



Family, Youth & Children's Services
Service Review
Occasional Care
June 2018

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Introduction

Background

Council provides Type 1 Occasional Care services at all three Yarra Leisure facilities located at Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy.

Occasional Care is also provided at the Connie Benn Centre but is offered as a vastly different service model to Occasional Care provided in the Leisure Centres. At the Connie Benn Centre, Occasional Care is provided as part of an integrated suite of services offered to families. The Occasional Care service is included under the Centre's integrated licence, offers longer sessions and has proven to be an attractive service for vulnerable families who live in the local area.

Utilisation of Occasional Care at Connie Benn Centre remains high at an average rate of 80% with a high proportion of vulnerable families accessing the service. The relevance of the service to the local community is clear and the viability of the service has not been questioned. Therefore, this Service Review will concentrate on the Type 1 Occasional Care services located in Council's Leisure Centres only and will not include the Type 2 Occasional Care service at the Connie Benn Centre.

In 2009 a decision was taken to centralise the management of Council's Children's services due to legislative changes. As part of this decision responsibility for Occasional Care was transferred from the Leisure centres to Family, Youth and Children's Services where it currently remains. However the day to day operations of the service are shared across Family, Youth and Children's services and Leisure services.

Purpose of the Service Review

The purpose of this service review is to consider Type 1 Occasional Care services currently provided in all three Yarra Leisure Centres and recommend options for the future of the service.

Review objectives

Specific objectives have been established for the review to provide clarity about the purpose and outcomes sought by the service review. The objectives are outlined as follows:

- To identify community needs and expectations regarding Type 1 Occasional Care services and opportunities to improve responsiveness
- To consider Council's existing service model for Occasional Care and Council's exposure to risk.
- To recommend options regarding Council's future role in Occasional Care.

Review Methodology

The methodology employed by the service review is comprised of the following 7 key stages.

- Overview of State and Federal Government legislative frameworks relevant to Occasional Care Services.
- Review of the Occasional Care service model as it applies in Yarra's Leisure centres.
- Demographic profile for 0-4 year olds in Yarra.
- Financial analysis of Council's Occasional Care service.
- Consultation including market research survey, focus group discussions with families and 1:1 interviews with key stakeholders including employees at Yarra Leisure Centres and Occasional Care services.
- Benchmarking comparing Council's Occasional Care service with select local governments and community based providers of Occasional Care in Yarra.
- Outline of key issues and options for consideration.

Yarra 0-25 Plan 2018-2022

The 0-25 Plan provides strategic guidance for the Service Review. The Plan includes seven Strategic Priorities that are central to achieving positive outcomes for children, young people and their families in Yarra. The following Strategic Priorities are particularly relevant to this review, highlighting the importance of providing services and environments that are safe for children, that promote active play and enhance resilience, health and wellbeing of children and their families.

- *Strategic Priority 2*
 - *Support children, young people and their families to be strong, resilient and resourceful*
- *Strategic Priority 5*
 - *Improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families*

Legislative framework

Occasional Care is described as a limited hours service and is subject to the requirements of the Children's Services Act 1996.

The Children's Services Act 1996 authorises the Children's Services Regulations 2009 which govern and regulate the licensing and operation of children's services including Occasional Care services.

Under the Act, there is no legal requirement or obligation for Council to provide Occasional Care services. However, as an approved licensee, the Act specifies particular legal requirements and responsibilities that Council must fulfil to ensure that all children are cared for or educated in an environment that is safe, meets the developmental needs of children and supports their health and wellbeing.

The Children's Services Regulations 2009 define Occasional Care as a service that provides Education or Care to children on an ad hoc or casual basis where the service does not usually offer full-time or all day education and care to children on an ongoing basis.

Occasional Care services are licenced under the Children's Services Regulations 2009 to provide a maximum number of places that can be accommodated at any one time. This 'cap' is listed on the service licence and cannot be exceeded.

A limited hours service can be operated from the same location as a different type of Education and Care children's service under the provisions of an integrated licence. In such circumstances, the National Law applies and requires one service approval only for services operating from the one location. For example, Occasional Care can be co-located with a Long Day Care service and included under the one integrated licence. This is the type of arrangement in place for the Occasional Care service provided at the Connie Benn Centre in Fitzroy.

Occasional Care Service

Purpose of Occasional Care

Occasional Care is designed to provide a flexible short term child care option for families. The flexibility provided by the service allows families to have a short term break from caring for their child, to take care of personal matters, to participate in physical exercise, study or pursue part time work. For some families, occasional care gives their child the opportunity to participate in a range of activities and social interactions with other children in an early years learning environment. In this sense, Occasional Care can provide a 'bridge' or supported transition for children into longer forms of child care.

Service Description

Occasional Care is typically defined by the State government as a 'limited hours' service providing care or education for children including care at sports or leisure services and neighbourhood houses for limited hours only.

A limited hours service is not required to provide outdoor space or to meet all of the premises requirements of a standard service. Under this model, children can be cared for limited hours only.

Limited hours services comprise type 1 or type 2 services.

Type 1 service provides care and education for no more than 2 hours a day and not more than 6 hours a week per child.

Type 2 service provides care and education for no more than 5 hours a day and not more than a total of 15 hours a week per child.

Occasional Care Services in Yarra

In Yarra there are 54 Occasional Care places.

Council directly manages 37 places, or 69%, of the total number of Occasional Care places available in Yarra which are comprised of both Type 1 and Type 2 services.

Area of Council responsible for Occasional Care services located in Yarra's Leisure Centres

The Family, Youth and Children's Services branch centrally manage the Occasional Care service which is located in the Children's Services portfolio. On a day to day basis the service is overseen by the Out of School Hours Care and Occasional Care Services Team Leader. Administrative functions of the service are shared between Family, Youth

and Children's services and Leisure services. This arrangement will be elaborated on further in the review.

Staffing

The regulations stipulate child to staff ratios according to the number of children and their age together with mandatory qualifications of employees in the service. The staffing group comprises a total of 3.17 EFT.

Type 1 Occasional Care Services Provided by Council

Council provides Type 1 Occasional Care services at all three Yarra Leisure facilities located at Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy.

Children's Services are the licensed provider of the service and have responsibility for ensuring the regulatory requirements are met. Children's services also hold responsibility for enrolment of families and staffing of the service. The Leisure centres are responsible for administering all service bookings and the collection of fees.

The services currently deliver two 1.5hr sessions (9.00am to 10.30am & 10.30am to 12.00pm) five days a week, 50 weeks per year. A combined total of 28 places are offered per session with a total of 54 places per day across all Occasional Care services in the Leisure centres.

The number of licenced places does not provide a true indicator of the number of Occasional Care places offered to the public but rather is indicative of the overall capacity of the service. For example, Richmond Leisure centre is licenced to provide a maximum of 23 places and yet offers 10 service places per session. Similarly, Fitzroy Leisure Centre is licenced to provide 12 places and currently offers 10 service places per session (will reduce to 9 post pending capital works).

Operational considerations influence the number of actual places offered to the community at each service location. Factors such as site specific constraints, amenity related issues and service demand may lead to a cap in the number of places offered to families that is below the number of places the service is licenced for.

Occasional Care Services provided by Community Based Providers

In Yarra, Type 2 services are provided by the Richmond Community Learning Centre. Richmond Community Learning Centre provides 17 places per day offering four hour sessions on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. A 3 year old activity group is also available on Friday morning for a 5 hour session. Bookings are made on a term basis only.

Table 1: Occasional Care places in Yarra

Service Location	No. of Licenced Places	No. of Service Places (per session)	Type
Collingwood Leisure Centre	8	8	Type 1
Fitzroy Leisure Centre	12	10	Type 1
Richmond Leisure Centre	23	10	Type 1
Connie Benn Centre	10	10	Type 2
Richmond Community Learning Centre	17	17	Type 2

Demographics

Population forecasts have been provided for children aged 0 to 4 years of age given the average age of children in Occasional Care are up to 2 years of age and remainder generally pre-school age.

Over the next decade population forecasts suggest that the number of children living in Yarra aged 0 to 4 years will increase (+805) from 5,255 children in 2016 to 6,060 children in 2026. The areas expected to gain over 100 additional children aged 0 to 4 years are Abbotsford (+198), Fairfield-Alphington (+157), Collingwood (+124) and North Richmond (+114). A slight decline in the number of children aged 0-4 living in Carlton North – Princes Hill (-20) and Clifton Hill (-20) is also predicted over the next decade.

In addition to Occasional Care provided in Council's Leisure centres, community based providers such as the Richmond Community Learning Centre offer Occasional care sessions up to a maximum of 5 hours. Whilst the demand for long day care for children up to 3 years of age currently exceeds the number of long day care places available, existing Occasional Care Services remain underutilised. This raises questions about the relevance of the Occasional Care service model for families when demand for long day care persists as reflected by Council's waiting lists.

Table 2: Forecast population Yarra - 0 to 4 year olds at selected years 2016, 2021 & 2026

Area	2016	2021	2026	Change b/n 2016 & 2026
City of Yarra	5,255	5,693	6,060	805
Abbotsford	433	598	631	198
Carlton North - Princes Hill	447	434	427	-20
Central Richmond	729	772	816	87
Clifton Hill	422	407	402	-20
Collingwood	518	569	642	124
Cremorne and Burnley - Richmond South	276	292	347	71
Fairfield - Alphington	191	286	348	157
Fitzroy	709	717	741	32
Fitzroy North	711	738	772	61
North Richmond	818	881	932	114

Source: i.d. consulting Population Forecasts produced for Yarra City Council, accessed 08 Feb 2016 <http://forecast.id.com.au/yarra/home>

Client Profile

A profile of service users accessing the Occasional Care service has been prepared based on sessional attendance records and enrolment data across the 2016/2017 financial year.

Clients accessing Type 1 Occasional Care in Council's leisure centres are principally leisure centre members with the highest proportion of children accessing the service aged 2 years of age and under.

As part of the enrolment process information is recorded that reflects the Yarra Priority of Access policy. Non-financial enrolment data shows that the number of single parent families and parents with a disability accessing the service is low and there are less than 6% of children from a non-English speaking background represented. Enrolment data also shows that there are no families identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural background accessing the service. This data indicates that very few families are vulnerable.

Data on payment type sourced from Leisure Services indicates a concession fee is applied for 30 percent of fees collected for Occasional Care. However, what is not shown is the type of concession that is applied such as student, health care, senior card or number of visits made by a concession card holder in a given week.

Leisure Service Review

Background

Yarra Leisure completed a service review in 2015 that included consideration of Occasional Care services delivered in all three Yarra Leisure centres. The recommendations included in the Leisure Services review as they relate to the provision of Occasional Care services in the Leisure centres will be discussed as part of this review.

The original intent behind the provision of Occasional Care services in Yarra's Leisure centres was recorded in the Leisure services review as the wish to facilitate access to exercise and leisure options for families with parenting commitments.

At this time, Occasional Care services were managed by Yarra Leisure. However, changes to the regulatory regime introduced in 2009 prompted the service to transition from Leisure services to Family, Youth and Children's services.

Leisure Services continues to retain responsibility for some administrative aspects of the service namely, bookings and payment at the individual leisure centres with the remaining responsibilities for the service sitting with Family, Youth and Children's Services.

Service Directions

Questions were raised in the Leisure services review about the allocation of space in Leisure centres to Occasional Care and whether these spaces could be more equitably utilised and deliver a broader set of community outcomes.

The review compared the average rate of visits to the Occasional Care service with visits to the Leisure centres. The rate was shown as one visit to the Occasional Care service compared with 176 visits to the Leisure centres (or 1/176). This emphasises the high demand for leisure services compared to the low utilisation of Occasional Care and raises questions about the equitable distribution of resources when such a low volume of people access Occasional Care.

A number of opportunities were identified in the Leisure Services review that could be pursued should the space occupied by the Occasional Care become available for use by Leisure services. Opportunities flagged by Leisure included the introduction of new Leisure programs, expansion of existing programs and allocation of space to support the business functions of the leisure centres.

Recommendations – Leisure Service Review

Three initiatives were put forward for consideration in the Leisure Services review that would impact on the provision of Occasional Care Services at the Leisure Centres if implemented. The initiatives are as follows:

1. Cease operation of the Occasional Care service at all Yarra Leisure Centres and redistribute Occasional Care space for the use of Leisure programs.
2. Cease operation of Occasional Care service at Richmond Leisure Centre only and retain Occasional Care service at Fitzroy Pool and Collingwood Leisure Centre.
3. Retain Occasional Care services at all Yarra Leisure centres but convert the Occasional Care space at Richmond Leisure centre to shared use with Leisure programs.

Leisure Services have identified Initiative 1 as the preferred option. The Leisure Services service review was endorsed by Council in 2015. However, initiatives requiring changes to either service levels or policy must be considered by Council.

Given the preferred options put forward for the Occasional Care service would have significant implications for both policy and service levels, Leisure services have sought to rely on the outcomes of the Occasional Care Service review to inform how these recommendations might be considered by Council.

Utilisation of Council’s Occasional Care Services

In the 2016/2017 financial year there were 1,127,000 visits to Yarra’s Leisure centres. Of these, 5,071 represent the number of visits to the Occasional Care services located at Yarra’s Leisure centres. At just 0.45 percent, this equates to less than 1 percent of visitors to the Leisure centres who utilise the Occasional Care service.

This compares to 5,800 visits or 0.50% of the total number of Leisure visits between 2013 and 2014, representing a decrease of approximately 700. The reduction of over 700 visits to the Occasional Care service since this time is significant, particularly when compared to the high demand for additional floor space for Leisure programs.

The average rate of utilisation of the Occasional Care service for the financial year 2016 to 2017 is highlighted below.

Leisure Centre	Capacity	Total number	Average rate of utilisation
Collingwood	4160	2129	51.2%
Fitzroy	4680	1410	30.1%
Richmond	5200	1522	29.3%
Total	14040	5061	36.0%

Table 3: Utilisation Data sourced from Leisure Services 2016/2017 financial year.

As shown above, the rate of utilisation of the Occasional Care service in the three Yarra Leisure centres is less than 50 percent for all centres with a combined average utilisation rate of 36.0 percent across all three Leisure centres.

Service profile

- The average age of children enrolled in occasional care is 24 months old.
- An average of 85% of service users live in Yarra.
- The majority of occasional care users are members of the leisure centre (56%), with 44% attending as casual users.
- 291 families enrolled in Occasional Care in the 2016/2017 financial year.
- Occasional Care averages 100 bookings each week. Of these bookings, utilisation data shows an average of 55 families use the service approximately two times each week.
- 31% of fees paid to access the Occasional Care service are recorded at the concession rate with 69% at standard rates.

Issues

The following issues have been identified as part of this review and are categorised as follows:

Financial

- A financial analysis was undertaken for the 2016 to 2017 financial year on the Occasional Care service
- Financial grants have historically been provided to community based Occasional Care providers from the Family, Youth and Children's Services budget to support the provision of Occasional Care. Grants were accessed by community based services on a request basis.
- Whilst grants have been provided by Council throughout the history of the services, this does suggest that over time Occasional Care has not proven to be financially sustainable for many community based providers. In 2017 the Holden Street Neighbourhood House discontinued provision of Occasional Care due to the service not being financially viable for the Centre.

Service Model

- The service location within the Leisure centres and the limited hours of service offered renders the service difficult to manage.
- Occasional Care has been accommodated in all three leisure centres in designated spaces licenced for the operation of an Occasional Care service.
- The rooms are not purpose built and have been adapted as best as possible to accommodate the needs of an Occasional Care service.
- The rooms accommodating Occasional Care are located adjacent or proximal to the pool decks for each of the centres and are confined to indoor space within the Leisure centre complex.
- Whilst each space is different across the three Leisure Centres, there are issues common to all three Occasional Care services that highlight the inadequacy of the spaces from a child and family friendly perspective.
- Occasional Care operates as a stand-alone service model in the leisure centres. Opportunities to link families using Occasional Care with other early years services, programs or supports is very limited in this context because of the lack of integration with other programs and services.
- This is particularly concerning for vulnerable families who may be accessing the service and may require additional support and referral.
- The administrative functions of Occasional Care are divided between Leisure services and Family, Youth and Children's services.
- Administering the service from two separate areas of Council impacts detrimentally on the service because neither area of Council has complete oversight or responsibility for all aspects of the service.
- On a day to day basis the service has experienced operational issues that impact on families, Leisure services and the Occasional Care service. This might be due to factors such as staff absence, booking errors or inconsistency of practice in relation to policy and procedures.

Operational Environments

Collingwood Leisure Centre

- The service has been licenced to provide 8 places and offers all 8 places.
- Collingwood Occasional Care service is accommodated in a small space accessed directly from the pool deck.

- The space does not have a dedicated kitchen, toilet or administration area incorporated into the licensed area.
- There are no toilet facilities within the licensed space itself and staff must access public toilets located off the pool deck. Consequently a staff member is required to leave the licenced space to supervise children or babies requiring toilet facilities. If the public toilets are occupied the staff member may be absent from the licensed space for some time.
- As a result, for the period of time that a staff member is outside of the room, the staff to child ratio in the licensed space may no longer comply with the legal requirement that applies to the operation of the service.
- Entering the pool deck with children exposes staff to risks such as slip hazards, increases potential risk of a child absconding from the service or falling into the swimming pool.
- Ongoing issues have been raised by various staff regarding the air quality in the licenced space. The space is not well ventilated and there is a strong odour of chlorine that permeates the space requiring the air conditioning to remain on at all times.
- This issue has been investigated through on-site air quality testing. Results of tests concluded that Chlorine in the air was not at a level that could be harmful to human health.
- However, this does not exclude Chlorine being an irritant for some individuals causing symptoms such as skin irritations, headaches, nausea, sinus, eye and ear problems.
- Improved ventilation was installed in the room however the issues of poor air quality have persisted with some staff requesting that they not be rostered to work in the service due to the detrimental health impacts experienced.
- The space is considered to be too small to provide appropriate care over longer hours and the exposure to risks detailed above would increase if the service was to operate under a different licence with longer hours.

Fitzroy Leisure Centre

- The service has been licensed for a maximum of 12 places but offers 10 places per session due to operational limitations.
- The Occasional Care service at Fitzroy is accessed from an outdoor public area adjacent to the swimming pool and group fitness studio.
- The proximity to the swimming pool presents significant risks in the advent of a child absconding.
- Capital works have been scheduled to create wheelchair access to both the Occasional Care service and adjacent group fitness room. A gated area within the licensed space will also be established to prevent any child from absconding from the service. Due to the physical space required for these works, the number of service places offered will decrease from 10 to 9 places.
- The general amenity of the service space is poor. The entry does not provide any weather protection for families, nor is there space for the storage of prams.
- Inclement weather would impact significantly on families accessing the service due to the lack of weather protection.

- The licensed space is highly constrained with an extremely limited transition area for sign in, drop off and pick up of children. The room has no external windows other than clerestory windows which are located at ceiling level.
- Separate toilet facilities are provided with louvered windows that remain open at all times. This area also accommodates the fold down change table for babies. Due to the conditions in the room, the space remains very cold and uncomfortable in colder weather and is not an optimum facility for babies.
- There is no capacity to provide access to a child safe/friendly outdoor area and any expansion of the licensed space could only be accommodated through significant capital works to the existing building.

Richmond Leisure Centre

- The licensed space at Richmond is the largest of the three Occasional Care services.
- Richmond Occasional Care has a separate administration area, toilet facilities and kitchen within the space accommodating the Occasional Care service.
- The space is adjacent to the front reception area and can only be accessed off the pool deck.
- Access to and from the space from the pool deck again presents particular risks associated with the proximity of the swimming pool, increased risk of slip hazards if surfaces are wet and the risk of a child absconding from the Occasional Care room that is adjacent to the deep end of the 50 metre swimming pool. The current arrangements mean that both the door to the Occasional Care service and gate to the pool deck must be open to facilitate prams entering and exiting the space presenting additional risks. This arrangement also increases the risk to the service of a child absconding.
- The risks presented by proximity to the pool is highlighted by a recent serious incident. In the incident a child was found unattended within one metre of the pool deck. The child who was not appropriately supervised at the time, exited the Occasional Care room via an external door that was left open. The door opened onto adjacent outdoor space. The child then re-entered the Leisure service through a door that opened onto the pool deck and was sighted by Leisure Centre management as the child walked past the glass walled office. Occasional Care staff were then made aware of the child's absence and incident. As a consequence, the external door is permanently locked and the room has been modified with a gate installed so children cannot access any exit doors. The service, and therefore the approved provider as a whole, has received an administrative caution as the findings concluded that the service had not been compliant with legal obligations to:
 - supervise
 - keep children safe from harm and hazard
- The transmission of noise between the reception area and Occasional Care space is described by staff as problematic with leisure centre staff reporting noise from the Occasional Care service as disruptive. The wall separating these areas is temporary and has no acoustic properties.
- Access to the outdoor area adjacent to the Occasional Care room and outdoor basketball courts is not included as part of the licenced space. It is understood that there may be potential soil contamination issues associated with this area requiring

further investigation if access to the outdoor area was to be pursued for use by the service.

- Leisure services deliver a variety of classes in the licensed space outside the hours Occasional Care is provided. This requires the pack up and storage of equipment in the back of the room creating a level of inconvenience for both Occasional Care and Leisure services.
- The service is licenced for a maximum of 23 children however, the number of places offered is capped at 10 due to the low rates of utilisation and poor general amenity of the facility. If the number of places offered increased, the ratio of staff to children would need to be adjusted to reflect this together with the provision of additional staff with a higher level of qualification.

Equity

- Bookings data shows a total of 291 families accessed occasional Care in the 2016/2017 financial year.
- On average, 100 bookings were received for the Occasional Care service each week. Of these bookings, an average of 55 families per week frequented the service approximately 1.8 times per week.
- This equates to a relatively small number of families frequenting the service and may be contrary to the initial aspiration to support families on low income to access the Leisure centres.
- Utilisation data highlights a consistent pattern of underutilisation over time with little demand for the service.
- Whilst Leisure Services actively promote Occasional Care on their website and despite a growth in Leisure membership numbers, utilisation of Occasional Care has continued to be low
- Visitation rates indicate 176 visits to the leisure centre were made for a single Occasional Care visit in the period 2013 to 2014.
- This raises questions about the breadth and depth of community benefits achieved from Council's investment in the Occasional Care service compared to the extensive reach of Leisure centre programs and facilities on offer to the broader community. Particularly given some Leisure programs are currently over-subscribed and the demand for new programs cannot be met.
- The demand for program space at the Leisure Centres exceeds available floor space.

Benchmarking

A benchmarking exercise was undertaken to compare Council's Occasional Care Services with a variety of Occasional Care services delivered across the community and local government sectors. Information was primarily gathered through telephone interviews, surveys and targeted discussions with service providers. This information was then distilled for comparative purposes. The information is illustrated in table 4.

Comparison with neighbouring local government providers was constrained by the limited number of local government Occasional Care providers.

The City of Stonington has an Occasional Care facility with an 'unrestricted' licence which is a long standing historical arrangement from previous regulations. As such, the service is an approved provider for Child Care Benefit, therefore receiving Commonwealth funding. The service offers 30 places, nine hours a day, five days a week and utilisation is estimated to be around eighty percent. The City of Stonington essentially offer a service that mimics a long day care service model and does not operate within the constraints that other limited hours services face.

Of the local Governments contacted for purposes of this review, Yarra is the only local government provider of Type 1 Occasional Care services in a Leisure Centre setting.

Table 4: Occasional Care Services – Local Government & Community Providers 2017

Provider	Type of service	Number of places	Session fees per child
City of Yarra	Type 1 (1.5 hours)	56	\$3-\$10
	Type 2 (4 hours)	10	\$9 -\$18
YMCA Active Moreland	Type 2 (1.5 -4 hours)	3 centres Coburg Leisure, Fawkner Leisure & Brunswick Baths. (parents must leave the centre) *also have up to 3.5 hours of childcare available on site.	Variable from \$6.90 per 1 hour, \$31.05 per 3.5 hours
YMCA Darebin Leisure	Type 2 (1.5 or 3 hours)	1 centre (Reservoir Leisure)	\$9.60 per 1.5 hour session \$16.70 per 3 hour session.
Stonington	Historical unrestricted licence - up to 9 hours per day	1 centre – 30 places	\$15 per hour up to \$103 per day, CCB subsidy applies.
Richmond Community Learning Centre	Type 2	17	4 or 5 hour session \$45 – \$30 Conc

Consultation

Consultation was initially undertaken in mid-2016 with a range of stakeholders including, employees of the Occasional Care service, Community based providers of Occasional Care and families utilising the service. Methods included surveys, facilitated workshops, telephone and face to face interviews.

Further consultation was undertaken throughout July, 2017 with families utilising the Occasional Care service and families who access the Leisure Centres but do not use Occasional Care. The consultation relied on surveys and face to face interviews with families attending the Leisure centre but not using Occasional Care and families who are using Occasional Care at the Leisure Centres. Staff of Leisure Services were also consulted at this time.

What families told us

In mid-2016 a market research survey tool was utilised to obtain information from families about Council's Children's Services. 3000 randomly selected families drawn from the Maternal and Child Health database from the last 10 years received the survey together with 300 families who have used the Out of School Hours Care service over the past 12 months. The Occasional Care service was one of the four service areas focussed on as part of the survey.

23 respondents, equating to 9 percent had utilised occasional care in the last 12 months. Of these, just over half used Council's Occasional Care service, predominantly in the leisure centres. Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated they access occasional care services located outside of Yarra.

Of the 21 respondents who provided a detailed response, 8 families used Occasional Care located in the leisure centres, 4 families used Occasional Care in child care centres, 3 families accessed occasional care at the Connie Benn Centre, 3 families used Occasional Care at community based centres and 3 respondents identified 'other' as the primary provider of their Occasional Care.

The majority of families accessed occasional care less than monthly and the most common reason for using occasional care was cited as exercise (7 respondents). This is consistent with a brief analysis of attendance records at the leisure based services conducted in 2015 which indicated that over 98% of people attending occasional care do so for the sole purpose of attending the leisure facilities.

When asked to rank the most important feature when selecting an Occasional Care service, families selected location as the most important consideration and families were predominantly satisfied with the provider of the service. Across the ten features families were asked to rank in order of importance, families ranked service provider 9 out of 10, with 10 being the least important feature.

In August 2017 families who had used Occasional Care over the past 6 months were surveyed together with families who accessed Yarra's Leisure Centres but did not utilise Occasional Care services. Surveys were distributed to families using the Occasional Care service via SMS. Face to face consultations were conducted at Richmond and Collingwood Leisure Centres during operation of the 'Learn to Swim' program. Face to face interviews were not conducted at Fitzroy given the Learn to Swim program was not operational over the winter months.

A total of 96 surveys were received. Of these, 78 were from families who have used the Occasional care service in the past 6 months or are current users of the service. 18 families who do not use the service were also surveyed.

Given the survey was distributed to over 180 families enrolled in the Occasional Care service, the majority of respondents were likely to have recently experienced the service. The majority of respondents live in Richmond and Clifton Hill.

Summary of feedback includes:

- Respondents who use the service want to see longer sessions and varied session times, particularly weekends and afternoons.
- Barriers cited by families who do not use the service included lack of flexibility and inconvenience in session times offered and limited hours of service delivery.
- Service not considered relevant by families when using other forms of child care that offer more flexibility and longer hours.
- The service is predominantly utilised for the opportunity to exercise and most children in Occasional Care are aged between 1-2 years of age.
- Suggested improvements include online booking, simplified enrolment, coordination of session times with leisure group fitness class times, improved facilities and programming
- Families reported that they like the service because it's affordable, conveniently located and they like the staff.
- Most respondents self-report using the service 1-2 times per week.

What Staff told us

A facilitated workshop was conducted with staff of the Occasional Care service in 2016. The consultation explored the strengths of the current service model and identified opportunities to improve the service. Feedback from staff is summarised below.

- The experience of Occasional Care supports children's transition into long day care.
- The service provides an opportunity for families to take time out, exercise and maintain connections in the community.
- Areas for improvement were identified including:
 - Increasing the hours of the service
 - Strengthening collaboration with Leisure Services to improve coordination between Leisure Programs/classes and Occasional Care session times
 - Relocating the service to a purpose built facility.
 - Introducing new ideas and equipment into the service.

Leisure Centre staff

The Manager of Leisure services and Managers of the three Leisure Centre's were consulted during the consultation. Comments are summarised as follows:

- The demand for floor space is high within the Leisure centres.
- A number of Leisure programs are currently over-subscribed and cannot be expanded due to lack of floor space to accommodate expansion.
- Anecdotally the Occasional Care service appears to be utilised by a small number of families more than once across a given week
- The timetable of classes on offer at the Leisure Centres is designed on the basis of customer feedback from all Yarra Leisure members. This explains the disconnect

between hours of operation of Occasional Care service and times group fitness classes are offered.

- Operational improvements to the service would be dependent on consolidating oversight of the service within one branch of Council.

Community based providers

Community based providers in Yarra have reported underutilisation and face ongoing challenges in delivering a sustainable service. Holden Street Neighbourhood House has previously sought financial support from Council to operate the service and has now ceased offering Occasional Care from the centre due to lack of viability.

Richmond Community Learning Centre continues to offer Occasional Care but only accepts enrolments on a term basis to provide a level of certainty for the service.

Summary of consultation

- A diverse range of stakeholders were consulted throughout the consultation.
- The service is primarily accessed to provide the opportunity to exercise and the majority of people accessing the service self-report a frequency of 1-2 visits per week.
- The service is valued by families who use the service for its convenience, affordability and staff.
- Location was considered to be the most important factor for families with service provider ranked amongst the least important factors.
- Key improvements identified included provision of longer and more varied session times, improved coordination between session times and group fitness classes, consistency of staff and introduction of on-line booking service.
- Barriers to service included lack of flexibility and inconvenience in session times offered and limited hours of service delivery.
- Service not considered as relevant by families when using other forms of child care that offer more flexibility and longer hours.
- Ideas for operational improvements were identified by staff however many of these are dependent on establishing a longer hours service in a different physical location with a centralised management and administration structure within one branch of Council.

Summary of key issues

Data indicates the Occasional Care service has continued to be underutilised over time. At an average rate of utilisation of 35.8% across the 3 services from 2016 to 2017, the services remain significantly underutilised. Key questions have been raised throughout the review about the relevance of the service for families. This is clearly reflected by the poor rate of utilisation over time and the lack of flexibility that is embedded in the service model. This lack of flexibility was cited by families as being a major barrier to accessing the service.

The Occasional Care service is delivered in spaces that are not purpose built, provide poor amenity, are stand-alone and do not provide an optimum environment for children's health and wellbeing. As a limited hours service provided in 1.5 hour sessions, the service has a

limited capacity to meet the developmental needs of children and to support their health and wellbeing. Additionally, a number of risks are clearly evident in the service's proximity to the pool decks and the internal amenity of the rooms allocated for the Occasional Care service is very poor.

Benchmarking shows that Local Government is no longer an active provider of Occasional Care services. The constraints associated with providing a Type 1 limited hours service where the Child Care Subsidy does not apply presents significant challenges in delivering a service that is viable and relevant for families over the longer term.

Occasional Care is a limited hours service and the significant waitlist for long day care for children 3 years and under could suggest that families are seeking a different form of care. This is supported by the consistent feedback gathered through the consultation where families stated that they would prefer a more flexible service that provided care over longer and varied times.

In Yarra's case, the demand for long day care places for children up to 3 years of age in long day care centres operated by Council currently outstrips the number of places available. Across Yarra's five long day care centres, as of July 2018, there is a waitlist of 331 children up to the age of 3 whose families require long day care.

The Occasional Care service model does not include any form of assessment that considers the needs of parent's/guardians. For parents who may be socially isolated or require additional supports, the stand-alone nature of the service and context for its operation does not expose families to information, early years services and supports tailored to the needs of families and children.

Booking data shows that an average of 55 families utilise the service approximately twice a week across all three Leisure centres.

The Leisure Services review highlights the demand for program space and the broader community benefits that could be achieved through enhancing Leisure's capacity to deliver more programs or extend programs that are oversubscribed. Visitation data collated as part of the review of Leisure Services indicates there was 1 Occasional Care visit compared with 176 visits to the Leisure centre.

Issues related to equity are further accentuated by the underutilisation of the Occasional Care service over time when compared to constraints Leisure Services face in responding to unmet demand for Leisure programs due to the lack of floor space.

Options for Consideration

A number of options have been explored in response to the issues outlined in this Service Review and to support consideration of future provision of Occasional Care services in Yarra. Four options are detailed below. The options are considered against the key issues outlined in the review together with associated Pros and Cons.

Option 1:**Occasional Care Services continue to be provided by Council in all Leisure Centres as a Type 1 Service**

Issues	Pros	Cons
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cheap option for families	
Service model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No disruption to existing services• No staffing implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service inaccessible or irrelevant to needs of many families and reach of the service will continue to be limited.• Remains a stand-alone service (not co-located or integrated with other family or children's services).• Family's needs not assessed as part of service model.
Operational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nil	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spaces offer very poor general amenity for children.• Outdoor space not included in licenced area.• Proximity to pool deck poses ongoing risks.
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nil	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not address underutilisation of service over time.

Option 2:**Cease operation of Type 1 service in all 3 Leisure Centres and establish a Council operated Type 2 Occasional Care Service**

Issues	Pros	Cons
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could potentially offer similar fees to those charged for Occasional Care at Connie Benn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viability of establishing a Type 2 service remains untested if established as a stand-alone service. • Depending upon cost structure, a review of the fee structure offered at Connie Benn Centre may be triggered in the future • Any capital works required have not been costed
Service model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer hours service offered (up to 5 hours) • Potential integration with other early years services dependent on location and service model. • No loss of staff. Reallocation of staff currently employed in Type 1 Occasional Care service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If service located at Richmond Leisure Centre risks would increase proportionate to any increase in service hours. • Quality of children's experience of care likely to be compromised for children if no access to outdoor play space.
Operational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carlton North Children's Centre has underutilised space at the first floor level that may provide potential option for operating an Occasional Care service. • Richmond Family Centre 213 Church Street, Richmond. Potential option for operating an Occasional Care service. • Richmond Leisure Centre is licenced for 23 places but only offers 10 spaces due to operational constraints. Service has continued to remain underutilised over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited options for accommodating an Occasional Care service if North Carlton Children's Centre, Richmond Family Centre and Richmond Leisure Centre are not suitable. • Fitzroy and Collingwood Leisure Centres are unable to operate as Type 2 services due to environmental constraints. • Significant capital works may be required at centres to ensure facilities are fit for purpose. • Poor general amenity and significant environmental risks remain at Richmond Leisure Centre.
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be more affordable option than long day care for some families if fees charged are in line with Connie Benn Occasional Care fees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited geographic reach of service • Broad appeal of the service could be limited if located at Richmond Leisure centre as evidenced by continued low rates of utilisation.

Option 3:

Cease operation of Type 1 Service in all 3 Leisure Centres and support external provider to deliver a Type 2 Occasional Care service in Yarra.

Issues	Pros	Cons
Financial		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentive would be required to attract external provider. Business model would need to address level of subsidy and utilisation rate. • If delivered in a Council facility, capital works may be required and costing would need to be considered.
Service model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer hours service offered to families • Appropriate model would need to be developed. • Potential for establishing relationship with specialist service provider of Occasional Care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to remain as a stand-alone service. • May not be integrated with other services • Staffing implications to be determined depending on service model and number of places offered. Implications could include; redeployment, transfer of business/loss of EFT. • If the service was established at Richmond Leisure Centre, there would continue to be administrative challenges in operating a service that has a division of operational responsibilities across two areas of Council.
Operational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely that capital works will be required to ensure any facility is fit for purpose. • Limited options due to licencing requirements
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space currently occupied by Occasional Care in the Leisure Centres could be returned to Leisure services to meet unmet demand for Leisure program expansion. • May be more affordable and accessible option than long day care for some families. 	

Option 4:

Introduce an Occasional Care offer in existing Council run Children’s centres utilising vacancies and absences within the services. Includes introduction of a childcare booking App as a tool for promotion and managing both the offer and bookings on a daily basis

Issues	Pros	Cons
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhances service viability through filling short term vacancies or absences. • Any growth in utilisation would equate to a growth in income without any requirement for additional staffing outlay. 	Nil
Service model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to demand for casual care and introduces more flexibility and choice for families. • Potential to absorb existing staff. • Model could be easily piloted. • Quality framework for Education and Care services would apply to programming. • Could increase the profile of Occasional Care because the service would be promoted more broadly within an early years setting. • In one centre between July 1, 2018 to July 31, 2018, there was an average of 12% absences per day equating to availability of 6 casual places per day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative systems would need to align with service model. • Whilst eligible families could apply for the Child Care Subsidy, long day care fees would apply and not all families will be eligible for the Child Care Subsidy. Therefore, may be unaffordable for some families. • Availability of days may be unpredictable for families. • Bookings would be restricted to the age of the room that the cancellation or vacancy applies to. • Unable to provide care to school aged children
Operational Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating environment equipped to provide quality Education and Care service for children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces increased geographic coverage of an occasional care service for families if offered in all of Council’s Children’s centres. • Redistributes unused child care places on a daily basis. • Connie Benn Occasional Care service provides alternative option for families where casual care may be unaffordable due to fees that apply. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For families that are not eligible for Child Care subsidy, service may be unaffordable • Service is tied to the location of Council operated children’s centres.