

## GENERAL REPORTS

### **2 CARDINIA SHIRE EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST PETITION**

FILE REFERENCE INT1752407

RESPONSIBLE GENERAL MANAGER Jenny Scicluna

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#### RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive and note the petition regarding Early Years Management and respond to the organiser of the petition advising of the information contained in the below report.

#### Attachments

*Nil.*

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A petition was tabled at the July Council meeting, the prayer of the petition read:

We are demanding that:

1. Licencing fees of \$35,000 and \$55,000 are removed to ensure affordable kindergarten for those in our community;
2. The tender process is revisited and that Kinders Together are given the opportunity to continue managing the kindergarten within Cardinia Shire Council to ensure we have consistent and exceptional EYM

As such, Council considered the community requests and the following information responds to the prayer of the petition.

#### 1. Licencing Fee

The licencing fee detailed in the EOI is an estimate of operational costs involved in the maintenance and running costs of each kindergarten building and surrounds. The operational costs include cleaning, public utilities, building maintenance and grounds maintenance. These costs are already paid by the Early Years Manager.

Council is centralising the payment of these costs to eliminate duplication of effort, which occurs now.

The Early Years Manager will pay an estimated amount quarterly. The final payment (4th quarter) will be reconciled with the actual cost of the year's operational costs. The fourth payment will be adjusted to reflect actual cost not estimated cost.

Following the first year of operations the licencing fee will be reviewed and adjusted to reflect the actual cost amount for the previous year.

Council is not making any "profit" from this licencing fee.

Kindergartens will continue to be "rent free" unlike other local governments where rent is charged.

The licencing fee doesn't put any upward pressure on kindergarten fees. The fee is what the Early Years Manager is responsible for now.

## 2. Expression of Interest Review

Council has thoroughly debated and analysed the outcome of the expression of interest process undertaken for the Early Years Education and Secondary Services for various kindergarten centres within the Shire.

As an outcome of this, it was resolved at the Council Meeting held on Monday 17 July 2017 that the Council's CEO re-negotiate the award of management of these kindergartens so that Bestchance be appointed to manage all kindergartens under the current cluster arrangement being Beaconsfield, Cockatoo and Gembrook. but the new facility being constructed as part of the new Gum Scrub Creek Primary School.

With One Tree withdrawing its application, Bestchance has been allocated Lakeside, Pakenham Springs and Henry Family and Children Centre kindergartens.

Documentation regarding Bestchance (18) and ECMS (1) being the Early Years Managers for 19 kindergartens has been signed by both parties.

Bestchance and ECMS will now proceed to engage with Parents, Parent Advisory Groups and Educators to enable the 2018 kindergarten year to operate smoothly.

As the majority Councillors voted for the appointment of Bestchance and ECMS, Council does not consider rescinding the motion would be appropriate. Further, the decision has been actioned by the Chief Executive Officer and the motion cannot be rescinded.

## **BACKGROUND**

Council has recently concluded a comprehensive Expression of Interest (EOI) process to select the providers to deliver early years education and care at Council-owned facilities across Cardinia Shire including kindergarten facilities.

The successful providers will commence in 2018 for a five-year period.

Evidence shows that high quality early years education and care is vital to the long-term development of children and over recent years there have been significant policy reforms aimed at improving the access and quality of the service.

While Council does not directly deliver early years education services, it is obligated to ensure the service is the best it can possibly be for the Shire's community, now and into the future.

As a result of the EOI the current Early Years Manager was not successful in retaining its Early Years Manager position in the Shire. This has resulted in a level of community backlash from current parents, educators and the organisation. The recent Council resolution enabled these community members to voice those concerns and for Council to respond and confirm it resolution.

Council has acknowledged that information regarding the process and the voice of the Parent Advisory Group, Educators and families in the lead up to the process was lacking from both the responsibility of the current provider and Council. Commitment has been given that relationships

with Parent Advisory Groups, the providers and Council will be strengthened through the Licence Agreements and MOU arrangements.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

## **RELEVANCE TO COUNCIL PLAN**

The recommendations align with Council's Plan, specifically:

- 1.1 Access to a variety of services for all.
  - 1.1.1 Continually review services to ensure those provided by Council meet community needs.
  - 1.1.2 Routinely review overall community needs for services and either deliver or advocate for others to provide services to meet those needs.
- 1.2 Access to support services and programs for young people.
  - 1.2.2 Advocate for increased locally based health services to support our young people.
  - 1.2.3 Investigate opportunities for allied services to be co-located with Council facilities
- 1.4 Improved health and wellbeing for all
  - 1.4.4 Support children, young people, families, older adults and people of all abilities by providing a range of accessible services and facilities.
- 2.4 Improved health and wellbeing of our residents.
  - 2.4.3 Support the provision of services by Council or others for people of all abilities.

## **CONSULTATION/COMMUNICATION**

Communication regarding the concerns raised in this petition has taken place over several weeks in the lead up to the General Council meeting 17 July 2017. Various responses were provided to individuals along with broader community media information.

## **FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

N/A.

## **CONCLUSION**

The issues raised in this petition have been on the whole considered and responded to through the Council resolution on 17 July 2017 and through communication to the community through the process.

Learnings have been acknowledged and the development and implementation of the Early Years Management provision from January 2018 has been informed by the learnings and will be strengthened as a result.