

Management report to Council

Agenda item 6.6

Recommendation to undertake an Expression of Interest process to explore options to manage and operate early years education and care within the Carlton Learning Precinct

Council

Presenter: Ali Wastie, Director City Communities

25 September 2018

Purpose and background

1. This report seeks Council endorsement to undertake an Expression of Interest (EOI) process to explore with not-for-profit providers and existing community groups, options to manage and operate early years education and care at the Carlton Early Learning and Family Services Centre (EL&FSC) within the Carlton Learning Precinct. The EL&FSC is due to be completed by December 2018. It is anticipated that the Carlton EL&FSC will open in the second quarter of 2019.
2. The EOI process will consider and assess whether respondents to the EOI process demonstrate capability to provide early years education and care services at the Carlton EL&FSC as well as the Lady Huntingfield and Munro EL&FSCs, due to be completed in 2020 and 2021 respectively. It is anticipated that the three developments will provide 324 child care places; an increase of more than 120 places currently available.

Key issues

3. Council's strategic intent is to develop an Early Years Plan (EYP) aligned to the goals of the Future Melbourne Plan 2026 and the outcomes of the Melbourne City Council Plan 2017-21. Research over the past few decades has revealed that the early childhood period of children's lives has a profound impact on their learning and development for the long term. A critical time to shape productivity is from birth to age eight, when the brain develops rapidly to build the foundation of cognitive and character skills necessary in school, health, career and life. The Early Years Plan will set priorities for Council, such as responding to service gaps and environmental issues that impact children aged 0 – 8.
4. Any Council agreement with a preferred provider, if this is an outcome following the EOI process, would entail strong governance arrangements requiring a robust working relationship with Council and communities.
5. The outcomes of the EOI process and management's recommendation arising will be the subject of a report to the Council Meeting of 30 October 2018.
6. It is noted that in 2006, Council resolved to continue to operate child care centres until such time those new centres were built (see Attachment 2). There is a strong market for developers and providers of high quality education and care across the municipality. This is important in the context of a fast-growing city with increasing demand for services and social infrastructure.
7. Attachment 3 outlines the proposed timeframe and actions related to this report.

Recommendation from management

8. That Council:
 - 8.1. Authorises management to commence an Expression of Interest process with not-for-profit providers and existing community groups of early years education and care services to explore options to manage and operate early years education and care at the Carlton Early Learning and Family Services Centre within the Carlton Learning Precinct.
 - 8.2. Notes that a report from management of the outcomes of the EOI process with recommendations will be presented to the October Council meeting.

Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (Page 2 of 4)
2. 2006 Council Resolution (Page 3 of 4)
3. Timeline for Proposed Actions (Page 4 of 4)

Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. Legal advice will continue to be provided on the matters subject of this report.

Finance

2. There is no financial impact for the EOI process.

Conflict of interest

3. As a member of the board of a not for profit children's services provider that may submit an expression of interest, Linda Weatherson, Director City Operations has declared a potential conflict of interest. No other member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a direct or indirect interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Stakeholder consultation

4. Community engagement is proposed to be undertaken in 2018 to inform the strategic development direction of Council's Early Years Plan.
5. Community consultation will be undertaken for the naming of the three Early Learning and Family Services Centres.

Relation to Council policy

6. The proposed Early Years Plan will be aligned with the goals of the Future Melbourne Plan 2026 and the outcomes of the Melbourne City Council Plan 2017-21.

Environmental sustainability

7. Environmental sustainability issues or opportunities are not considered relevant to this proposal.

2006 Council Resolution

1. *That the Community Services Committee resolves to:*
 - 1.1. *continue to manage existing child care centres provided by Council in Council owned facilities;*
 - 1.2. *pursue community based and or not for profit management models as the preferred management arrangements for any new Council owned facilities where there is the capacity to do so;*
 - 1.3. *endorse the revised Municipal Early Years Plan – Child Care Policy noting the following priorities and/or amendments;*
 - 1.3.1. *Community involvement – supporting the provision of child care under a variety of community involvement models;*
 - 1.3.2. *Access – supporting a universal (inclusive of all) approach to access with particular attention to children in special need of support;*
 - 1.3.3. *Quality Assurance – requiring child care services that operate in Council owned facilities to meet or exceed a range of criterion;*
 - 1.3.4. *HR/Staffing issues- continues to support the recruitment of high quality staff through the maintenance of responsive employee development programs;*
 - 1.3.5. *Centralised services – supporting the provision of a range of centralised services; and*
 - 1.3.6. *that item 3.1 of the Child Care Policy be amended to read “Council supports the provision of childcare under a variety of community involvement models from Council managed and supported through to fully independent not for profit...”;*
 - 1.4. *establish a municipal-wide Children’s Services Advisory Committee to provide Council with advice on program and policy development;*
 - 1.5. *subject to normal budget processes, commission a research project to identify the community building potential of child care services and review how to strengthen the role of Council’s services in contributing to community building locally; and*
 - 1.6. *subject to normal budget processes, commission a research project to assess the level of quality, the factors contributing to quality in Council’s child care services and identify strategies for continuous improvement.*

Timeline of Proposed Actions

Action	Date
Advertise Expression of Interest process to explore options to manage and operate early years education and care at the Carlton EL&FSC	26/09/2018
Close Expression of Interest process	10/10/2018
Report to Council on outcome of Expression of Interest	30/10/2018