

Community Engagement Report

Background

This review forms part of Council's regular three-year review cycle for the Kindergarten Policy to ensure it remains current, effective and aligned with community expectations. It also provides an opportunity to align the policy with the Victorian Government's *Best Start, Best Life* reforms, which are reshaping the early years system across the state. As part of broader changes in the sector, Council's role has evolved from directly delivering kindergarten services to working in partnership with providers and taking on a stronger strategic planning role. The purpose of this engagement was to gather community feedback on the proposed guiding principles that underpin the policy, and to understand how these principles can best support equitable, high-quality kindergarten provision across the municipality. The Community feedback received was able to influence the refinement of these principles and inform the overall direction of the revised policy.

What the Engagement Asked

The engagement sought community views on the proposed guiding principles for the Kindergarten Policy. Participants were asked to consider whether the principles reflected what is important for high-quality, equitable and accessible kindergarten provision across the municipality.

Engagement Methods

A range of engagement methods were used to reach community members and key stakeholders. This included an open public "Have Your Say" online consultation, discussions with the Early Years Advisory Committee (EYAC), and engagement with the kindergarten service providers' network. These channels ensured that families, early years professionals, and service providers all had the opportunity to share their perspectives on the proposed guiding principles.

Who We Reached

We heard from families with young children, early years professionals, and local organisations with an interest in early childhood outcomes.

Engagement Timeframes and Website Views

We meet with the kindergarten service providers in October and our Early Years Advisory Committee in both July and November with the Have Your Say Campaign open to the community for a two-week period 3-14 November including past, present and future community users of kindergarten. The "Have Your Say" engagement page received 192 views, showing community interest in the review.

A total of 10 community members completed the online survey, providing valuable insights into local priorities and expectations.

What We Heard

Overall, there was strong general approval for the direction of the Kindergarten Policy and broad alignment with the proposed guiding principles. Many participants felt the principles reflected the values of the community. Respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that the principles translate into clear, practical actions that guide decision-making and are meaningfully implemented.

Community members also raised the need to reconsider the local priority of access criteria, with several noting that these criteria are closely linked to equity and should be reflected within the guiding principles themselves. While the engagement focused specifically on the principles rather than operational matters, this feedback shows a desire for stronger alignment between the policy's principles and the processes that flow from them.

Changes to the Draft Policy

Based on community feedback, Council refined the guiding principles where wording or intent required strengthening, ensuring they clearly reflect community priorities. In response to feedback about the link between the guiding principles and the local priority of access criteria, each principle now includes a statement explaining how it informs and supports the local priority of access approach within the policy.

Next Steps

The revised Kindergarten Policy will be provided to Council on 15 December 2025 with a recommendation to endorse. If endorsed, the final policy will be published on the Knox website shortly after the meeting.