Stage 2 engagement report

Children's Services - draft policy recommendations

March - May 2019

Executive summary

This report presents the results and findings of Stage 2 Consultation for the City of Port Phillip's Children's Services Policy review.

Methodology

The stage 2 consultation sought stakeholder responses to the *Every Child, Our Future: Policy Issues and Options Paper.*

The consultation offered a range of methods to stakeholders to provide feedback on the policy issues and options paper:

- survey (online and hard copy)
- open comment (submitted online)
- face-to-face workshops and consultation sessions
- direct engagement with families experiencing vulnerability.

Results and key findings

Stakeholders were actively engaged in the consultation with over 500 people participating, including more than 450 survey responses and more than 40 submissions from individuals and organisations.

The following key themes were identified from the consultation response:

- natural environments and universal access are the two most important policy areas (objective 1 and objective 7)
- strong support for community-run centres
- strong support for small centres and opposition to introducing a minimum number of places
- strong support for not-for-profit services (either Council-run or community-run)
- preference that Council-run childcare services continue to be operated by Council
- low support for transitioning existing childcare assets to operate as kindergartens
- low support for changes to the childcare waitlist
- low support for centralised kindergarten enrolment.

Next steps

The findings from the stage 2 consultation will inform the development of the Children's Services Policy.

Project background

The City of Port Phillip is currently undertaking a review of its Children's Services Policy to respond to the changing needs of families and vulnerable communities within the City of Port Phillip and to respond to current legislation, population forecasts and contemporary practice. The policy will cover childcare, kindergartens, toy libraries and playgroups.

The Children's Services Policy is being developed with the following vision: *"A children's services environment that honours diversity, builds creativity and social connections and encourages all children and families to maximise their health and wellbeing now and in the future".*

The City of Port Phillip undertook a comprehensive program of community engagement in June and July 2018 (Stage 1 Consultation), inviting community members to indicate what is important to them in children's services. Two hundred adults and 71 children participated in the Stage 1 consultation. A full report on the engagement findings of Stage 1 can be viewed online. This engagement informed seven high level policy objectives, which were endorsed by Council in September 2018.

A Children's Services Reference Group (CSRG), made up of representatives from early years services, was established during this time to provide information and advice to inform Council's decision making regarding the new children's services policy. This group's key recommendations were presented to Council on 20 March 2019.

In March 2019, Council endorsed the *Every Child, Our Future: Policy Issues and Options Paper* to be released for Stage consultation. The consultation was designed to understand the community's level of support for the 25 draft policy recommendations contained in the Policy Issues and Options Paper. This report presents the feedback received as part of this consultation.

Councillors will consider this feedback when making decisions on the recommendations to include in the final children's services policy. Councillors will also consider the effectiveness of the recommendations in achieving the vision, the extent to which the recommendation is Council's responsibility, the potential benefits and the potential costs.

Council is expected to set the direction for children's services in September 2019. An implementation plan will then be developed along with a facility strategy. The insights gathered during this consultation phase will also be used to inform the implementation plan, and will shape future engagement with the community on children's services.

Methodology

During Stage 2 consultation, the community was invited to provide feedback on the draft policy recommendations. The consultation was held from 25 March to 7 May 2019. This consultation period included a two-week extension in response to community requests to allow more time to make submissions.

The engagement approach considered how best to reach directly affected community members. Given the complexity of the information in the Policy Issues and Options Paper, the engagement used a mixed method approach, allowing people to give feedback in a variety of ways:

- survey (online and hard copy)
- open comment (submitted online)
- participating in workshops and consultation sessions
- direct engagement with families experiencing vulnerability.

The promotion methods used and stakeholder groups invited to participate in Stage 2 consultation are detailed in Table 1.

Methods used to promote the consultation	Stakeholders
Information published via: - Council's website - Postcards distributed at children's services - Town Halls and library information boards - Email invitations (plus follow-up reminders) - Feedback boxes, information packs and hardcopy surveys - Council's social media accounts - Maternal and Child Health centres - Family Support team - Have Your Say database - Port Phillip Library website - Storytime and baby rhyme sessions at libraries (Emerald Hill, Albert Park, St Kilda) - Media release - Community facilities' information boards	- Families at Council-run childcare centres - All early years services in Port Phillip (65) and their families - Families registered for Parent information sessions (1,800) - Stage 1 consultation participants - Service providers participating in the Children's Services Reference Group - Playgroup coordinators - Maternal and Child Health centre users - Supported playgroup participants - Council staff - Older Person's Consultative Committee - Residents and ratepayers

Table 1 - promotion methods and stakeholder groups

To help participants understand the draft recommendations, an Information Pack was developed to provide a summary of the Policy Issues and Options Paper. Key documents provided as part of the consultation included:

- Information pack – a summary of the Policy Issues and Options Paper
- Every Child Our Future: Policy Issues and Options Paper
- Every Child Our Future executive summary
- Murdoch Children's Research Institute evidence review
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Inc research paper
- Stage 1 community engagement report

In response to community requests for more information and clarity on the draft recommendations, the following documents were added to the Have Your Say page during the consultation:

- glossary of terms
- recommendations by service type
- additional explanation of options in Recommendation 3.1.

A copy of the hard copy survey used is provided in Appendix 5. Examples of the promotion material and display methods are provided in Appendix 6.

Engagement results

Figure 1: Wordcloud generated from survey comments

This section details:

- Number of responses, the level of participation in the consultation
- Respondents, demographic information about respondents and the children's services they use
- Feedback, the qualitative and quantitative information collected from all the consultation activities

Figure 1 presents an overall view of the key words and sentiments from the qualitative information received.

Number of responses

Over 500 people participated in the Stage 2 consultation. There were 1,290 unique visitors to the consultation page on the website *Have Your Say*. Table 2 details the number of responses to each of the consultation activities.

Consultation Activity	Number of participants/ activities completed
Surveys (online and hardcopy)	470 (including 35 hardcopy surveys)
Online comments submitted	26
Submissions via email from individuals	8
Submissions from organisations (Provided as a separate attachment)	The following organisations provided submissions: Albert Park Preschool The Avenue Children's Centre and Kindergarten Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre Eildon Road Children's Centre Elwood Children's Centre Elwood Community Playgroup Joint submission from Ada Mary A'Beckett Children's Centre, Clarendon Children's Centre & South Melbourne Child Care Co-operative (Neighbourhood House) Poets Grove Family and Children Centre Lady Forster Kindergarten Middle Park Kindergarten Community Alliance of Port Phillip Star Health Ratepayers of Port Phillip
Supported playgroup consultation	2 families participated
Workshops (held 4, 8, 11, and 15 April)	13 pre-registrations and 9 participants
Meetings with Children's Services Reference Group	1 meeting (18 representatives of service providers attended)
Meetings with committees of management of community-run children's services and playgroups	13 meetings with General Manager, Community & Economic Development or Council representative at the following centres: Albert Park Preschool Ada Mary A'Beckett Children's Centre The Avenue Children's Centre and Kindergarten Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre Civic Kindergarten Clarendon Children's Centre Eildon Road Children's Centre Elwood Children's Centre Elwood Community Playgroup Poets Grove Family and Children Centre Lady Forster Kindergarten Middle Park Kindergarten

	South Melbourne Child Care Co-Operative (Neighbourhood House)

Table 2 - Consultation activities and participation

Respondent profile

Survey respondents were asked to provide basic demographic information:

- stakeholder type; for example, service user, service provider, resident/ratepayer
- children's services used (if any)
- residential postcode.

Stakeholder type

Respondents were able to select more than one stakeholder type. Respondents were predominantly service users and residents/ratepayers, with some respondents selecting both of these options. A review of the respondents who did not nominate as being service users identified a further 97 respondents who nominated as using one or more type of children's service. The total number of service users may be closer to 395. In addition, there were 130 respondents who nominated as service users and who recorded a residential postcode within City of Port Phillip but who did not nominate as a resident or ratepayer. The total number of respondents who live in the City of Port Phillip may be closer to 400.

The responses regarding stakeholder type are presented in Figure 2
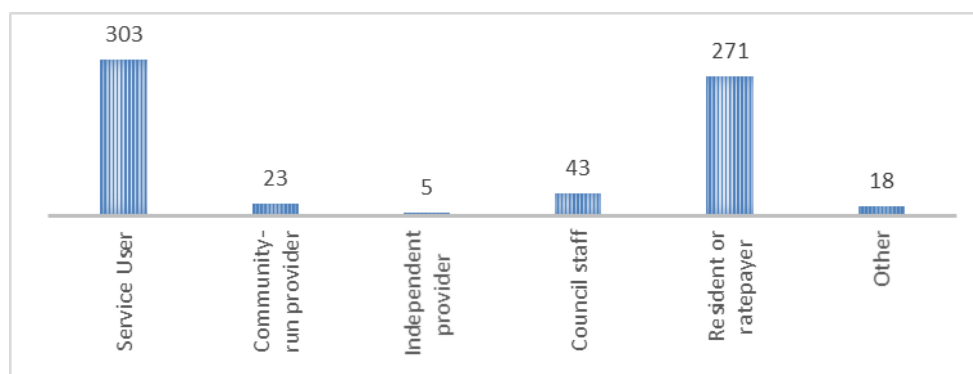
Figure 2 – Type of participant

Services participants use

Respondents were asked to nominate the types of services they used and were able to select more than one option. Survey respondents were predominantly users of childcare with some using more than one type of childcare:

- 17 respondents used both Council-run and community-run childcare
- 9 respondents used both Council-run and independent childcare

There were 24 respondents who nominated as using Council-run childcare and sessional kindergarten.

Users of playgroups and toy libraries typically also used childcare and/or sessional kindergarten, with five respondents nominating they used only playgroups and/or toy libraries.

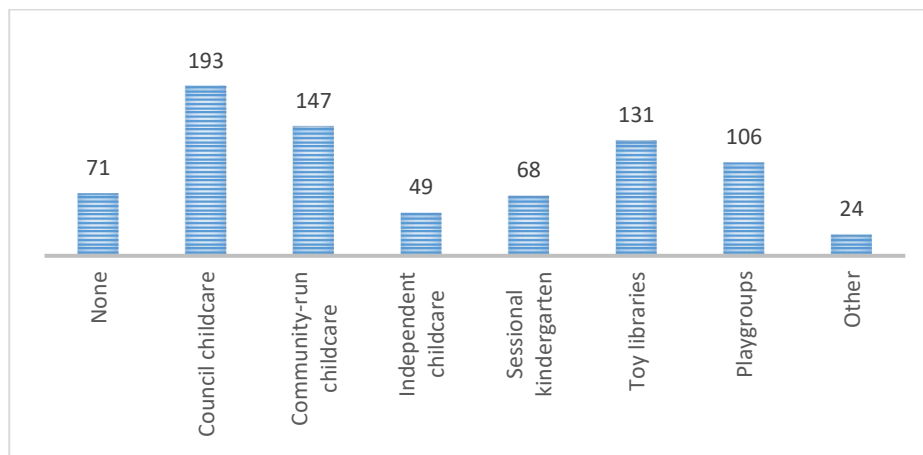Responses regarding services used are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Services participants use

Respondents were asked to nominate their residential postcode. While 38 respondents nominated a postcode as "other", only nine of these respondents were users of childcare and none of these respondents were users of sessional kindergarten.

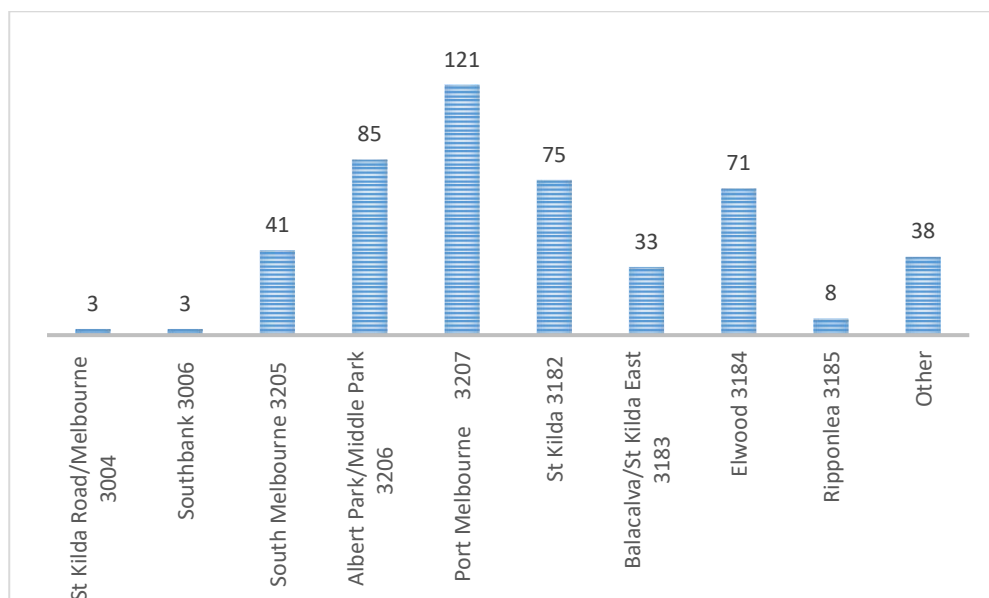Responses regarding respondent postcode are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Respondent postcode

Feedback

Introduction

The feedback provided in Stage 2 consultation included both quantitative and qualitative information.

Quantitative Information

The survey responses provided quantitative information about:

- The degree of support for each of the 25 policy recommendations
- Respondents' preferences for each of the 5 options detailed in recommendation 3.1 - the future service model for childcare services
- The priority that respondents placed on each of the seven policy objectives
- Demographic information:
  - Stakeholder type
  - Services used (if any)
  - Residential postcode
- The number of respondents who noted whether (or not) the information provided during the consultation helped with providing feedback.

Qualitative Information

The survey responses also provided qualitative information though the prompt question *Do you have any other comments or feedback?* Respondents were able to use the free comments field to record their responses.

Qualitative information was also received from:

- Community workshops
- Online submissions
- Engaging directly with families experiencing vulnerability

This section of the report details

- Quantitative findings survey responses, specifically respondents':
  - Priority for seven policy objectives
  - Most supported recommendations
  - Least supported recommendations
  - Preferences for the 5 service model options within recommendation 3.1
- Qualitative information from the thematic analysis of:
  - Survey comments
  - Community workshop discussions
  - Submissions
  - Engaging directly with families experiencing vulnerability

The survey responses for all of the policy recommendations are detailed in Appendix 1. The verbatim comments submitted as part of the survey, online as a separate comment and submissions by individuals via email are detailed in Appendix 2. The analysis of the discussions at the community workshop are detailed in Appendix 3. Written submissions are detailed in Appendix 4.

Priority rating for the seven policy objectives

Participants were asked to rank the seven policy objectives in order of priority. The objective ranked highest priority was given the highest score. The two highest priority areas were Objective 1, Universal Access and Objective 7, Natural Environments. The lowest priority was Objective 5, Information.
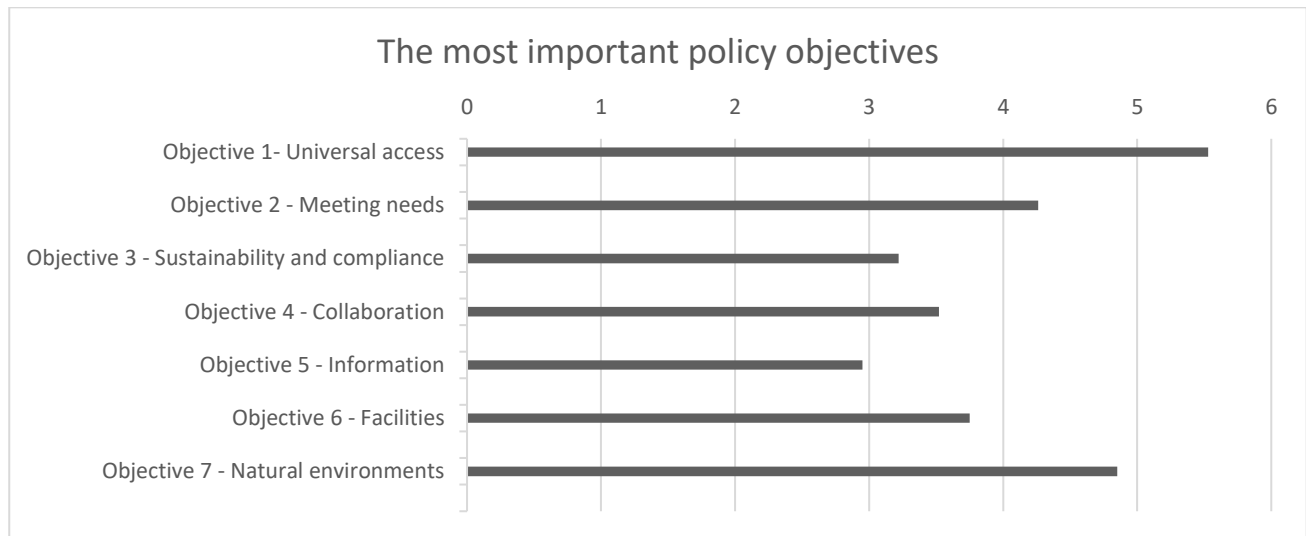

Figure 5 – priority ranking of policy objectives

Most and least strongly supported recommendations

Participants were asked to indicate their degree of support for each of the 25 policy recommendations using a 5 point scale. The responses for each recommendation were scored, with a higher degree of support attracting a higher score and a lower degree of support attracting a lower score.

The six most strongly supported recommendations were:

- **Recommendation 7.1** - Develop model for optimising access to existing assets in the city such as parks, beaches, and adventure playgrounds.
  (90% somewhat or strongly support)
- **Recommendation 7.2** - Advocate for the promotion of outdoor learning environments and programs that promote children's connection to nature and environmental sustainability practices, for example Clean up Port Phillip Day, Be Out There, Let's G.O (Get outside), and Indigenous nature-based cultural programs.
  (89% somewhat or strongly support)
- **Recommendation 1.3** - Fund an early intervention outreach role to work with relevant service providers in the City (child protection, homelessness, mental health, family violence) to increase participation of vulnerable children in early childhood education services, especially kindergarten services.
  (*87% somewhat or strongly support)*
- **Recommendation 7.3** - Develop a minimum design guideline for future playground works/upgrades at childcare centres that can be tailored for each site and implemented in stages, including investigating the development or suitability of nature and sensory play environments within open space settings for excursion purposes, for example developing bush kindergarten setting/s in the municipality.
  (87% somewhat or strongly support)
- **Recommendation 4.1** - Facilitate collaborative and collegiate relationships with early years' networks:
  - Identify professional development needs for educators (including assistance in sourcing bulk discounts for training and providing free training room space).
  - Childcare staff to visit and learn from centres in the municipality or within Melbourne that are consistently receiving an 'Exceeding' or 'Excellent' NQS rating, encouraging a 'community of practice'.
  - These recommendations to apply to all providers, including independent and private providers.
  - Support of Educational Leaders and networking across services.
  (88% somewhat or strongly support)
- **Recommendation 7.4** - Work with early years' networks to consult and promote the range of opportunities to incorporate nature and sensory play into their service settings with supported funding opportunities.
  (86% somewhat or strongly support)

The five most contentious recommendations were those addressing use of Council assets, funding arrangements, centralised enrolment and waiting list management.

The following bar charts highlight the number of responses for each category:

- **Recommendation 2.4** - With the addition of funded three-year-old Kindergarten, consider transitioning current Council assets into kindergarten facilities to meet future demand where relevant, especially where the private market is meeting the demand/need for childcare services in that area.
  (42% somewhat or strongly support)
- **Recommendation 6.1**- Develop an Early Year's Services Facility Framework that will deliver the following outcomes:
- All assets to meet legislative and building compliance over the life of the strategy.
- All assets able to receive co-contribution funding from state government. This will require all assets to meet a minimum of 66 places.
  *(49% **somewhat** or strongly support)*
- **Recommendation 3.2** - Review all funding, subsidy and levy arrangements to ensure return on investment and KPI deliverables for acquittal purposes
  (37% somewhat or strongly support)
- **Recommendation 5.3** - Utilise approved state funding to scope the creation of an effective and centralised municipal-wide enrolment system for community-run and independent kindergartens in Port Phillip. This will require significant consultation with service providers.
  (50% somewhat or strongly support)
- **Recommendation 5.6** - Improve the current childcare waitlist and investigate expanding it to include private and independent centres in order to provide families with better information about places for children under the age of three, as well as to inform short- and medium-term planning for childcare
  (54% somewhat or strongly support)

Response to Policy Recommendation 3.1 - Council's future role in service delivery

Policy recommendation 3.1 states:

Council to decide the future service model for childcare services from five policy options (A, B, C, D, E).

- Option A - Council continues operating and subsidising childcare services as is.
- Option B - Council continues operating services, but at full cost recovery.
- Option C - Council ceases operating Council-run childcare services and transition services to not-for-profit providers.
- Option D - Council ceases operating Council-run services and sells or transitions assets for other Council purposes.
- Option E - Council chooses a hybrid model based on above options.

Survey respondents were asked to rank these five service model options in order of preference from most preferred (ranking 1) to least preferred (ranking 5).

Figure 6 shows the preference ratings of all survey respondents. Overall respondents ranked option A as their most preferred option, followed by option E, B, C then D. Option E was not defined so the fact it received high preference suggests respondents are supportive of exploring alternative options to those proposed: A, B, C and D.
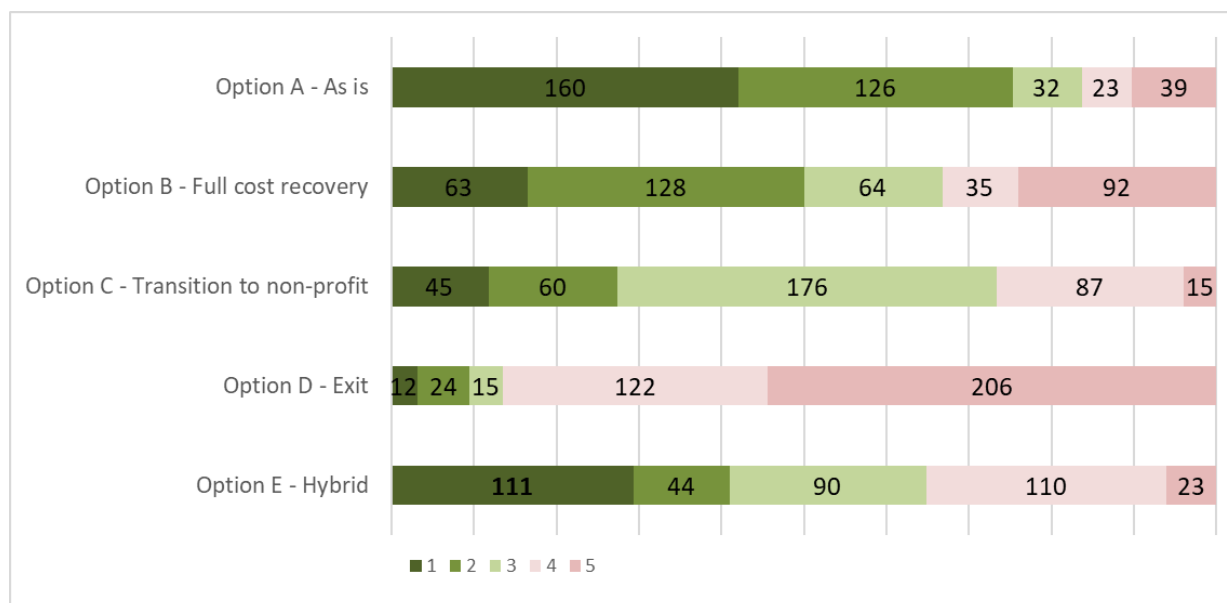

Figure 6 – Ranking of preferred options – all respondents (n 391)

Analysis of the respondents who identified as users of Council-run centres results in a similar ranking with greater preference for option A, followed by option B, E, C and then D. In viewing the qualitative comments, participants expressed support that Council-run centres continue to exist.

Thematic analysis of survey comments

All comments submitted as part of the survey were coded and analysed according to themes. This thematic analysis was completed to understand which themes emerged most frequently and to understand the issues that were most important to participants.

Support for community run services and against private services were the most frequent themes in the comments. Respondents also demonstrated support for small services. There were similar numbers of comments in support of and against council having a role in children's services. Other themes identified included waitlist and places, support for vulnerable families, support for Council-run services and cost increases. These results are summarised in Figure 7.
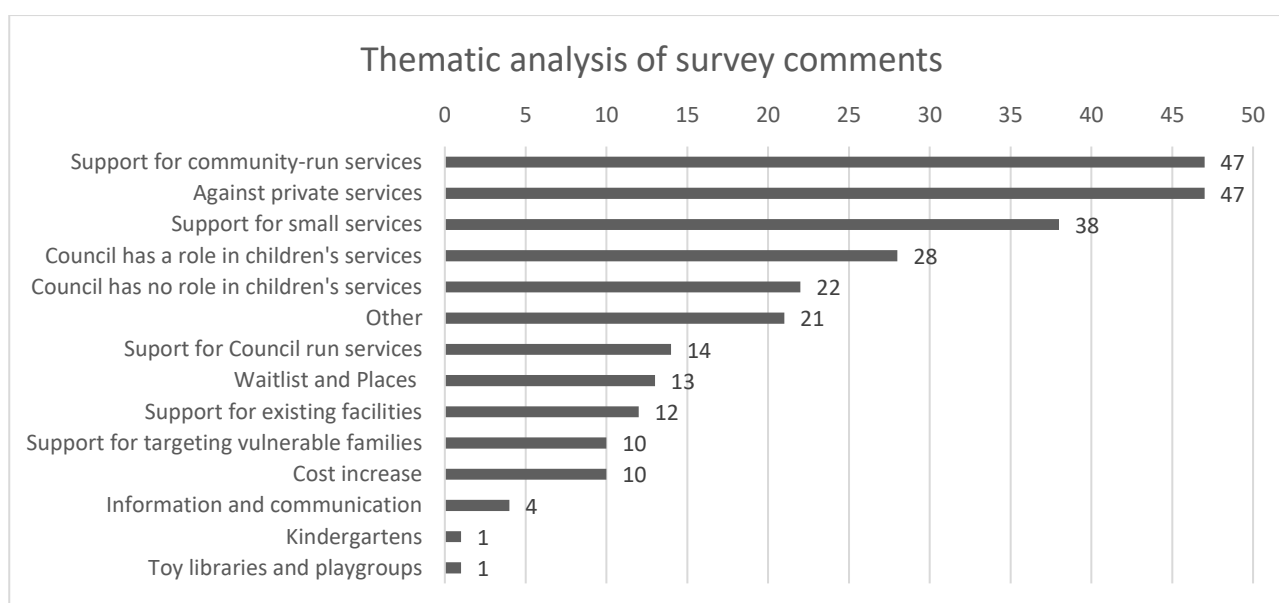

Figure 7 – Thematic analysis of survey comments

The total number of comments for each theme and illustrative examples of comments related to each of the themes are provided in Figure 8. A transcript of all survey comments is provided in Appendix 2.

Theme	No.
Support for community-run services	47
"Small community based services I believe provide the highest quality and progressive care and education as well as best conditions for their employees"	
"Community centres are the backbone of quality early learning, and some of these proposed changes will have a detrimental effect on the quality of services around the local area"	
"I can tell you from have multiple children who have experienced both community run and private childcare that the level of care is far superior in the community run. Keeps people before profits"	
"The community does NOT need more childcare centres. What they need is more high quality ones like community services"	
"These centres are consistently in such high demand and are operating near or at full capacity BECAUSE the quality of care they provide is so fantastic"	

Against for profit services	47

"State supported initiatives are imperative. This is about offering as many options as possible to a growing population"

"Local NFP and Council competition is the only thing left to stop the fees skyrocketing further. Having a NFP/Council funded option is essential to compete against private institutions with a captive audience who up their fees with little or no notice"

"I believe highly in a mix of larger, smaller, community based and not-for-profit services and not too many privately owned or large corporate providers for early years "

"Relying on the market has no place in early childhood, this will always disadvantage the most vulnerable children. Selling assets is crazy. Haven't we learnt this in this municipality at a state level?"

"I am concerned that if we eventually move to a model where council fully ceases to operate childcare services, that the focus of providers will be purely profit, and that the quality of services will be eroded"

"For profit childcare should not become a norm…it is unrealistic to expect that private owners of the facilities will provide the same level of care, and inclusion to children and families, particularly those that are disadvantaged"

Support for small services	38

"The size of the centre was a key reason I put my children in there"

"Centres under 66 places offer safe community based childcare in environments where children can learn and flourish and children's needs are met. Overcrowded spaces don't' allow for the individual specialised care that we have experienced"

"Blanket rules, such as the 'minimum 66 children' requirement could have severe unwanted consequences for centres that may be doing an outstanding job"

"Build what is needed, not what will attract state funding. Eligibility for co-contribution funding from the state government varies from year to year. So requiring all assets to meet the minimum 66 places will not necessarily meet that objective. Therefore this requirement should be removed"

"Limiting funding to those centres with more than 66 places is prohibitive. There's so much benefit to be had in smaller centres where children receive great care and feel part of a community"

"I fail to see why a 'big is better' approach is the best outcome for supporting kids and parents. Quality of the centre should be the key driver, not size"

"My children suffered at a large corporate centre, and have thrived in the family environment of a small centre"

"I am deeply concerned regarding Policy objective 6.1. The facility my children attend has less than 66 children attending and this is one of the main reasons why we chose this facility"

Council has a role in children's services	28

"Do everything you can to maintain access to childcare services for locals"

"Council has an important role in providing Early Years service infrastructure, the net CoPP owned/managed buildings must increase and be multi-functional"

"I don't know why we are paying rates when City of Port Phillip constantly wants to stop funding human services. This is why we pay rates so that human services are provided in our community"

"Council and community-run centres could be protected. They are an important part of ensuring that all children can access quality early education services"	
Council has no role in children's services	22
"Why should I fund other people's children?" *"This is not a council responsibility and far too much of ratepayers money is going into these projects. Sell the assets and reduce rates you are not the state government"* *"Cut back services to what is required of councils, to give ratepayers lower rates"* *"Council has no statutory requirement to fund childcare- this is a state and federal government responsibility"*	
Other- these comments mostly focussed on the broader experience of families using early years services	21
"There are few opportunities provided by Council for families with young children which are affordable or not cost" *"Natural environments are vital"* *"I hope you make the best decisions that suit the community. I am an employee and I be upset if I lose my job but you have to go with what is best for the community and what is affordable too. I enjoy working for CoPP and supporting families in our community"* *"I am a single parent and I need greater access to childcare that is flexible. I want flexibility to have an additional day a fortnight rather than having a day every week"*	
Support for Council run services	14
"Council will be leaving many families and staff stranded if they choose to shut down or sell" *"Do not close council operated child care centres"* *"Subsidised high quality council run childcare is something that the community strongly values and the City of Port Phillip does very well"* *"Council owned and/or run long day care centres are a vital part of life for many families in the municipality. The connection to Council provides many of these services with their highly regarded reputations and this is something that should continue, albeit with a high standard of facilities at affordable costs both for centres to run and for families to afford"*	
Waitlist and Places	13
"A centralised waitlist does not respect parent choice and is difficult to navigate if you have preferred centres" *"A kindergarten waitlist could be detrimental to the financial viability of services"* *"A central waitlist is not really necessary as there is no longer an under supply of facilities"* *"What is being done to address the fact that actual owners and ratepayer in Port Phillip Council are unable to secure council subsidised places within council-run centres for their children?"*	
Support for existing facilities/assets	12
"Older buildings can be just as fit for purpose" *Why on early would you talk of 'contemporary' kinder centres rather than investing in the great, older centres established in the zone"*	

"The use of the term 'contemporary' is interesting as Port Phillip is known for its fierce protection of heritage buildings so I would think that there would be some merit protecting and investing in the older centres" *"I do not want to see excellent centres being closed because the building isn't flashy or modern"*	
Support for targeting vulnerable families	10
"Supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged families must be a high priority. Please don't make it onerous or difficult for these families to be able to access Early Years Services" *"Families don't always disclose vulnerability or financial pressures- please make it invisible and non-judgemental. Make it clear what is available to families so they don't need to ask"* *"I would like for my child to share his classroom with children of all backgrounds. If other children require additional support, they should receive it"*	
Cost increase	10
"If the fees were to go up due to this policy, we would need to leave and I can assure you we wouldn't be the only ones" *If possible, only implement minimal price rices. Childcare places are already incredibly expensive and hard to secure in the area"* *. "As a parent I would rather pay $10-$15 extra a day to achieve this, rather than have the Centre sold to a private operator that runs a commercial operation rather than providing a community service"*	
Information and communication	4
"Information on Port Phillip Family Youth and Children website needs to be improved – it's so hard to find information" *"Rather than trying to centralise everything into yet another information hub, a better approach is to utilise multiple channels to communicate, some online, some in person where parents with young children are likely to go"*	
Kindergartens	1
It is important that we keep community run kindergartens within our local community. They play a vital role in children's developing a sense of belonging and community. Childcare is not suited to every child and family and it is important that we consider that factor"	
Toy libraries and playgroups	1
"Toy libraries and playgroups are a great way for the community to feel involved but I think the facilities already in place could be better utilised as opposed to adding more"	

Figure 8 – Survey comments illustrative examples (by theme).

Community workshops

To complement the online survey, four workshops were offered to provide community members the opportunity to meet with council officers, to ask questions, to understand more detail about the draft recommendations and to provide their feedback. The workshops were led by an independent facilitator and were held in locations across the municipality including South Melbourne Community Centre, Middle Park Community Centre, Betty Day Community Centre and St Kilda Town Hall.

While attendee numbers were low, attendees provided a range of viewpoints and included participants who were (or who represented) parents, kindergarten providers and teachers, childcare providers, toy library volunteers, and residents. The small numbers allowed detailed discussions to take place and the information captured from participants at workshops contains particularly useful insights that will assist Council when developing the implementation plan for the policy. The attendance numbers for community workshops were:

- 4 April 2019 (0 attendees)
- 8 April 2019 (3 attendees)
- 11 April 2019 (1 attendee)
- 15 April 2019 (5 attendees)

These community workshops were comprised of facilitated structured discussion rounds that covered:

- The relative importance of the seven policy objectives
- Policy Options associated with Objective 3 to help determine the future service model for childcare services
- Policy Recommendations associated with Objectives 1,2,4,5,6 & 7

The main discussion points were captured by the external facilitator. Most participants also completed rating and ranking activities for the proposed policy options and recommendations. (See Appendix 3 for full workshop notes)

The **key themes** that emerged from the workshops were:

- The importance of continuing support for not-for-profit early childhood services
- Lack of support for the word 'contemporary' to describe assets as older buildings can be suitable. 'Fit for purpose' is the preferred description.
- Dissatisfaction with the current waitlist system (particularly from service providers)
- Support for improving communications and access to culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Importance of consulting with service providers to seek their advice
- Value placed on access to natural environments for children
- Importance of providing certainty for service providers through long-term leases
- Acknowledgement of high quality services currently operating
- Consideration of impact of any service loss due to inadequate assets
- Confusion around policy recommendations and what impacts they will have if introduced

Details of the workshop outputs are provided in Appendix 3: Workshop Outputs.

Supported playgroups

A consultation session was held on 28 March with Council's Supported Playgroup at Bubup Nairm, St Kilda to invite feedback on the draft policy recommendations.

Key feedback from this group:

Targeting families experiencing vulnerability (Recommendation 1.1)

Funding and grants to support vulnerable families need to be available to non-permanent residents. Non-permanent residents cannot currently access federal subsidies for childcare. They are not entitled to Medicare or Health Care cards.

The families who participated said they would like to use childcare services but given they are not eligible for the childcare subsidy, they cannot afford to pay full fees.

Information and communication

Participants said current online information about children's services is adequate.

Libraries are an important source of information about services. Information boards in libraries as well as announcements at Storytime are a good way to reach families.

The families were referred to the supported playgroup coordinator by a librarian at the local library.

Participants said they valued the supported playgroup, noting the toys, ambiance, opportunity to meet other families and supportive staff who listened to them and were responsive to their needs. They would like to see more families attend supported playgroup.

Natural environment

Outdoor play spaces should provide shade and be enclosed to keep children safe.

More indoor play spaces would enable play during wet weather or during cold months.

Submissions received

Submissions were received from 11 individuals and 13 organisations. These submissions represented a range of views from support for the current arrangements to council having no role in children's services. The topics raised and a summary of each submission are summarised in Table 2. Submissions have been provided in full to Councillors and are included in Appendix 4, where the person or organisation making this submission gave consent for it to be included.

Submitter	Summary of submission
Individual	Council has no statutory requirement to fund childcare and many other councils don't. Support option C in Recommendation 3.1.
Individual	Rejects recommendation for minimum 66 places and contemporary centres. Support for outreach role to support vulnerable and refurbishment of existing buildings
Individual	Rejects recommendation for minimum 66 places
Individual	Would like Council to consider offering families who use childcare in Port Phillip a nappy wash service to reduce costs for parents, reduce landfill from centres and improve health for children. Submission cites company Botanic Baby who provide nappy wash services to other childcare centres in Melbourne and provide all materials, pick-up, cleaning and delivery service weekly.
Individual	Concerned about minimum requirement of 66 places and the impact this could have on small valued centres such as South Melbourne Neighbourhood House which offers high quality service with profound and enduring educational, social and cultural benefits. Concerned minimum 66 places requirement would favour large commercial providers.
Individual	Concerned that requirement of minimum 66 places would force closure of smaller centres such as South Melbourne Neighbourhood House. This service offers educational, social and emotional benefits and is exemplary. Concerned about large corporate services taking over early childhood education in community. Values community involvement that small scale childcare centres offer.
Individual	Concerned about closure of small, community-run childcare centres. Values small, family-friendly community-run centres such as Neighbourhood House. Has experienced large commercial and council-run centres and feels these are impersonal with high staff turnover and lack of community feel.
Individual	Does not support any recommendation that would threaten existence of small community-run services. These services offer quality care and are in high demand.
Individual	Support for community-run centres and opposed to privatisation of services. Opposed to changes that could threaten survival of South Melbourne Community co-op given quality of service, level of demand (running at full capacity).
Individual	Council has no statutory requirement to fund childcare and many other councils don't. Support option C in Recommendation 3.1.
Individual	Council should retain assets for children's services and retain smaller centres rather than large integrated centres.

Submissions received from organisations

Organisation	Summary of submission
Joint submission from Clarendon Children's Centre, Ada Mary A'Beckett and Neighbourhood House	Support for Council's historical role in supporting community managed children's services and ongoing consultation with stakeholders regarding services to meet increases in demand. Opportunities to improve operating model e.g. leasing arrangements, operating costs (maintenance etc.), waitlists and Maternal and Child Health outreach.
The Avenue Children's Centre	The Avenue Committee of Management is seeking to explore opportunities to acquire and manage the asset and to increase operating efficiencies (e.g via managing its own waiting list).
Community Alliance of Port Philip	Childcare is an essential service and Council provision of childcare is in the public interest.
Star Health	Recommend there are multiple opportunities to support connections to early years services, including simplifying the current grant program to ensure equitable service access for vulnerable and disadvantaged families, expanding support for vulnerable mothers during pregnancy, maintaining a mix of council operated (full cost recovery) and not-for-profit childcare, support for the development of a facilities framework and a preference for integrated services.
Elwood Children's Centre	Advocate for smaller stand-alone centres remaining as childcare providers and Council privileging social benefits over economic benefits when looking for a return on assets. The Committee of Management is seeking clarity regarding the service model options and future provision of the service including exploring options for service location and lease arrangements that support longer term planning and investment.
Elwood Community Playgroup	Describes the history and benefit of the Elwood Community Playgroup and outlines which policy recommendations are supported or not-supported by the organisation.
Lady Forster Kindergarten	Describes the history and benefit of Lady Forster kindergarten and advises that the committee is looking to explore co-funding opportunities to expand and upgrade site.
Bubup Wominjeka Family and Children's Centre	Make a range of comments and suggestions regarding affordability, accessibility and quality, funding to support networks and access to nature play and submit that a further analysis and consultation is required before a decision is made regarding Council's role in operating early years service.
Albert Park Preschool	Describes history and operations of Albert Park Kindergarten, makes a number of comments regarding the information in the Every Child, Our Future: Policy Issues and Options Paper and requests that Council delay the adoption of the Children's Services Policy until the potential impact of state and federal

Organisation	Summary of submission
	reforms are understood better, continue to support services and seek independent expert advice. Note, Albert Park Preschool's submission has been provided to Councillors but is not included in the appendix at request of centre.
Poets Grove Family and Children's Centre	Express concern about the current and future capacity in Elwood to meet demand for children's services and low kindergarten participation rates in the municipality and note the importance of nature play.
Eildon Road Childrens Centre	Advocates for current mix of council-run, community-run and private centres to continue, for Council to monitor the market response to childcare demand and implement a pragmatic approach to ensure buildings are compliant.
Middle Park Kindergarten	Endorse a children's services website, advocate for more consideration of the ability of existing services to accommodate demand before transitioning existing assets into kindergarten facilities and submit that they do not support a centralised kindergarten enrolment system or the recommendation that assets accommodate more than 66 places. Submission notes that the kindergarten does not receive significant funding from Port Phillip Council and majority of income is derived from fundraising activities.
Ratepayers of Port Phillip	Supports transitioning Council-run childcare to community-management if quality or number of places is not reduced.

Table 8 –submission topics and summary

Evaluation of the consultation process

Feedback on the policy issues and options paper

- Several participants commented that the Policy Issues and Options paper was not clear, particularly in relation to Objective 3 which outlined options for service provision for childcare. It was not clear that some of the options only related to the five Council-run centres. Some participants commented that as a result this had caused confusion and unnecessary concern for community-run centres about their future.
- Other examples provided of how the language in the documentation could be improved:
  o definition of what 'operation' means
  o distinction between 'Council-owned, Council-run', and 'Council-owned, community-run'
  o distinction between licensed places and enrolments. Licenced places does not equal enrolments
  o distinction between utilisation figures and enrolments in particular for Kindergarten who may have capacity for 24 children at one time but 80 families enrolled who use the service across the week.

In the survey comments, 15 comments were made on the theme of consultation process and communication. Illustrative examples are provided in Figure 9.

Consultation process and design	15
"This is a confusing survey design and contains a 'wish list' of things to support"	
"Would be good to have a comments section to justify answers that are not strongly support or disagree"	
"In principal, the objectives are sound and it's good to see forward thinking and consultation"	
"This survey was prepared with language that is not inclusive of all members of the community- particularly those people with lower levels of literacy"	

Figure 9 – Survey comments consultation process and design

Respondents' views on the value of the information provided during the consultation

At the conclusion of the survey respondents were asked:

Did the information provided during the consultation help you to provide feedback?

The survey included this question to measure the adequacy of information provided. 70% of respondents responded that the information provided did help them. For the 10% of who responded "Other", many commented they had not been consulted or did not "attend" a consultation, indicating that participants did not view their involvement in providing feedback in the online survey as consultation. This response may also suggest that participants believed that Council had already made decisions on the new policy and that they had not been given the opportunity to influence the decision. Responses to this question are shown in Figure 10.
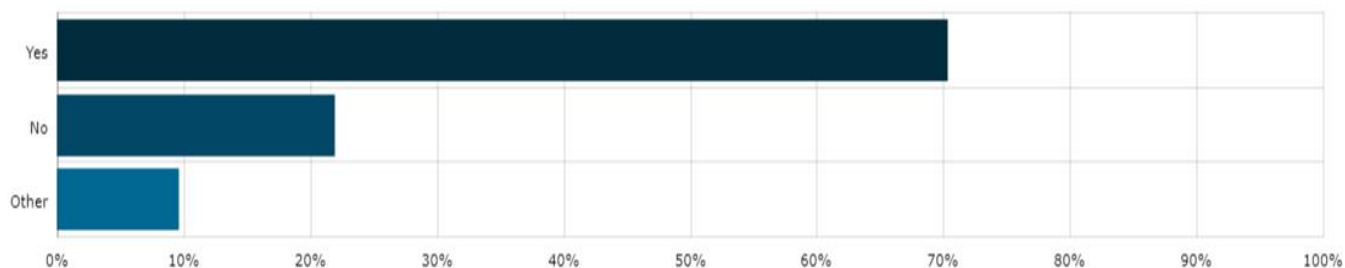
Figure 10 – Value of information provided.

Duplicate responses

The survey responses were analysed by IP address to determine whether multiple surveys were completed from the same location and to identify whether the same person may have submitted multiple responses.

It should be noted that it is not unusual to see duplicate IP addresses in survey results as multiple people in the same organisation (and same IP address) can make submissions.

There were 3 instances when the same IP address was linked to more than 2 responses:

- One IP address had 14 responses
- One IP address had 13 responses
- One IP address had 5 responses

The responses from these 3 IP addresses were reviewed. In each case, the responses were not identical, and several different email addresses for follow up contact were supplied.

There's no evidence to suggest that the overall results are influenced by the responses from these three IP addresses because the number of respondents with the same IP address is a small percentage of the responses overall (6.7%), and there is variation within the responses from each of the three IP addresses.

Conclusion

Stakeholders were actively engaged in the Stage 2 Consultation with over 500 people participating, including more than 470 survey responses and more than 40 submissions from individuals and organisations.

The findings from the stage 2 consultations will help to inform the development of the final Children's Services Policy.