

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Date Authorised by Acting Chief Executive Officer or Council:	8 August 2025
Commencement Date:	8 August 2025
Review Date (4 years from authorised date):	8 August 2029
Responsible Department	People and Safety

This policy has been authorised.



Eamonn Fennessy
Acting Chief Executive Officer

1. Introduction

Council will create and maintain environments where children and young people have a voice, are listened to, respected and are empowered about their rights.

Engagement with children and young people is not always planned and coordinated and can happen incidentally; being a child safe organisation is everyone's responsibility. The Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy applies to Councillors, Council Personnel and Other Personnel.

For the purpose of this policy child/children refers to any person aged under 18 years.

2. Context

1. Alignment

The Child Safe Standards require Council to embed child safe culture and practice across the organisation, therefore there is alignment across most areas of Council including the associated policies and procedures, as outlined in section 8.

2. Organisational Context

As Council provides services and facilities for children and young people, we are required under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005) to implement and comply with the Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Scheme to protect children and young people from abuse and harm.

2.1 Child Safe Standards

The Victorian Child Safe Standards (Standards) are in place to:

- promote the safety of and prevent harm and abuse to children and young people;
- ensure effective processes are in place to report and respond to all allegations of child harm and abuse; and
- encourage children and young people to have a say on matters that are important to them and/or impact their lives.

There are 11 Standards each with several minimum requirements to meet compliance. The Standards are as follows:

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.
Standard 2	Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance, and culture.
Standard 3	Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
Standard 4	Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Standard 5	Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
Standard 6	People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
Standard 7	Process for complaints and concerns are child focused.
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.
Standard 9	Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
Standard 10	Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.
Standard 11	Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

2.2 Reportable Conduct Scheme

The Reportable Conduct Scheme (the Scheme) aligns with the Child Safe Standards and relates to the behaviour of Council Personnel and Other Personnel. Council has a [Reportable Conduct Management Procedure](#) to comply with this requirement.

2.3 Mandatory Reporting

In Victoria, under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* any personnel who are mandatory reporters 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.

In Council this is relevant for some Council Personnel and Other Personnel in particular mandatory reporting applies to Maternal Child Health Nurses, teachers, and early childhood workers. Information about mandatory reporting is available on the [Department of Families, Fairness and Housing website](#).

2.4 Offences

The Crimes Act 1958 and Crimes Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014 outline three offences applicable to Council as follows:

- [Failure to disclose offence](#): All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 years have a legal obligation to report that information to the police.
- [Failure to protect](#): People of authority within Council 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 offence](#): Grooming offence targets communication, including online communication, with a child under the age of 16 and/or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse. This offence targets predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual abuse at a later time with the groomer (aged 18 years or over) or another adult.

3. Objectives

This Policy provides:

- the foundation for Council's approach to Child Safety and Wellbeing, and outlines systems, practices, and procedures that promote child safety and wellbeing across the whole organisation; and
- information and guidance to Councillors, Council Personnel and Other Personnel on:
 - the organisational approach to creating safe environments for children and young people who attend Council activities, programs, services, and/or facilities owned or managed by Council; and
 - their roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children and young people from child abuse and harm.

4. Policy details

4.1 Child Safety Commitment Statement

Merri-bek City Council is committed to being a Child Safe organisation and has zero tolerance for child abuse. We believe children and young people have the right to be and feel safe and that their safety and wellbeing is the responsibility of everyone. All child safe incidents will be treated seriously and responded to promptly.

At Council we support and encourage the empowerment and participation of all children and young people. As an inclusive organisation we recognise and respect diversity. We are committed to providing culturally safe environments where all children and young people are heard, respected, and encouraged to reach their full potential.

We recognise the distinct history and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and their families and encourage the expression, enjoyment and sharing of their cultures.

4.2 Cultural Safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

The Standards, places first, the importance of cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. To implement child safe standard one Council will ensure:

- Implementation of policies, procedures and systems that will support the creation of culturally safe and inclusive environments that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families;
- Participation and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families in our services and activities is supported and facilitated; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people can express their cultures and enjoy their cultural rights and that this is encouraged and actively supported by all Council Personnel and Other Personnel.

Council has zero tolerance of racism or discrimination and is proactive in implementing policies, procedures, and systems for prevention.

4.3 Participation of children, young people, families, and the community

Council is committed to empowering children and young people to actively participate in programs, activities, and services and to know and understand their rights when engaged with Council.

Children and young people are active members in the community and Council will consult with them and their families when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. Council will pay particular attention to ensure culturally safe information, participation, and engagement opportunities for:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people;
- Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- Children and young people with a disability;
- Children and young people that are unable to live at home; and
- LGBTIQA+ children and young people.

Council will promote the role the whole community plays in keeping children and young people safe and preventing harm and abuse.

4.4 Children in the Workplace

While Council does not encourage Council Personnel to bring their children to the workplace, on rare occasions where there is no alternative but to bring their children into the workplace they must ensure:

- the safety and wellbeing of their children, including the risks associated with the environment they are in, the type of work being undertaken and the developmental needs of their children.
- Children are always supervised.

4.5 Online Engagement

Council recognises that there are unique risks to children and young people in online environments that require more specific guidance.

4.6 Transportation of Children and Young People

Council Personnel and Other Personnel will not provide unauthorised transportation to a child or young person participating in a Council activity, program, service, and/or facility.

Where transportation is required, this will be undertaken in a Council vehicle or a vehicle approved by Council using appropriate restraints.

4.7 Child Safe Standards of Behaviour

Council will outline expected child safe standards of behaviour with children and young people via the Code of Conduct.

4.8 Reports of Harm and Abuse

Anyone can report a child safe incident, including, children, young people, families, and other members of the community.

Councillors, Council Personnel and Other Personnel must report all child safe incidents, including suspected cases of child abuse or harm. All reports will be treated seriously and responded to promptly. Confidentiality will be maintained unless there is a legislative requirement to disclose or report information, for example if there is a risk to the safety of a child or young person.

Council has procedures in place to ensure all reports are investigated fairly, thoroughly, appropriately, and promptly. [Attachment 1 – Child Safe Reporting Process](#) outlines the internal reporting process for making a complaint.

Complaints

Children or young people (or someone on their behalf) may want to make a complaint about:

- a Council service.
- the way a Council staff member, or another adult, child or young person has treated them at a Council program, event, service, or facility.
- the way a problem was handled.

All complaints will be managed by the Child Safe Incident Response Group (as outlined below) following the Complaints Management Procedure outlined in the [Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedure Manual](#).

4.9 Response to Child Safe Incident Reports

The Child Safe Incident Response Group will respond to all child safe incident reports and complaints. The group is made up of the following personnel:

- Child Safe Advisor (Child Safe Officer)
- Coordinator Safety and Wellbeing or Unit Manager Workplace Relations Lead
- Manager Early Years and Youth (Child Safe Officer)
- Unit Manager Children's Services (Child Safe Officer)
- Unit Manager Maternal Child Health and Immunisation (Child Safe Officer)
- Unit Manager Youth Services (Child Safe Officer)

The relevant Unit Manager will be included in responding to child safe incidents and may elect to delegate and/or invite other staff to participate as appropriate.

Those noted as Child Safe Officers are available to take Child Safe Incident reports or complaints from children, young people, families, or members of the community and will also provide Council Personnel and Other Personnel support and guidance in relation to child safe matters. This includes if someone is unsure whether to report, any queries in relation to the Child Safe Standards or Reportable Conduct Scheme and making reports to the Police, Child Protection or any other relevant authorities or services.

4.10 Risk Management

Council will proactively manage the risk of harm or abuse to children and young people, including the consideration of both physical and online environments. Risk Assessments will be undertaken when required if a project, activity, or event (etc) will impact on children or young people.

4.11 People and Safety

Council has a range of human resources policies and procedures to ensure the recruitment, selection, induction, and ongoing supervision of suitable and appropriate Council personnel, including the management of Working with Children Checks.

4.12 Education, Training, and Information

Education and training are important to ensure all Councillors, Council personnel and Other Personnel understand that child safety and wellbeing is everyone's responsibility.

Information is made available to Councillors about their responsibilities regarding child safety and wellbeing.

All Council Personnel will be provided child safety training on induction and this will be repeated at least once every two years thereafter. Child safety and wellbeing information is accessible at all times on [Grapevine](#).

Further education and training will be provided to relevant Council Personnel based on level of risk to and contact with children and young people, to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to meet the requirements of the Child Safe Standards and to keep children and young people safe.

4.13 Record Keeping, Management of Records and Privacy

Council will keep detailed records of all child safe incidents and these will be stored and managed in line with the [Records and Information Management Policy](#). Unless there is a legislative requirement (for example if there is a risk of self-harm, or to someone's safety) all personal information will be handled in accordance with the [Information Privacy and Health Records Policy](#).

4.14 Third Party Operators

Council enters contractual arrangements with a range of suppliers that hire, access, or use buildings with children or young people present and/or deliver services for or with children, young people, and their families.

Council follows a tiered approach to contract management in relation to child safety and wellbeing, based on the level of engagement with and risk to children and young people. The requirement to comply with child safety requirements is incorporated into contracts with third party operators, to ensure that businesses and organisations understand their obligations relating to child safety and wellbeing and to be aware of and (where relevant) compliant with the Child Safe Standards.

4.15 Breaches

Breaches of this Policy will be viewed seriously. Breaches by Council employees will be managed in accordance with Council's Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Safeguarding children and young people are a shared responsibility across Council. The following Governance Framework will oversee the implementation of Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, Procedure and Practice.

The *Child Safety and Wellbeing Steering Committee* provides high level oversight of compliance with legislation and manages the child safe risks in the risk register.

The *Child Safety Incident Response Group* oversees and leads the response to child safe incident reports and complaints.

Specific responsibilities for roles are outlined below.

Role	Responsibility
Councillors	Model a culture of child safety and wellbeing
	Understand and comply with their obligations in relation to child safety and wellbeing.

	Participate in training/education to identify, prevent and report child abuse and harm. Report any concerns about child safety and wellbeing.
Executive Team	Strengthen and model a culture of child safety and wellbeing, and provide leadership and good governance, ensuring: • the appropriate policies and procedures are in place and implemented across the organisation; • all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to child safety and wellbeing; and • allegations of child abuse and harm are reported and fully investigated. In addition, the <i>CEO</i> is responsible for meeting specific requirements under the Reportable Conduct Scheme and ensuring these are implemented within legislated timeframes.
People Leaders	Ensure a culture of child safety and wellbeing is embedded among their team/s, including training, recruitment, induction, and community engagement. Ensure Child Safety and Wellbeing policies and procedures are implemented within the work areas they are responsible for, including that all Council Personnel and Other Personnel: • have access to Child Safety and Wellbeing Policies and Procedures; and • complete relevant training and are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to child safety, including child safety incident reporting. Conduct risk assessments, taking reasonable steps to identify any potential risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people within their team/s and remove or minimise the risks. Ensure engagement and consultation with children and young people on matters that affect them in relation to the work their team/s undertake. Where relevant, and in conjunction with relevant People and Safety Personnel, ensure that relevant Council Personnel and Other Personnel maintain a current Working with Children Clearance Check.
Council Personnel and Other Personnel	Understand and comply with their roles and responsibilities in keeping children and young people safe.

	Provide environments for children and young people where they feel safe, empowered, and can participate. Report any concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person. Participate in training and education in relation to child safety and wellbeing as required. Personnel working in a role assessed as requiring a Working with Children Check (WWCC) will obtain and keep current a WWCC or provide evidence of current Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) Registration. Behave safely and appropriately with children and young people. Engage with and consult children and young people when making decisions that will impact on them.
Child Safe Advisor and Coordinator Safety and Wellbeing	Develop and review relevant policies and procedures. Promote a culture of child safety and wellbeing across the organisation. Coordinate the response to child safe incident reports. Provide guidance and information to teams across the organisation to support embedding of child safety and wellbeing policy and practice. This includes: • Training and education relating to child safety and wellbeing. • Support the review and management of risks relating to child safety and wellbeing. • Encourage engagement and consultation with children and young people on matters that impact them. Where relevant, and in conjunction with People Leaders, ensure staff have and maintain a current WWCC or VIT Registration on an ongoing basis. .
Coordinator HR Recruitment and Inclusion	Ensure appropriate frameworks are in place regarding recruitment and selection to meet the requirements of the Child Safe Standards. Where relevant, and in conjunction with People Leaders, implement systems to ensure staff have and maintain a current WWCC or VIT Registration, prior to engagement.

	Ensure onboarding of new Council Personnel and Other Personnel includes the provision of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedures.
Unit Manager Workplace Relations	Manage disciplinary procedures as they relate to child safety and wellbeing.
Organisational Performance	Oversee the implementation of child safety training.
Contract Managers	The management of contracts includes, but is not limited to, all agreements, leases, licences, grant recipients, funded partners, and labour hire. Anyone managing these contracts will ensure: • all third-party operators are provided with a copy of Council's Child Safety Commitment Statement; and • contracts contain the relevant child safe clauses, including the requirement for Working with Children Checks where relevant; and • monitoring of compliance with child safety requirements.

6. Monitoring, Evaluating and review

This policy will be reviewed every four years and/or in response to the occurrence of any significant child safe incidents.

7. Definitions

Term	Definition
Child	Any child or young person under 18 years or age.
Child abuse	Child abuse is defined in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) as including: • a sexual offence committed against a child • grooming for sexual conduct with a child under the age of 16 (under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)) • physical violence against a child • causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child • serious neglect of a child
Child safe culture	An organisation that has shared attitudes, values, policies, and practices that prioritise the safety of children.
Child safe incident	A child safe incident is any of the following:

	• sexual offences against, with or in the presence of a child; • sexual misconduct against, with or in the presence of a child; • physical violence against, with or in the presence of a child; • any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child; • significant neglect; • a disclosure of abuse or harm; and • breach of code of conduct relating to child safety and wellbeing.
Child safety	Child safety includes matters related to protecting all children and young people from abuse and harm. This includes managing the risk of abuse and harm, providing support to a or young person at risk of abuse or harm, and responding to suspicions, incidents, disclosures or allegations of abuse or harm.
Councillor	A democratically elected member of Merri-bek City Council.
Council personnel	For the purpose of this Policy, reference to Council Personnel includes the following people when Council engages them directly: • employees; • volunteers; and • contractors or consultants.
Cultural safety	The positive recognition and celebration of cultures. It is more than the absence of racism or discrimination and more than 'cultural awareness' and 'cultural sensitivity.' It empowers people and allows them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves.
Disability	The definition of disability is ever changing and there is no one definition. Disability can be physical, sensory, cognitive, neurological, mental health-related, or related to chronic health conditions. It may be visible or invisible, permanent, or temporary, formally diagnosed, or self-identified. It includes (but is not limited to): • physical conditions that affect mobility, sight, or hearing; • chronic illness or health conditions; • neurodivergence, including learning difficulties and mental health conditions;

	• experiences resulting from disfigurement or differences in appearance; • conditions that may not yet be diagnosed but result in barriers to participation.
Empowerment	Building up children and young people and strengthening their confidence in themselves and in an organisation. It involves equipping children and young people with the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions and enabling them to increase control of their lives.
Grooming	A person aged 18 or older communicates in any way with a person under 16 (or their family), with the intention of subsequent sexual activity with the child or young person.
Harm	Damage to the health, safety, or wellbeing of a child, including as a result of abuse by adults or the conduct of other children or young people. It includes physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act and can also be cumulative.
Mandatory reporting	Mandatory reporting is the legal requirement of certain professional groups to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities.
Online environments	Any digital devices and/or platforms used to communicate with children or young people such as computers, phones, websites, social media, and video conference facilities. It includes any interactions such as online meetings, emails, phone calls and text messages.
Other Personnel	For the purpose of this Policy, reference to Other Personnel includes the following people whilst they are performing work for Council: • workers supplied by a provider (e.g. labour hire, employment agency); • volunteer workers supplied by a provider (e.g. work experience or work placement students); and • secondees. It also includes the following people while the person performs work for Council: • individual business owners (who employ or engage staff in a business that exercises care, supervision, or authority over children); and

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- directors or office holders of companies when they are engaged by Council through that company (e.g. sole directors).
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8. Associated Documents

External

- [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)
- [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child](#)
- [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006](#)
- [Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005](#)
- [Children, Youth and Families Act 2005](#)
- [Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012](#)
- [Crimes Act 1958](#)
- [Crimes Amendment \(Grooming\) Act 2014](#)
- [Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014](#)
- [Public Records Act 1973](#)
- [Working with Children Act 2005](#) (and associated amendment Acts)

Internal

- Appropriate Workplace Behaviour
- Children and Young People's Engagement Framework
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedure Manual
- Model Councillor Code of Conduct
- Cyber Security Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Information Privacy and Health Records Policy
- Moreland Children, Young People and Families Plan 2021-2025 and Implementation Plan 2022-2025
- Procurement Policy 2021-2025
- Records and Information Management Policy
- Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure
- Social Media Policy
- Work Experience Policy and Procedure
- Working with Children Checks Management Procedure

9. References

[Child Safe Standards - definitions | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](http://www.vic.gov.au)

[Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 \(legislation.vic.gov.au\)](http://legislation.vic.gov.au)

[The Commission for Children and Young People](http://www.vic.gov.au)

[Crimes Act 1958 \(legislation.vic.gov.au\)](http://legislation.vic.gov.au)

[Department of Education and Training Victoria](http://www.vic.gov.au)

[Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria](http://www.vic.gov.au)

Attachment 1 – Child Safe Reporting Process

