



MINUTES

EARLY YEARS PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Held on 17 September 2020 at 10:00am, online – Microsoft Teams

Present:

Cr S Ramsey, Councillor
C Reich, City of Melton
A Brand, Community Member
V Sharma, Community Member
S O'Kelly, BPA Children's Services
N Smith, ECMS
M Boyd, Brotherhood of St Laurence
G Callander, Djerriwarrh Health Services
C Owens, Djerriwarrh Health Services
H Zwick, VICSEG New Futures
S Prestney, City of Melton
B Ball, City of Melton
B Maplestone, Foundation House
T Farrugia, TRY Australia
J Gemoh, Salvation Army
S Mudie, TRY Australia
C Reid, City of Melton
J McBurnie, City of Melton
K Curson, City of Melton
L Xerri, City of Melton – (minute taker)

Chairperson: G Callander, Djerriwarrh Health Services

1. Welcome

G Callander welcomed all attendees and acknowledged the meeting taking place in the land of Kulin Nation and paid respect to Kulin Nation people and their Elders both past and present and extended this respect to any Aboriginal people at the meeting.

2. Apologies

D Clarke, Community Member
H Schiele, Independent Schools
M Costa, Government Primary School
R Wilkinson, Catholic Education Office
E Smith, TRY Australia
D Wright, Victorian Inclusion Agency
J Weber, Caroline Chisholm Society
M Andrews, Department of Education and Training

MINUTES

J Taylor, Department of Education and Training
R Begley, DHHS
G Howard, VACCA
A Connor Simon, VACCA

3. Declaration of interests and/or conflict of interests

Nil.

4. Confirmation of minutes of previous meeting**Motion**

Cr Ramsey / S O'Kelly

That the minutes of the Early Years Partnership Committee Meeting held on 23 July 2020 were adopted by Council at the Ordinary Meeting held on 14 September 2020 be noted.

5. Business Arising

There are no outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

6. General Business**6.1 3 year old funded kindergarten planning update****Christine Reid, 3 year old funded Kindergarten Capacity Officer, Melton City Council**

New Kindergarten Central Registration policy with inclusion of funded 3 year old kindergarten has been endorsed by Council. The intentions of this policy remain the same with fair and equitable allocation of kindergarten places.

The development of the policy included input from draft best practice recommendations that have been developed via a Central Enrolment Project team from Department of Education and Training, Municipal Association Victoria and the Nous Group. The Central Registration Enrolment Scheme (CRES) is designed to achieve consistency of kindergarten registration and enrolment across Victoria and has been co-designed with current stakeholders.

Current practices will be further enhanced, strengthening the engagement process to support kindergarten participation, include active outreach, effective community engagement and targeted promotion.

Action

C Reid to provide updates at future meetings.

6.2 Best Start update**Karen Curson, Coordinator Early Years Partnerships. Melton City Council**

There are currently 41 children enrolled in Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) for 2020, 14 of these are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and 27 are children known to child protection (CKCP). As of the end of August, nine ESK enrolments had been received for 2021.

Currently there is 25 Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycles on the Best Start portal. This is largely due to continuous improvement work identified by the Vulnerable Children Working Group (VCWG) and further collaborative work between K Curson and a number of service providers.



MINUTES

K Curson identified that work for the remainder of 2020 will focus on ways to identify children eligible for ESK and explore ideas that can assist with engagement and participation. As the governing body for the Best Start program, the Committee were asked for further recommendations of focus areas. Concerns were raised around low enrolment numbers for kindergarten in 2021. K Curson noted that this was discussed at the last VCWG and has led to a number of continuous improvement ideas being developed and to be implemented through PDSA's. B Ball noted that Council have commenced a social media campaign to reminder families to enrol.

6.3 Vulnerable Children's Working Group Terms of Reference

Karen Curson, Coordinator Early Years Partnerships. Melton City Council

Terms of Reference was reviewed at the previous meeting, feedback received at the meeting was used to amend the document which was again sent out to Committee members for review and further feedback, thank you for those who provided feedback on the document.

K Curson asked for any additional comments or feedback, there was no further feedback provided. G Callander confirmed that the Committee were in agreement to endorse the Terms of Reference.

Action

Vulnerable Children's Working Group Terms of Reference – Consensus achieved for endorsement

6.4 DET update

Karen Curson, Coordinator Early Years Partnerships. Melton City Council

An updated prepared by Michelle Andrews, Early Childhood Performance and Planning Advisor was provided prior to the meeting and presented by K Curson.

M Andrews will be finishing her secondment as Early Childhood Performance and Planning Advisor (ECPAPA) on Friday 25 September and Fiona Norman's secondment has been extended to the end of the year, recruitment is underway for the remainder for F Norman's secondment now ending in December.

Early Childhood Educators Day was held on 2 September 2020. This was a moment to celebrate educators and the work they are doing in this difficult time.

In line with state government announcements on Sunday 6 September funded kindergarten programs remain open and available for on-site learning for eligible children included vulnerable children unless otherwise advised by DHHS. Early Education and Care Services will be again open for all children on Monday 28 September and from Monday 5 October sessional kindergarten programs will again be open for all children.

Many parents have shared concerns that their children may not be ready for school in 2021. DET is working closely with schools and early childhood sectors to support children and their families to be ready. The process and requirements for a second year of funded kindergarten are unchanged, a second year should only be considered where a child is showing delays in key learning and where the kindergarten program would be deemed beneficial. Requests should not be based on missed onsite or learning from home program time.

School Readiness Funding will remain available to support learning from home for the remainder of 2020, mid-year reviews are being completed and the Brimbank Melton Early Childhood Improvement Branch (DET) will conduct planning workshops for 2021 funding during September and October.

DET continue to work with Council on the three year old kindergarten reform.

Information Sharing Scheme - Phase Two has been delayed and is proposed to commence in the first half of 2021, no specific dates have been received as yet.

Action

K Curson to share information for circulation to the Committee

6.5 DHHS update**Karen Curson, Coordinator Early Years Partnerships. Melton City Council**

An updated prepared by Robert Begley, Deputy Area Operations Manager was provided prior to the meeting and presented by K Curson.

Current numbers for Brimbank Melton Child Protection (CP) are;

- 1174 children, of these 176 are Aboriginal Children
 - 488 children are with the investigation team
 - 482 children are with the case management team (long term)
 - 204 are with the contracting and community based team

In August, there were 200 reports to child protection. There has been a change in where reports are coming from during the COVID-19 pandemic with less reports being received from the education sector and with more coming from police responding to family violence and from health colleagues who have raised concerns following telehealth appointments.

This time last year there were 1700 children. CP have received fewer reports however the reports received have been more complex. Common themes have included: increased of family violence and increases of substance misuse. This has led to further removals of children, including the removal of some children from kinship care arrangements.

The CP team continue to support enrolments in kindergarten, childcare and schools. There has been minimal issues with students attending school, however, there have been some instances where Principals have refused requests for children to attend school. Additional funding sources due to the COVID-19 pandemic have assisted CP in ensuring that children in need of additional educational supports at home can access these.

B Ball asked for information on the current number of children in Out of Home Care (OoHC) in the municipality. Discussion was held regarding enrolment and participation of children in OoHC in Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) and 4 year old kindergarten. S O'Kelly highlighted that attendance of children in OoHC, who are permitted to attend on-site learning, has decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Action

K Curson to seek further information on the number of children in Out of Home Care in the municipality to be provided to the Committee

6.6 Early Years Evaluation Plan for Melton: A City for all People strategic document**Karen Curson, Coordinator Early Years Partnerships. Melton City Council**

The Melton: A City for all People strategic document is moving into its final year, for early years this will include an evaluation. The evaluation will include assembly of background information, engagement with community and stakeholders and identification of priorities for future planning, early next year the Committee will be asked to provide feedback into this evaluation process.

6.7 Community Impact for COVID-19**Jayde McBurnie, Team Leader Health Promotion and Planning, Melton City Council**

Council's Community Planning Leadership Group identified a need to understand impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Melton community.



MINUTES

Information was gathered through a collection of service responses and experiences. Council services have been working differently during the COVID-19 pandemic including: adaptation of core services, welfare checks for existing clients, dissemination of information about restrictions, taking calls for the COVID-19 hotline, additional referrals to services, establishment of Community Connector Hubs and an additional grants program.

Impacts identified for the Melton Community include;

- increase in Family Violence reports and increased waitlist for case management
- decreased access to social connections, this is further intensified by digital exclusion for individuals without access to devices or an internet connect
- delayed non COVID-19 related physical health needed resulting in reductions in cancer referrals, radiology and pathology
- higher levels of racism and discrimination.

It is predicted that a further 370,000 people across the state will seek treatment or be hospitalised as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this is in addition to individuals who were seeking supports for mental health prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Economic impacts include an increase of unemployment across Melton from 4.5% in December 2019 to 10.5% in June 2020. Additional impacts of this included: fall outs of income loss, reduction in education and employment pathways and reductions in revenue for businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated issues for vulnerable cohorts. Cohorts identified as having a nuanced or disproportionate experience from the COVID-9 pandemic, including: people with exiting mental health concerns, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people identifying as LGBTIQ+, young people, older people, people with a disability, woman, children, diverse communities, international students and carers.

The members noted that a number of children who were eligible to attend education and care services during stage 4 restrictions were not attending and that this reduction in attendance may continue to impact the engagement and participation of children in services once restrictions are lifted.

Action

J McBurnie to share information for circulation to the Committee

7. Other Business

Nil

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting is to be held on Thursday 10 December 2020 commencing at 10:00am, venue to be confirmed.

9. Close of Business

The meeting closed at 12.02pm.