

SERVICE REVIEW OUTCOMES – 2004/05

EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

DETAILS OF SERVICE

Early Childhood Services is a service unit within Community and Leisure Services Directorate.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

The Early Childhood Services unit consists of 20.85 EFTs (equivalent full time staff) and up to 36 Family Day Care care providers.

The scope of services considered in this review include;

- Family Day Care
- Vacation Care
- Occasional Care

Note: The Maternal and Child Health unit, is also a service provider of the Early Childhood Services and under went a Best Value Review in 2004.

The range of activities and services provided include:

- Management of children’s services facilities,
- Provision of long and short term flexible child care,
- Children’s educational and recreational programs,
- Co-ordination and provision of home based child care for children under 12 years of age,
- Co-ordination of the Family Day Care Toy Library service,
- Provision of Family Day Care play groups.

The unit provides these services from a range of sites within the municipality:

- Maroondah Occasional Care, Civic Square, Croydon
- Council offices located at 43 Ringwood Street, Ringwood
- Council offices located at Braeside Avenue, Ringwood
- Kerrabee Club, Louisa St Croydon,
- Careprovider residences

SERVICE STANDARDS

Note: The following is a summary of the activity and outcomes of the Best Value Service Review; a detailed Service Plan is available upon request

Best Value Service Review Principle	Key Performance Indicator	Actual Performance 2004/05	Target 2005/06	Target 2006/07
Cost Standard	<i>Occasional Care</i> Level of Council subsidy per licenced place. (40)	\$1,575 Medium range against benchmarked Councils	CPI increase	CPI increase
Cost Standard	<i>Family Day Care</i> Level of Council subsidy per EFT place (131)	\$1,616 Medium range against benchmarked Councils	CPI Increase	CPI Increase
Cost Standard	<i>Vacation Care</i> Level of Council subsidy per Approved place (104)	\$238 Low range against benchmarked Councils	CPI Increase	CPI Increase
Quality Standard	Annual Customer Service Satisfaction rating (Average across key all services)	97.5%	95%	95%
Quality Standard	<i>Occasional Care</i> Compliance with State Children's Services Regulations 1998	Maintenance of registration and licence	Maintenance of registration and licence	Maintenance of registration and licence
Quality Standard	<i>Family Day Care</i> National Childcare Accreditation Council status	Renewal of Accreditation	Maintenance of Accreditation	Maintenance of Accreditation
Quality Standard	<i>Vacation Care</i> National Childcare Accreditation status	Achievement of initial Accreditation	Maintenance of Accreditation	Maintenance of Accreditation

Consideration of Best Value Factors in setting Cost and Quality standards

Factors

Consideration Comments

**Best on offer
208C(a)**

The Early Childhood Services unit provides the Community with Early Childhood services in accordance with the legislated requirements set down by the State and Commonwealth governments. Grants are acquitted as required in funding agreements and licences are renewed accordingly.

The service compared the average cost of this activity with a range of metropolitan Councils to establish industry benchmarks with the following results.

Occasional Care

- At \$4.45 per hour, the cost of care was the lowest in the group, indicating value for money.
- At an average of 80% utilisation, Maroondah’s centre was the most utilised centre in the group with other services ranging from 60-77%.
- The subsidy provided by Council per licensed place at the service was \$1575, which is comparable to that provided by other municipalities.

Family Day Care

- The cost of 50 hours of care (maximum allowed under legislation) was \$207.50, which was the lowest in the group, which indicates value for money.
- Maroondah is the only service that offers a reduction in fee for families utilising over 30 hours of care, indicating value for money.
- Careprovider provisions and training arrangements surpassed other municipalities, which indicates quality for cost.

Consideration of Best Value Factors in setting Cost and Quality standards cont.

Factors

Consideration Comments

**Best on offer
208C(a) continued**

Vacation Care

- The fee structure provided in vacation Care was the lowest in cost amongst the benchmarked municipalities. Maroondah charges \$27 for a centre day and \$36 for a full day excursion. Other services charged \$32 for a centre day and \$42-\$46 for a full day excursion.
- Maroondah has the lowest operating budget and lowest Council contribution of funds in the group.

**Value for money
208C(b)**

A benchmarking exercise was undertaken involving a comparison between several metropolitan Councils. While the range of activities and services offered varied considerably across the benchmarking partners, delivery of the core statutory requirements to the required standards is a common responsibility of all those in the group. On-going achievement of legislative compliance is a direct indication of effective, efficient service performance.

**Community
expectation and
values 208C(c)**

Community expectation can be summarised in the aim of the Municipal Early Years Plan 2005-2010, which was created as a result of Community Consultation. The aim is that “The Community of Maroondah will foster the development of healthy, happy and resilient children.”

The goals of the Plan are: -

- Improving health outcomes for all children
- Ensuring that all children have access to quality care environments
- Enhancing educational opportunities for children
- Facilitating social connections

Key expectations that directly impact on the Early Childhood Services delivery of programs raised by service providers and parents throughout the Community consultation were:-

- Integration of staff and resources
- Quality, affordable, accessible, flexible childcare options
- Information provision and delivery in an accessible and consistent manner
- Diverse service system that offers a range of choice specifically related to childcare

In addition, the Community can reasonably expect that Council will deliver its services in compliance with State legislation and regulation and national quality standards as determined by State and Federal governments.

Consideration of Best Value Factors in setting Cost and Quality standards cont.

Factors

Consideration Comments

**Affordability and Accessibility
208C(d)**

As a statutory service, the Licensing agent for the service is the State Government, however, the Commonwealth Government provides financial support and a level of funding to the service as well as subsidising parent fees for those utilising the services. While these funding arrangements and subsidies establish a minimum base, Councils have the ability to set fees above this. Maroondah City Council’s policy with respect to fees setting is not one of targeting full cost recovery but balancing the financial barriers and providing better access for all potential users. To this end Council does subsidise the cost of providing these services to families.

Accessibility to the Occasional Care Service is supported by the practice of bookings being renewed on a term-by-term basis. This allows new users to secure a place for their child at a minimum of four times per year. Vacancies can be booked at any time throughout the year. Whilst the centre is located in Croydon, the customer base is fed from all over the municipality. There are no set priority of access guidelines set by the Commonwealth in Occasional Care services, so care can be booked by working (47% are part time workers) and non-working (48%) parents alike. This maximises the accessibility to care for families who would not otherwise be eligible in other types of childcare services.

Family Day Care provides childcare delivered from private residences by employees of Council. These residences are scattered across the municipality and provide excellent access to service to families in all suburbs. The Commonwealth Government sets priority of access guidelines as a condition of making Childcare Benefit available to families. These guidelines do apply to Family Day Care, which means that children at risk or from working families have priority. Family Day Care provides the most flexible care for families, as it is the only service that is available for 24 hours and on weekends if needed. This service does not close for school holidays and can be available on public holidays as well.

Vacation Care is available from two sites in the south of the municipality – Bayswater North and Croydon South. The services are well utilised and Commonwealth determined priority of access guidelines do apply. Council has recently received funding from the Department of Human Services to explore the feasibility of extending its Vacation Care service into the Ringwood area. Results from a community needs analysis will be available mid 2005.

Consideration of Best Value Factors in setting Cost and Quality standards cont.

Factors

Consideration Comments

Local Employment 208C(e)

The service actively supports the local community through direct employment initiatives such as the Family Day Care service which employs 26 carers, a requirement of which is that they are all residents within municipality.

Maroondah’s Best Value Supporting Local Suppliers policy is a demonstration by Council of its commitment to supporting and promoting local businesses as a means of sponsoring local employment opportunities. A Council wide KPI relating to the policy is the target of 25% of purchasing activity to be directed to local suppliers of goods and services. The initiative also extends to the local advertisement of vacant positions and appropriate tenders. The Financial Services unit recognises this policy in its annual purchasing activity.

Early Childhood Services uses local suppliers for the following provisions

- Equipment purchase and repair
- Art and craft supplies
- Local attractions and services for excursions and incursions
- Bus companies
- Venue Hire
- Cleaning contracts
- Catering

Best Value Principle

Actions Taken

Responsive to Community Needs

The Early Childhood Service Unit annually surveys clients to assess satisfaction levels with key service factors. Specifically, the objectives include understanding expectations, gauging satisfaction levels with both service and facilities from both a quality and access perspective, and to ensure service delivery is meeting the needs of clients. To ensure impartiality the survey results were assessed and evaluated by an external third party.

In 2004-2005, the three services combined received an average satisfaction rating of 96.7%, which exceeds the target set for the year.

Best Value Principle

Actions Taken

Responsive to Community Needs continued

- Highlights of the surveys include client satisfaction with the quality of services provided:
- Family Day Care and Vacation Care service delivery rated at 3.15 (with a mean score of 4 being the ultimate score) and this indicated a high to very high level of satisfaction,
 - Occasional Care Service delivery rated at 4.14 (with a mean score of 5 being the ultimate score).

The National Childcare Accreditation Council awarded accreditation status to the Vacation Care and Family Day Care services during the review period. The process of accreditation involved two community surveys, a comprehensive self-study analysis and assessment by an external Validator. Both services achieved accreditation to a high standard. Service User feedback was a vital aspect of the process. It can be deemed that compliance with all aspects of the Accreditation process protects the interests of the service and is reflective of Community need.

The Department of Human Services in regards to safety, education and quality, reviews the Occasional Care Service annually. The licence to operate Occasional Care as a Children’s Service is dependant on the outcome of this annual review. Hence the interests of service users and the Community in general are protected by the statutory requirements as set down by the State. The Occasional Care Service completed all of its licence renewal requirements with strong positive feedback from the DHS officer who conducted the inspection.

Accessible

Information about all the services is available between normal business hours, Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 5.00 pm via telephone on 1300 882 233, via email: Maroondah@maroondah.com.au or in person at one of Council’s four Customer Service outlets. Council information is available 24 hours, seven days a week from Council’s Web site, <http://www.maroondah.vic.gov.au>

- The individual services can also be reached directly on the following telephone contacts:
- Family day care – 9298 4297
 - Occasional care – 9294 5520
 - Vacation Care – 9298 4266

The service also provides an opportunity for a personal interview for all potential service users as part of its enrolment process.

Best Value Principle

Actions Taken

Continuous Improvement

As a result of the best value service review and consultation programs, the service has identified and implemented the following initiatives and innovations as part of its service improvement program:

- An organisational re-alignment to enhance the integration of all early childhood services and provides a central point of service co-ordination.
- Implementation of the Municipal Early Years Plan,
- Achievement of Accreditation under the National Childcare Accreditation Council for both the Family Day Care and Vacation Care services,
- Successful completion of the 2005 Licence review for the Occasional Care centre as administered by the Victorian Department of Human Services,
- Introduction of a new administrative software program to replace three separate independent systems being operated by the service area to manage enrolments and accounts for service users.

The best value process also identified the following initiatives for investigation and evaluation for potential service improvement. This investigation and assessment process will be undertaken over the next two years:

- Review and assess an alternative enrolment fee structure and process for the Family Day Care service,
- Review the current system for provision of the Toy Library service,
- Review and develop recommendations to manage the impact of changes by the Commonwealth Governments to funding arrangements in Occasional and Family Day Care services,
- Undertake a feasibility study of the needs of Vacation Care service users, utilising grant monies from the State Government.

Consultation

Maroondah City Council has an endorsed policy that addresses the level of community participation and consultation in relation to its service areas and service issues. This policy is promulgated to standardize and enhance the service levels and procedures for areas that have consistent and regular interface with the community and the public at large.

Given that Early Childhood Service’s customer basis is within the external community, regular community consultation is a key aspect of the service planning process.

Best Value Principle

Actions Taken

Consultation continued

The Early Childhood Service consults with its customers in the following ways:

- Annual customer satisfaction surveys for each key service area,
- Bi- annual Quality Survey in accordance with the National Child Care Accreditation process,
- Customer satisfaction phone interviews with new service users soon after introduction to the service,
- Family Day Care Providers consultative meeting / workshops which are held every term and are open to all FDC providers.

Survey results and feedback will be compiled into a management report and assessed as part of the services annual service planning process.

In addition, an extensive consultation process was undertaken in the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan. Community Consultation included:-

- One to one interviews with over 100 parents
- Parent focus groups
- Two service provider forums
- Parent Surveys
- Service provider surveys
- Individual contact with key stakeholders

Community need can be determined from the results of these consultations and have been incorporated into the Municipal Early Years Plan. The actions from the plan will feed into the Early Childhood Services Service Delivery Plan and set the direction for future service focus and development.

The program for further consultation is included in the continuous improvement plan for implementation and includes the following consultation commitments;

- Service users regarding policies within the Family Day Care and Vacation Care programs,
- Families to establish if there is a need to expand Council's Vacation Care service.

Council also has established a formal community feedback and request process as part of its community service charter initiative.

Best Value Principle Reporting

Actions Taken

A copy Maroondah’s Best Value Annual Community Report of key findings and key performance target and results will be available to the community via the following methods and access points;

- Council’s community web page for public access
- At each of our three Customer Service Centres for public viewing.
- At each of Council’s Public Libraries for public viewing.

Performance reporting against key service indicators is undertaken on a monthly basis and the results documented in Council’s monthly performance report. This report is tabled before Council on a quarterly basis and is a publicly available document. Each service area has an annual service delivery plan, which is strategically aligned with Maroondah’s Council Plan, and its overarching strategic community plan Maroondah 2025. Annual performance and key achievements of the strategies in these plans is reported in Council’s Annual Report.