

## 2.1 LEGEND PARK SUPPORTED PLAYGROUP UPDATE (File No. CT)

Responsible Director: Julie Salomon

### **RECOMMENDATION**

*That Council*

#### **PART A:**

1. *Notes that officers have investigated alternative locations for the supported playgroup as per Council's resolution made at the June 2019 Council meeting, and have identified that the Mulgrave Community Centre is the only readily available location that could in the short to medium term accommodate a five day a week playgroup.*
2. *Notes that if Council is to provide a five day a week play group at the Mulgrave Community Centre, Council would require a budget expenditure of approximately \$210,000 to achieve this outcome;*
3. *Accepts in principle that this is an appropriate location and directs officers to commence consultation with the 350 playgroup families currently accessing the service at Legend Park to seek their comments and feedback on the possible Mulgrave Community Centre location;*
4. *Notes that officers will report back to a future Council meeting on the outcome of the consultation with the playgroup families;*
5. *Notes that this project, should it proceed will be referred to the 2020/21 budget process for consideration; and*
6. *Notes that it is an option for Council to not consider an expansion of the family support group at this time and maintain a status quo position at Legend Park, with both the current playgroup and the Kindergarten operating from the premises.*

#### **PART B:**

7. *Notes the enrolment numbers of children at Legend Park Kindergarten for 2020 has not achieved the sustainable numbers required by the Early Years Manager bestchance as of 2 September 2019;*
8. *Notes the request from bestchance for Council to underwrite the shortfall in funding to ensure they are able to continue to operate a kindergarten program without sustaining any further financial loss from 2020 onwards, currently estimated at \$52,950 based on current 2020 enrolments as at 2*

*September 2019. The final amount which will not be greater than \$52,950 and be based on actual attendance as at 27 March 2020;*

*9. Resolves to fund any shortfall in the operating cost as identified in recommendation 8 above so as to ensure the continuation of the kindergarten program for the forthcoming year; and*

*10. Receive a further update report at the June 2020 Council meeting detailing the enrolment numbers at Legend Park Kindergarten for 2021.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In accordance with the resolution passed on 25 June 2019, this report provides an update regarding options for an alternate location and any associated financial implications to support a five (5) day per week operational model for the supported playgroup located at Legend Park Kindergarten from 2020 onwards.

The report also provides an update to Council on the Legend Park Kindergarten enrolments as the number of enrolments have not reached the required minimum numbers. Bestchance has requested that Council underwrite the shortfall in funding to ensure that the Kindergarten continues to operate as per the 25 June 2019 endorsed position and to ensure that their organisation does not sustain any further financial loss.

### **BACKGROUND**

In response from the strong community feedback in relation to the proposed repurposing of Legend Park Kindergarten, at the 25 June 2019 Meeting, Council passed a motion to support the continuation of the two (2) day per week Legend Park Kindergarten program and to work with bestchance to increase enrolments to a financially viable level; maintain the kindergarten garden and play area to a community expected standard (in accordance with lease requirements) and seek agreement by the parent group to take responsibility for promotional activities as occurs at all other Monash kindergartens operating from Council owned buildings.

Council also directed officers to provide a further report to the September 2019 Council meeting cycle advising them of alternative venues for a five (5) day per week playgroup, a Policy and Procedure to guide future closures of early years facilities to the December 2019 meeting cycle and a report on the future of kindergartens with the view of Council being a strong advocate in ensuring the ongoing sustainability and success of kindergartens in Monash to the March 2020 meeting cycle.

At that time, bestchance, the Early Years Manager for Legend Park Kindergarten indicated that to be a viable kindergarten they required a minimum of twenty eligible four year old children and ten eligible three year old children.

**DISCUSSION****PART A:**

As the expansion of the five day per week Supported Playgroup was suspended in June 2019, families requiring small intensive playgroup support are currently being required to drive to Cabena Avenue in Oakleigh. This also limits these families from accessing the larger playgroups in a familiar environment. Officers were asked to investigate alternative options, preferably in the Glen Waverley area to accommodate the five (5) day per week playgroup. The most viable option should Council wish to increase the supported playgroup program is to relocate to Mulgrave Community Centre in Wellington Road Mulgrave. This will provide the local community and best chance greater confidence to grow the Legend Park Kindergarten program.

The Supported Playgroup currently running three days per week at Legend Park Kindergarten has 350 families regularly using the service. The Supported Playgroup running 5 days per week at Cabena in Oakleigh has 1,100 families regularly using the services. At present approximately twenty-five (25) new families per week seek out these two playgroups.

For a supported playgroup to be located at Mulgrave Community Centre, capital upgrade works would be required for this to occur, including the reconfiguring of three rooms into one, provision of children's toilets and the development of a playground. The estimated cost of these capital works is \$210,000. The additional benefits of this would be:

- Utilise and activate the community centre to full capacity;
- Provide a single venue to provide large and small playgroup programs to support and address the diverse needs of families, particularly vulnerable families;
- The recent Community Satisfaction Survey has shown a need to improve the sense of community for young parents and their children. The supported playgroup will provide the Mulgrave community with a further option to connect, socialise and increase confidence in a playgroup setting; and
- Provide a playground which could be accessed by visitors to the residents of the aged care facility which adjoins the Mulgrave Community Centre.

Two of these rooms are currently used by U3A and other users approximately 3.5 days per week and would require them to be relocated to an alternative rooms within the Mulgrave Community Centre.

Officers propose this approach as it aligns with Councils commitment to maintain the operation of the Legend Park Kindergarten whilst providing the community adequate time and opportunity to achieve financially viable enrolments at Legend Park. It is expected that this financial viability based on the efforts by best chance and the parent group will be better known over the next couple of years. State Government data indicates Glen Waverley to be to be the location of our most vulnerable children and families in our city. Whilst a suitable alternate location could not be located in Glen Waverley, officers are seeking Council endorsement to consult with the 350 families currently accessing the Legend Park Supported playgroup. Services need to be easily

accessible to families of young children as this is the period where early intervention and prevention is the most powerful. The options of utilising Mulgrave Community Centre is considered a viable option to support access.

#### *PART B*

As of September 2019, Legend Park Kindergarten has a total of 23 children enrolled for the 2020 comprising of 15 eligible four year old children and 8 three year old children. These numbers follow the completion of the three rounds of kindergarten offers having gone out to all eligible families.

All families from the Kindergarten Central Enrolment Portal have taken up their offers, leaving 103 vacancies available across Monash for four year old children and 113 vacancies for three year old children. These figures indicate an oversupply of kindergarten places at this time within Monash.

On 2 September 2019, officers met with representatives from bestchance who indicated that to operate Legend Park kindergarten in 2020 with 23 children, an additional Diploma qualified educator will be required to comply with the legislated staff child ratio. At this meeting, bestchance indicated that operating with either 22 children or 23 children would not be financially viable. Bestchance indicated the cost of this additional staff member would be \$26,600 for the year. In addition to this, the shortfall in the government per capita funding of \$3,774 for four year old kindergarten children will be \$26,420 for the places not yet taken. This is a total of \$52,950 to ensure this kindergarten is financially viable for 2020. Past utilisation trends at Legend Park have indicated that enrolments have fallen prior to the commencement of the kindergarten year. Subsequent to this meeting, bestchance has formally advised Council of their request to cover any shortfall for Legend Park in 2020 based on the final numbers of children attending in 2020. Further discussions with bestchance will be required prior to the commencement of the 2021 and 2022 kindergarten years to consider the financial viability of the Legend Park kindergarten for each year with Council considering the level of financial assistance required.

In the current circumstances, and in light of Council decision made at the June 2019 Council meeting, officers recommend that Council makes up for the funding shortfall, based on the March 2020 final attendance numbers.

On Saturday 8 September, officers attended a parent meeting at Legend Park Kindergarten. There were 7 of the 11 parent advisory group in attendance who reported being very positive about the kindergarten. They reported that parents and educators have engaged with the local community through such activities such a letter drop, had an article on the front page of the local Leader newspaper on 2 July 2019, a 'Real Estate' advertising board at the kindergarten and an Open Day on Saturday 24 August which attracted six families. To date there has been no conversion of these six families to additional enrolments, but bestchance is contacting these families to follow up their interest. The parent group has an additional community day on 23 November 2019 to further promote the kindergarten.

***FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

The option to relocate the supported playgroup pending community consultation is estimate at \$210,000 to complete the capital upgrade works required.

As detailed in the report, the request from bestchance for Council to underwrite any funding shortfall is estimated to be up to \$52,950. Council may also need to underwrite a further financial loss for 2021 if viable enrolments are not achieved.

***POLICY IMPLICATIONS***

A Policy and Procedure to guide the closure or repurposing of early childhood facilities in Monash will be provided in the December 2019 cycle with implementation for February 2020.

***SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

Relocating to Mulgrave Community Centre as a five (5) day per week playgroup has the potential to increase the opportunities for children and families to feel more connected to their neighbours and the local community.

***HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS***

There are no Human Rights implications associated with this report as all children and families will have access to a kindergarten program, although not necessarily at their preference.

***CONSULTATION***

The parent group have been in regular contact with Council Officers since the Council meeting held on 25 June 2019. Council has supported the Parent Group through provision of printing and advice on matters such as advertising, and working in a positive partnership with bestchance. Council Officers have also arranged for the internal painting of the facility to be brought into the 2019 – 20 Financial Year, twelve months ahead of the planned date.

Council Officers have met with Bestchance Management and the Legend Park educators to ensure there is a positive working relationship between the staff at Legend Park and Council Officers working in the supported playgroup operating at the centre.

It is proposed that officers will undertake a consultation process with the Legend Park Supported Playgroup users and that the outcome of this consultation will form part of the 2020/21 budget bid.

***CONCLUSION***

Based on the above, officers recommend that Council provides in principle agreement to relocate the Legend Park Supported Playgroup to Mulgrave Community Centre and to underwrite the funding shortfall based on actual attendance at 27 March 2020.