

Item No: 0.0

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Responsible Division: Children's Services
Officer: Group Manager – Children's Services
File Number:
Community Strategic Plan Goal: *A safe accessible community*

SUMMARY

This report has been prepared to discuss the adoption of the *Child Protection Policy*. The Policy will inform the child protection practices of the entire organisation and ensure Council adheres to its legislative requirements under relevant NSW law. The Policy covers; the mandatory reporting of child protection concerns, the selection and recruitment of staff, allegations against staff involving children and young people and promotes Council as a Child-Safe Organisation. The Policy will be supported by a number of relevant guidelines and procedures. The Policy aims to ensure that children and young people have safe and positive experiences in our community, when accessing our facilities and when in our care.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council place the *Draft Child Protection Policy* on public exhibition for a period of 28 days, with a report to be provided back to Council following the conclusion of the exhibition period.

REPORT

Background

The former Holroyd City Council and Auburn City Council adopted their respective Child Protection policies in 2015. Council currently still refers to the former Holroyd City Council's *Child Safe Child Friendly Policy*. The *Child Safe Child Friendly Policy* includes outdated information notably an old phone number for the Child Protection helpline, mention of the now superdeded Child Protection Committee and refers to an outdated reporting threshold which was amended in the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. The *Child Safe Child Friendly Policy* also fails to feature current systems and procedures including the function of the Internal Ombudsman Shared Service to manage allegations against staff.

The final report for the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017)* makes a number of key recommendations including Recommendation 6.12 which is directed at Local Government. This strongly reinforces Council's responsibility to work towards becoming a Child-Safe Organisation as well as ensuring there are effective policies, guidelines and systems to support child protection and safety within Council.

Further, organisations which have contact with or directly care for children and young people are legislated by a number of NSW laws around child protection. *The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* dictates that staff who are employed in child-related positions are mandatory reporters and have certain responsibilities around protecting children, notably reporting concerns to the Child Protection Helpline. Council has a large number of staff who are mandatory reporters as well as a number of staff who have regular contact with and exposure to children and young people. Selection and recruitment is another way Council works to protect children and young people, this is to ensure that when recruiting, certain applicants, require Working with Children Check (WWCC) verifications in order to be considered for their respective positions.

The Policy has been developed in consultation with Council's Child Protection Team, Corporate and Customer and the Internal Ombudsman Shared Service. The Child Protection Team formed in May 2018 and has representatives from across Council. The aim of the Team is to collaborate on the identification, implementation and creation of policies, procedures and actions that enables Council to meet its objectives as a Child-Safe Organisation.

Child Protection

The Policy covers four areas of child protection:

- **Mandatory reporting risk of significant harm**
- **Selection and recruitment**
- **Allegations against staff**
- **Child-Safe Organisation**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The *Draft Child Protection Policy* will be placed on public exhibition for a period of 28 days, to enable the community to have an opportunity for input.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The *Child Protection Policy* has been prepared in accordance with Council's *Compliments and Complaints Management Policy* and relevant NSW legislation including:

- *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*
- *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012*
- *Ombudsman Act 1974*

The adoption and implementation of the Policy will contribute to effective responses to the reporting of child protection concerns, the selection and recruitment of staff and managing allegations against staff involving children and young people. It will also support the fulfilment of the relevant recommendations from the *Royal*

Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017) and the adoption of the Principles for Child-Safe Organisations.

RISK IMPLICATIONS

There are legal and reputational risks to Council if it does not adequately respond to children protection concerns, manage the selection and recruitment of staff and respond to allegations against staff involving children and young people.

Child protection matters must be handled in a timely manner, following specific processes, particularly when reporting to the oversight agencies. This is due to the highly legislated nature of what is required.

The Policy states that Council adopts the Principles of Child-Safe Organisations and will implement Recommendation 6.12 of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017)*.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for Council associated with this report as all processes and roles specified in the Policy are funded in existing budgets.

CONCLUSION

The Child Protection Policy is an important document to ensure Council is compliant with NSW Child Protection Legislation, including; mandatory reporting, recruitment and selection and responding to allegations against staff involving children and young people. The Policy articulates the professional and legal obligations of Council staff in relation to child protection. It supports the implementation of procedures for the prompt and confidential response to allegations against Council staff where a child or young person is involved. The Policy promotes the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people and promotes a safe environment for children and young people in our community, when accessing our facilities and when in our care.

ATTACHMENTS

1. The Child Protection Policy.