delivery of high-quality early years services.

But in recognition of the changing community, policy and financial context within which Council operates, this role will be influenced and guided by a series of principles.

Key Principles

Evidence based decisions	Support the provision of kindergarten and childcare infrastructure where there is clear evidence of community need including population size and change, the availability of other like services, changes in government policy, infrastructure age and condition, and the link between these services and the economic prosperity and liveability of communities.
Partnering	Actively pursue constructive and strong partnerships with State and Local Governments, community, and private providers to facilitate access to the right early years' services in the right location.
Quality	Facilitate and deliver quality early years infrastructure and service models. This means smaller rather than larger spaces and group sizes, providing infrastructure to complement core activities and support children and families with additional needs, and high-quality outdoor environments.
Strengthening the service system	Strengthen the capability of individual service providers, supporting them to maximise licensed capacity in response to community needs and facilitating a more collective approach between service providers.
Advocacy	Advocate to the State Government and State agencies about the needs of the South Gippsland Shire community for access to early years services, supports and infrastructure, and the community and economic impact of continued changes in policy about early years services.
Sustainable future	Take a proactive approach to attracting funding and partnering with others to support capital developments, and implement a sustainable approach to funding the ongoing maintenance of infrastructure.

Proposed Initial Priorities

1. Share the Position Paper with early years' service providers operating from Council-owned buildings.
2. Share the proposed infrastructure development projects from the Early Years Service Needs Assessment with the Victorian School Building Authority and develop an agreed pipeline of projects for capital investment.
3. Advocate to the State Government for the provision of 66 licensed places at the Korumburra Primary School to support the future need for three- and four-year-old kindergarten.
4. Enter an interim / short-term lease arrangement with the State Government for the kindergarten facilities proposed at the Korumburra Primary School. The purpose of the short-term agreement is to provide time for Council to facilitate the establishment of an early year's management arrangement as outlined in priority five below.
5. Facilitate the establishment of localised Early Years Managers with the suggested catchments including:
 - Central – Leongatha, Mirboo North and Meeniyan.
 - West – Korumburra, Loch and Poowong.
 - East – Foster, Toora and Welshpool (noting this is already in place).
6. Continue to implement the service agreements with early years providers located in Council buildings.
7. Explore options for having a collaborative approach to managing the cost of maintaining Council-owned building supporting early years services.

Community Context

Council's Existing Role in the Early Years

Council's existing role in the early years is focused upon four core areas:

- **Direct service delivery** for Maternal and Child Health (including enhanced MCH), immunisation and supported playgroup services.
- **Provision of infrastructure** to support kindergarten, childcare (Korumburra, Leongatha and Foster), Maternal and Child Health and playgroups.
- **Sector coordination and capacity building** including coordinating Kindergarten Central Registration, facilitating networking and training opportunities for services and the preschool field officer.
- **Capacity planning for the service system** to ensure the community has access to early years services in the right locations and in facilities which support the delivery of high-quality early years services.

Table 1 below provides a summary of where early years services and infrastructure is delivered or provided by South Gippsland Shire Council.

	Toora	Welshpool	Foster	Meenyan	Tarwin Lower	Mirboo North	Leongatha	Korumburra	Poowong	Nyora	Loch
MCH			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Immunisation			✓			✓	✓	✓			
Supported Playgroup			✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Kindergarten Infrastructure	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Childcare Infrastructure			✓				✓	✓			

Table 1. Summary of early years services and infrastructure delivered or provided by South Gippsland Shire Council

The Early Years Population We Support

In 2021, there were 1,437 children aged between zero and four years and a further 331 aged five years. Families with children in this age cohort are actively accessing kindergarten, childcare, maternal and child health, immunisation and playgroup services.

While there was a small decline in the number of children aged zero to four years between 2016 and 2021, forecast data suggests the population will increase between 2021 and 2031, particularly in Leongatha, Korumburra, Nyora – Poowong and the South East Central Coastal District which includes Foster, Fish Creek, Toora and Welshpool.

	Actual 0 - 4 population		Difference		Projected 0 - 4 population	Difference	
	2016	2021	Number	%	2031	Number	%
South Gippsland	1,589	1,437	-152	-9.6	1,844	407	28.3
Leongatha	391	301	-90	-23.0	473	172	57.1
Korumburra	232	270	38	16.4	336	66	24.4
Mirboo North	110	98	-12	-10.9	117	19	19.4
Nyora – Poowong	172	177	5	2.9	269	92	52.0
South East Coastal District	204	153	-51	-25.0	220	67	43.8
South West Coastal District	167	150	-17	-10.2	165	15	10.0
Rural West	108	100	-29	-26.9	127	27	27.0
Rural North East	103	102	-1	-1.0	134	32	31.4

Table 2. Actual and projected 0 - 4 population in South Gippsland by locality, 2016 - 2031

In 2022 there are 506 children accessing three- and four-year-old kindergarten in buildings owned by Council and a further 80 in non-Council owned buildings. Using the 2021 Census data as a guide, this means that 82.5 per cent of three- and four-year-old children in South Gippsland are accessing kindergarten in a Council owned building. While it is acknowledged some four-year-old children accessing kindergarten in South Gippsland live outside South Gippsland, this is a small number and is counteracted by children from South Gippsland accessing kindergarten outside the Shire.

2021 Pop.	Kindergarten Participation 2022 in Council owned buildings												Non-Council buildings
	Toora	Welshpool	Foster	Meenyan	Mirboo North	Leongatha CC	Allora	Hassett	Karmai	Poowong	Loch	Total	
613	18	21	33	45	50	84	68	26	66	31	36	506	80

Table 3. Kindergarten participation in South Gippsland by locality in 2022



Sand Pit at Hassett Street

Key Factors Influencing this Position Paper

The Position Paper has been influenced and prompted by several factors including:

- **The significant State Government led change and reform** occurring in three- and four-year-old kindergarten including the roll out of 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten and the recently announced proposal to increase four-year-old kindergarten to 30 hours per week through a staged roll out between 2025 and 2032.

The ongoing changes to State Government policy about kindergarten are increasing expectations of local government and means it is critical Council has a clear position about its role in relation to kindergarten, has a documented priority list of projects (pipeline of projects) it will seek to partner with the State Government in delivering, and understands when advocacy for improved services, infrastructure and funding is required.

- **The urgent need to respond to a request from the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA)** for Council to be the lessee for a 44 licensed place modular kindergarten facility proposed at the Korumburra Primary School. And in addition, for Council to confirm this provision is adequate or that additional capacity is required.
- **The recently completed Early Years Services Needs Assessment** which has confirmed:
 - » With population growth and increased demand from the changes to three- and four-year-old kindergarten:
 - Additional service capacity (licensed places) is needed in the short to medium term in Korumburra, Nyora and Mirboo North to meet the demand for 15 hours of three- and four-year-old kindergarten.
 - Further capacity will be needed in multiple locations in the medium to long term to meet the demand generated by 30 hours of four-year-old kindergarten including in Leongatha, Mirboo North, Meeniyar, Korumburra, Nyora and Poowong.
 - » The age and poor condition of kindergarten infrastructure in multiple locations means infrastructure will need to be replaced in the medium to long term in Toora, Welshpool, Hassett Street (Leongatha), Fish Creek, Poowong and Loch.
 - » There are issues related to equitable access to kindergarten, in particular whether services should be retained or be provided in some communities in the medium to long term. Key locations for consideration are Tarwin Lower / Venus Bay, Loch, Toora and Welshpool.
 - » The critical role of childcare and kindergarten in supporting the liveability and economic prosperity of communities. Without reasonable access to childcare and kindergarten, communities become less attractive for families to remain or to relocate to.

- **The views and perspectives of Councillors** about the current and future role of Council in supporting families and children in the early years.

The Position Paper is also informed by *Council's Blueprint for Community and Economic Infrastructure* which has identified the most pressing need is for renewal of existing facilities, the importance of planning for multipurpose / community hub facilities as opposed to single-use facilities, and the demand for services is expected to be strongest in the growth areas such as Korumburra, Nyora, and Leongatha, AND the *2021 Early Years Infrastructure Review* which proposes a range of infrastructure changes and improvements in response to service demand, the condition of infrastructure, and the aspirations of early years' service providers.



Mossvale Park excursion

Options Available to Council

In simple terms the options available to Council for its future role in the early years are:

Option One	Maintain the same role / a similar role and service level.
Option Two	Take on a larger role e.g. directly deliver kindergarten and childcare services from Council owned buildings or sites.
Option Three	Have a smaller role e.g. maintain what is currently in place but not replace ageing infrastructure or building any new facilities OR ceasing to have any involvement providing infrastructure to support kindergarten or childcare services.

Assessing the Options

A number of impacts and factors have been considered by Council when assessing each of these options and determining Council's preferred role for the future. These factors include:

- **Access to services:** How community access early years services will be impacted. Will it be easier, will it be harder, will it be consistent? What is the likelihood other providers (private or not for profit) will step into the market to deliver early years services.
- **Financial impact:** How significant will the financial impacts and risks be for Council and service providers?
- **Strong service system:** Will the service system be strengthened? Will it support strong service providers capable of delivering quality early years services for the community?
- **Economic and liveability impacts:** Will the option support local economic prosperity and liveability?
- **Operational impacts for Council:** How will the option impact upon Council's workforce requirements? Is the option consistent with Council's skills and expertise?
- **Existing obligations:** How will Council's existing obligations in relation to leases, service agreements, funding, and sector-wide agreements be impacted?
- **Reputational impacts:** What will be the reputational impacts for Council?

Table Four below provides a summary of the assessment of the key impacts and factors for each option with a brief written description and a colour-coding system to indicate as follows:

Green = There is likely to be positive impacts and/or no negative impacts.

Yellow = There is likely to be some negative impact.

Orange = There is likely to be significant negative impacts.

It shows that **Option One: Maintaining the same role / similar role and service level** the early years space will deliver the most positive impacts and minimal to no negative impacts.

Factors	Option One: Maintain the same / similar role	Option Two: Take on a larger role	Option Three: Have a smaller role
Access to services	Access to services will be maintained and likely increased as additional infrastructure is developed in response to community need.	Access to services will be maintained and likely increased as additional infrastructure is developed in response to community need.	Access to services is likely to be reduced with no investment in additional infrastructure, and/or existing service providers unable to purchase Council property to continue operating services. The private sector is unlikely to step into the market in any great way because it is a regional location.
Financial impact	Capital costs will increase, but they will be consistent with the findings from the Early Years Needs Assessment and the funding currently nominally allocated in Council's 10-year financial plan.	<p>The operational cost to Council will increase as a workforce will need to be employed to operate the existing kindergarten and childcare services.</p> <p>Capital costs will increase, but they will be consistent with the findings from the Early Years Needs Assessment and the funding currently nominally allocated in Council's 10-year financial plan.</p>	The capital cost to Council would be reduced with no investment required in capacity building infrastructure, and if infrastructure was sold off, this would provide Council with funding for other infrastructure projects. Operational costs may be reduced if Council steps away from its role in capacity building and planning, and the direct delivery of services such as MCH, immunisation and supported playgroups.
Strong service system	The capacity of the service system will be maintained with Council continuing its role in its sector coordination, capacity planning and building. It will be strengthened as Council pursuing key initiatives e.g. service agreements with all providers in Council buildings and facilitating strong local early years managers.	The capacity of the service system will be reduced, as existing capable and viable community not-for-profit providers are obliged to step away because Council chooses to become responsible for kindergarten and childcare service delivery in Council buildings.	The capacity of the service system would likely be reduced, particularly if Council sold off early years infrastructure. Council has a critical role in sector coordination, capacity planning and building which would be diminished or lost if Council reduces its role.
Economic and liveability impact	Maintaining Council's current role in capacity planning for the service system and providing infrastructure, which is responsive to community needs, the community will retain access to quality early years services that support parents to work and families and children to thrive.	Increasing Council's role in direct service delivery may increase access to quality early years services, but it may also redirect away resources from capacity planning and building. When Council has a large footprint in direct service delivery, attention can be directed away from future service and infrastructure planning and delivery, and puts at risk Council's ability to be responsive to future community needs.	This option means there is significant risk service capacity that will be reduced or at a minimum not increased to meet changing community needs. The provision of accessible quality childcare, kindergarten and maternal and child health services is recognised as critical to the economic prosperity and liveability of all communities.

Factors	Option 1: Maintain the same / similar role	Option 2: Take on a larger role	Option 3: Have a smaller role
Operational impacts for Council	There are no new operational impacts for Council by maintaining the same or a similar role in the early years space.	The workforce planning and management issues for Council as the direct provider of kindergarten and childcare services will be significant. As noted above, this is likely to take away from future service and infrastructure planning and delivery, putting at risk Council's ability to be responsive to future community needs for kindergarten and childcare.	There may be a reduction in the staff Council is required to employ to support early years services and infrastructure, but this would depend upon the extent of the reduced footprint.
Existing obligations	Existing obligations will be honoured with service providers (lease and service agreements) and the State Government (Compact Agreement).	Council has lease and service agreements in place with many of the early years' providers located in Council's buildings. These would need to be exited or broken for Council to become responsible for directly delivering childcare and kindergarten services.	Council has lease and service agreements in place with many of the early years' providers located in Council's buildings. The ability to sell any of these buildings or sites will be compromised by the existing agreements. The Compact Agreement between the MAV (on behalf of local government) and the State Government underpins funding for MCH services and supported playgroups. This may be impacted if Council chooses to reduce its footprint.
Reputational impacts	<p>The reputational risk for Council is minimal and the community is likely to be supportive of Council maintaining its current role.</p> <p>The State Government will be supportive of Council taking a proactive approach in planning for early years services and infrastructure.</p>	The reputational risk for Council with becoming responsible for directly delivering kindergarten and childcare services is high. Existing community providers and local communities are likely to have significant concerns where the service providers are delivering a quality, viable service, that is well regarded by the community.	The reputational risk for Council with any reduction in Council's role is high, whether this be over time by not investing in existing or new infrastructure in response to service demand OR by largely exiting the early years space. The community is likely to be strongly opposed to this, and Council's reputation with the State Government is likely to be negatively impacted.

Table 4. Assessment of options for Council's future role in the Early Years

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