

GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY COUNCIL

CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

Effective: Day Month Year

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Version:	2
Business Unit:	People and Development
Responsible Officer:	Manager people and Development
Adopted By:	Council Day Month Year
Next Review:	Day Month Year

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is:

1. To facilitate the prevention of child abuse or harm occurring within Greater Shepparton City Council, through adherence to the eleven child safe standards.
2. To ensure that all parties are aware of their responsibilities for identifying possible occasions for child abuse or harm and for establishing controls and procedures for preventing such abuse and/or detecting such abuse when it occurs.
3. To provide guidance to staff/volunteers/contractors as to action that should be taken where they suspect any abuse within or outside of the organisation.
4. To provide a clear statement to staff/volunteers/contractors forbidding any such abuse.
5. To provide assurance that any and all suspected abuse will be reported and fully investigated.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Greater Shepparton City Council is committed to promoting and protecting the interests and safety of children. We have zero tolerance for child abuse or harm.

Everyone working at Greater Shepparton City Council is responsible for the care and protection of children and reporting information about child abuse or harm.

2. SCOPE

Council is committed to creating a culture of child safety and recognises that protecting children and preventing and responding to child abuse or harm is an organisation wide responsibility.

This policy applies to Councillors, employees including any person directly employed by Greater Shepparton City Council or employed through an agency or on a contract basis, Council's volunteers and work experience/work placement students, irrespective of their involvement in child related duties.

3. DEFINITIONS

Reference term	Definition
Aboriginal Child	A person under the age of 18 who is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community
Child/Children	A person under 18 years of age
Child Abuse	Any act committed against a child involving: physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and serious neglect or an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (VIC), such as grooming.
Children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds	A child who identifies as having particular cultural or linguistic affiliations by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry or ethnic origin, religion, preferred language or language spoken at home or because of their parents' identification on a similar basis
Child related work	Work within one or more of the occupational fields defined in the Act where the contact with children is direct, unsupervised, and part of a person's duties, not incidental to their work
Children with a disability	A disability can be any physical, sensory, neurological disability, acquired brain injury or intellectual disability or developmental delay that affects a child's ability to undertake everyday activities. A disability can occur at any time in life. Children can be born with a disability or acquire a disability suddenly through an injury or illness. Some disabilities may be obvious while others are hidden
Child Safe Organisation	In the context of the child safe standards, a child safe organisation is one that meets the child safe standards by proactively taking measures to protect children from abuse
Council	Means Greater Shepparton City Council
Councillors	Means the individuals holding the office of a member of Greater Shepparton City Council
Cultural safety for children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds	An environment which is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for children; where there is no assault,

	challenge or denial of their cultural or linguistic identity, of who they are and what they need. Efforts need to be made to ensure the culturally and/or linguistically diverse children and their families receive information in a culturally sensitive, relevant and accessible manner
Cultural safety of Aboriginal children	Cultural safety encompasses the child being provided with a safe, nurturing and positive environment where they are comfortable with being themselves, expressing their culture, their spiritual and belief systems, and they are supported by the carer and family
Harm	Damage to the health and safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. Harm can be either physical or mental and can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative
Mandatory Reporters	Mandatory reporters (doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers (including early childhood teachers), principals and Police) must report to child protection if they believe on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.
The Act	Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015

4. POLICY

4.1 Background

On 17 April 2012, the Victorian Government initiated the Family and Community Development Committee's Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations (Betrayal of Trust Inquiry). The report tabled to Parliament on 13 November 2013 made recommendations including compulsory minimum standards for creating child safe environments.

On 26 November 2015, the Victorian Parliament passed the Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015 to introduce the Child Safe Standards.

The original seven Child Safe Standards have now been reviewed and replaced with eleven Standards to be implemented by 1 July 2022. These Standards provide more clarity for organisations and set out the minimum requirements organisations must take to keep children and young people safe.

4.2 Child Safe Standards

Standard 1

Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Providing cultural awareness training for all staff
- Display Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander flags and art work in meeting rooms and work spaces.
- Council's Children's Centres implementing an 'Acknowledgment of Country' within their daily programs.
- Discuss with parents and children what makes them feel culturally safe.
- Consult with Youth Committees on what makes them feel culturally safe.
- Celebrate NAIDOC week and other significant events

Standard 2

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Having a Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, communicating it to all staff and displaying it on Council's website.
- Having all staff sign the Employees Code of Conduct which details Council's commitment to child safety and wellbeing.
- Having a risk management strategy focussing on identifying and mitigating risks to children and young people.

Standard 3

Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Involving Children within Council's Children's Centres in decisions about programming and play and education practices.
- Encouraging children and youth to speak up as their views and opinions are important.
- Partnering with Community Support groups, youth agencies and Council's Youth Committee

Standard 4

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Receiving informed consent from families and children regarding engagement in activities.
- Regularly engaging with families on Council's approach to providing a Child Safe environment, including how to provide a culturally safe environment.
- Celebrating Children's week.
- Consult with the Community on important projects and proposed policies concerning children and youth.

Standard 5

Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Ensuring age appropriate information is provided to children.
- Translating information into various languages.
- Implementing Best Start programs.
- Providing training on recognising and understanding the diverse needs of children.
- Adhering to Council's strategic documents including Gender Equality Action Plan, Workforce Plan, Reconciliation Action Plan, Multicultural Strategy, Universal Access and Inclusion Plan and LGBTIQ+ Advisory Committee Action Plan.

Standard 6

People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Requiring Working With Children's Checks (WWC) for all staff and volunteers in contact unsupervised with Children or where required within legislation and performing ongoing screening.
- Adhering to stringent recruitment and selection processes, including specific selection criteria, reference checks, appropriate qualifications and detailed Position Descriptions.
- Providing comprehensive Inductions for staff outlining Council's stance on Child Safety and Wellbeing, individual roles and responsibilities and understanding of Council's policies and procedures.
- Ensuring relevant Committee members have Working With Children's Checks.

Standard 7

Processes for complaints and concerns are child-focused.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Following the National Quality standards within the National Quality Framework.

- Following up on concerns, complaints and notifications of alleged abuse through the Reportable Conduct Scheme.
- Providing Braveheart's 'Ditto' - keep safe education to children, and other age appropriate safety training.
- Ensuring privacy and record keeping is appropriately maintained.

Standard 8

Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Providing Child Safe training including Child Protection training to relevant staff.
- Keeping a record of all appropriate training received by staff and monitoring attendance.
- Including reference to being a Child Safe organisation in Inductions and reminding all staff on their responsibilities under the Act.

Standard 9

Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Having in place a video conferencing policy where staff must have a WWC Check, no break out rooms are allowed and group chats are monitored.
- Fully supervising all adults to Children's Centres and monitoring excursions.
- Implementing risk management practices when designing indoor and outdoor play spaces, use of equipment and programs.
- Ensuring contractors and third party service providers understand their responsibilities in regard to Child Safety and adhere to Council's policies and procedures.

Standard 10

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Reviewing the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy every two years and updating where necessary.
- Review and monitor any complaints received on a six monthly basis to identify any areas of required improvement.

Standard 11

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

Council will meet this requirement by:

- Updating the Employee Code of Conduct to remain compliant with legislation and the Standards.
- Publicise and promote the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.
- Reviewing all Council policies and procedures with a child safe lens.
- Risk assessment strategies that address risks of child abuse and harm are documented.
- Recruitment processes include actions to ensure the suitability of staff and volunteers who may be in contact with Children or young people.

4.2. Commitment to Child Safety

Greater Shepparton City Council has zero tolerance to child abuse or harm. Everyone working at Council is responsible for the care and protection of the children within our care and reporting information about suspected child abuse.

All children, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse or harm.

Child protection is a shared responsibility between Council, all employees, workers, contractors, associates, and members of the Greater Shepparton community.

4.3. Diversity

Greater Shepparton City Council serves a diverse community and recognises and respects diversity and acknowledges that a family's personal, cultural or religious beliefs can mean differences in child rearing practices. However Council also recognises that these differences do not reduce a child's right to be safe or our responsibility to protect children from harm.

Council is committed to promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children living with a disability.

4.4. Legislative requirements

Greater Shepparton City Council takes its legal responsibilities seriously including:

- **Failure to disclose** – Reporting child sexual abuse is a community wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the Police.
- **Failure to Protect** – People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- **Grooming** – Grooming offence targets communication, including online communication, with a child under the age of 16 or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse. This offence targets predatory contact

undertaken to prepare a child for sexual abuse at a later time with the groomer (aged 18 years old or over) or another adult.

- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.

4.5. Risk Management

Council is responsible for effectively identifying and managing risks of child abuse or harm and for promoting a safe and healthy environment for employees, volunteers and the community.

In addition to general Occupational Health and Safety strategies, Council will review and further develop risk management policies to ensure they comply with the Child Safe Standards.

4.6. Reporting and responding to a Child Safety Concern

Council is committed to complying with all legal requirements regarding child safety concerns and works to ensure all children, families, employees and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour. Dependent on the circumstances and type of incident or concern, the appropriate authority will be notified in accordance with operational guidelines.

If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred or receives an allegation of abuse, then they have a responsibility to report the incident or allegation. Factors contributing to a reasonable belief may be;

- A child states they, or someone they know, has been abused
- Behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- Someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it; or
- Observing suspicious behaviour

4.7. Support

Council is committed to ensuring all staff and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

Where appropriate, following a child safety concern Council will assist alleged victims and their families to access counselling and support services and will provide support to affected staff through Council's Employee Assistance program.

4.8. Code of Conduct

Council has an established Employees Code of Conduct, detailing expected behaviours of all employees, contractors and volunteers. This Code of Conduct includes strict adherence to Child Safe Standards. Councillors also have a Code of Conduct detailing expected behaviours.

4.9. Human Resources and Recruitment

Council employs a range of best practice screening measures and applies these standards in the screening and recruitment of employees, contractors and volunteers.

Council understands it has an ethical as well as legislative responsibility when recruiting staff and will ensure its employees and customers are not placed at unreasonable risk. Thorough questioning, reference checks and pre-employment checks are carried out to ensure child safety.

4.10. Privacy

Council is committed to protecting an individual's right to privacy. All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. Safeguards and practices are in place to ensure any personal information is protected by adhering to the Information Privacy Principles contained within the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014.

4.11. Breaches

Breaches of this Policy may lead to action in accordance with Council's Corporate Procedure Managing Workplace Performance and Behaviours, which may include termination of employment and/or referral to Victoria Police.

5. RELATED POLICIES

- *Employees Code of Conduct*
- *Councillors Code of Conduct*
- *Corporate Procedure Reportable Conduct Scheme*
- *Corporate Procedure Managing Workplace Performance and Behaviours*
- *Privacy Policy*

6. RELATED LEGISLATION

- *The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Working With Children Act 2005*
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*

7. REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed by the Manager People and Development every four years, or sooner dependent on legislative requirements.

DOCUMENT REVISIONS

Version #	Date Adopted	Date Effective
2	Major rewrite in accordance with new Child Safe Standards and recommendations.	