



Darebin City Council
Early Years Infrastructure Planning
Framework 2021-2041

May 2022

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in Darebin

Darebin City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land we now call Darebin and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Council pays respect to all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Darebin.

Council recognises, and pays tribute to, the diverse culture, resilience and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We acknowledge the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the right to self-determination in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The early years are a crucial period in children's development, with impacts that can last a lifetime. High quality, inclusive and accessible services for children and families from birth to the time they enter school play an essential role in providing children with a good start in life.

High quality services require high quality facilities. Councils have an important role in planning for, providing and maintaining high quality early years infrastructure to ensure that families have access to the services they need. This Early Years Infrastructure Planning Framework (the Framework) seeks to provide a strategic framework to ensure that Darebin City Council provides its community with a suite of early years facilities that provide safe and high- quality environments for children, families and staff, meet the increasing demands for service created by population growth and the roll-out of funded three-year-old kindergarten, and promote equity and inclusion.

Council's approach to early years infrastructure planning and investment is guided by principles of equity, access and inclusion, choice, service integration, a whole of community approach, environmental sustainability and community engagement. The Framework also recognises the important role that access to natural environments, arts and creative culture play in the development of children's wellbeing and identity.

As a result of significant population growth and the roll-out of a second year of funded kindergarten demand for early years services in Darebin will grow significantly over the next twenty years:

- By 2041 an additional 100 Maternal & Child Health sessions per week will be required.
- The estimated total demand for funded kindergarten places is expected to grow from 1,628 places in 2021 to 4,196 in 2029 and 4,756 in 2041.
- An additional 1,173 long day care places will be required by 2041 to maintain the current provision rate of 1 place to every 3.9 children aged 0-6.

These needs will be met by actions and investment from a range of actors in the early years sector including Council, state government, community-managed and not-for profit organisations and private for-profit organisations.

The Framework lays out an approach for Council to play its role in meeting these growing needs through key actions to:

- Ensure equitable distribution of council facilities within the City of Darebin and direct future capital investment to where the community needs it most
- Optimise the use of existing Council facilities
- Expand the capacity of existing Council facilities where feasible, desirable and cost-effective
- Build new facilities in areas of high need, with a focus on delivering integrated service hubs
- Drive innovative, integrated and flexible service models and delivery that meet changing and diverse community needs and enable all children and families to thrive.

The Framework also emphasises the importance of addressing condition and functionality issues across Council's suite of facilities to create the best possible environments for children, families and staff.

Delivery of the Framework will require significant investment by Council over the next twenty years, as well as investments from the Victorian Government and other stakeholders. The Victorian Government's Building Blocks Infrastructure Strategy provides an exciting opportunity to access state government funding as co-contributions to projects that will deliver new and improved infrastructure for Darebin residents. Council will be working in close partnership with the Department of Education and Training, partners across the early years sector and other stakeholders to deliver the Framework.

The Framework is a living document and will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains relevant and provides a useful and contemporary roadmap for Council's investment in early years infrastructure over the next twenty years.

1. INTRODUCTION

The early years of life are crucial to children’s health, development and learning, and provide the foundations for lifelong wellbeing. High quality, inclusive and accessible early years services play an essential role in supporting the care, education, health and wellbeing of children and their families.

Darebin City Council (Council) plays many roles in the system of services that support children in the early years, including planning and coordination, service provision, facilities planning, advocacy, and strengthening community capacity. One of Council’s key roles is to plan for, provide and maintain a range of early years infrastructure from which critical services are delivered.

In the context of a growing population, significant service reforms and changing community expectations, the Early Years Infrastructure Framework (the Framework) aims to provide Council with a strategic framework for the future provision of early years facilities across the municipality, which will ensure that early years services are able to respond to the diverse and changing needs of our community and enable all children and families to thrive.

The Framework focuses on facilities used for maternal and child health services, kindergarten programs, long day childcare, occasional care, playgroups and toy libraries. It is concerned primarily with council-owned facilities, from which services are delivered either by Council or community groups. Services operating from other facilities have been considered for contextual purposes, particularly in the supply and demand assessment.

The key objectives of the Framework are to:

- Analyse the planning context in which early years facilities operate and identify the implications of this context for the future provision of facilities.
- Assess the suitability of the facilities for their current and future use in light of relevant legislation and policy, community expectations and anticipated future need.
- Identify the anticipated need for refurbishment and replacement of Council owned early years facilities and construction of new facilities over the next 20 years.
- Identify opportunities for service integration and flexibility in the utilisation of early years facilities.
- Propose a sustainable strategy to address the anticipated needs of early years services operating from Council owned buildings so that Council can effectively manage the upgrading, refurbishment and replacement of these buildings over the next 20 years.

The Framework aims to inform the provision of a suite of Council owned early years facilities that:

- Can satisfy existing and future demand
- Comply with relevant legislation and building codes
- Are fit for purpose and highly functional
- Are accessible, conveniently located and equitably distributed across the municipality
- Are optimally used
- Promote service integration
- Are sustainable in terms of maintenance
- Provide safe environments for staff, children and families.

The Framework has been informed by a comprehensive assessment report by ASR Research and the *Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan for Darebin*, jointly developed with the Department of Education and Training.¹

2. OVERVIEW OF SERVICES AND KEY TERMS

The Framework is focused on the facilities from which the following early years services are currently provided:

Maternal and Child Health

The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service is a free, universal service delivered by Council that supports children's health and development from birth until school age (generally from 0-4 years). The service supports children, parents, carers and families with an emphasis on health promotion, prevention, parenting, developmental assessment, early detection and referral and social support. Key elements of the service include key ages and stages consultations to assess children's physical, emotional and cognitive development assessed, new parent groups, parent education sessions and other parenting supports.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten programs offer developmental and education experiences for children in the two years prior to school entry. The programs are delivered at licensed education and care centres and are run by qualified teachers and support staff. In Victoria, **four-year-old kindergarten** programs are currently funded for 15 hours per child per week. **Funded three-year-old kindergarten** is currently being rolled out in Victoria and will be introduced in Darebin from 2022. Kindergarten programs are delivered at both standalone kindergartens and at long day care centres. At **standalone kindergartens** children attend for set kindergarten sessions on certain days and times of the week. The length of these sessions varies by service and can include part days or full days. At long day care centres, **integrated kindergarten** programs are integrated into longer days of education and care.

Long Day Care

Long Day Care (LDC) services provide centre-based care for children aged 0-6 years whose families are working or studying, or just need some regular time off. Centres are licensed and generally operate for at least eight hours a day on normal working days. Most centres offer integrated kindergarten programs.

Occasional Care

Occasional childcare programs (OCC) provide centre-based care and education for children 0-6 years on a casual basis for short periods of time. Typically, OCC programs offer three to five-hour blocks of care and children can attend for up to 15 hours per week.

Playgroups

In playgroups groups of preschool aged children and their caregivers come together to learn and develop through informal play activities and social interaction. Playgroups support children's development and provide social support and connection for parents. There are two main types of playgroups: **community playgroups**, which are usually funded, led and organised by the parents who attend, and **supported playgroups** which receive external funding, are led by a paid facilitator and are usually targeted to families who meet specific eligibility criteria. Council is funded by the state government to deliver supported playgroups in Darebin.

Toy Libraries

Toy Libraries provide families access to a range of toys, games, puzzles and activities to borrow or hire for a minimal fee. The service also provides a space for services to connect with local families through information sessions and individual consultations.

Some of the other key terms used in the Framework are:

- **Local areas or localities** refer to the geographic areas that Darebin has been divided into for population profiling and forecasting purposes. To align with the Department of Education and Training's planning for kindergarten infrastructure, the Framework has used the ABS Statistical Area 2 (SA2) boundaries to define local areas. These boundaries divide Darebin into eight local areas: Alphington-Fairfield, Kingsbury (which includes the parts of Bundoora and Macleod that lie within the City of Darebin), Northcote, Preston East, Preston West, Reservoir East, Reservoir West, and Thornbury. The local areas boundaries are shown on the map at Appendix 3.
- **Licensed number of places** refers to the number of places that a kindergarten or childcare service is licensed to provide by the relevant licencing authority. This is the maximum number of children the service is legally allowed accommodate at any one time.
- **Licensed capacity or licensed enrolment capacity** refers to the maximum number of children that a kindergarten or childcare room could accommodate in a week if the service provided the maximum number of places it is licensed to provide each day. For example, a kindergarten program licensed for 30 places at any one time has a licensed capacity of 60 children in a week as it could accommodate two groups of 30 children over the week.
- An **MCH session** refers to half a day of service. Therefore, a single MCH consulting room operating for five days a week during normal working hours can be used for 10 sessions.
- **Spare capacity** refers to the gap between the actual usage level and the maximum potential usage level of a facility. For example, an MCH consulting room can typically be used for five days or 10 sessions per week. If it is used for six sessions, the room has spare capacity of four sessions per week.
- **Types of management in kindergarten and childcare.** The kindergarten and childcare sector in Darebin includes a range of organisation that have different management and governance structures. **Community-managed kindergarten or childcare services** are not-for-profit services that are managed either by a committee of volunteer parents or by an Early Years Management service. Most but not all community-managed services in Darebin operate out of facilities owned and maintained by Council. **Other not-for-profit organisations** that provide services include universities (La Trobe University Community Children's Centre), independent schools (East Preston Islamic College) and the national not-for-profit organisation Goodstart. **Commercial services** are private businesses providing childcare and kindergarten services on a for-profit basis.

3. CONTEXT: DEMOGRAPHICS, POLICY AND REGULATION

3.1 Young children in Darebin

In 2020 there were an estimated 14,813 children aged 0-6 living in Darebin, out of a total estimated resident population of 166,430.

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) measures children's developmental health and wellbeing when they start school. The 2018 AEDC results show that most children in Darebin are doing well developmentally. A higher proportion of children in Darebin are developmentally on track across each of the five measured domains (physical, social, emotional, language and communication) than the Victorian and Australian averages and fewer are developmentally vulnerable. The AEDC 2018 results vary across local communities in Darebin as shown in Table 1.²

Table 1: 2018 AEDC results and 2016 SEIFA scores

Area	2018 AEDC			2016 SEIFA score (Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage)
	Number of children included in census	Vulnerable on one or more domains %	Vulnerable on two or more domains %	
Alphington	63	15.3	6.8	1095
Fairfield	70	8.8	2.9	1068
Kingsbury	48	31.8	15.9	938
Northcote	281	13.2	4.9	1064
Preston	398	20.7	10.2	997
Reservoir	586	18.1	10	952
Thornbury	194	14.2	4.9	1038
DAREBIN	1,640	17.4	8.3	1004
VICTORIA	76,245	19.9	10.1	1010
AUSTRALIA	308,953	21.7	11	1002

Children are vulnerable to the impacts of poverty, inequality and disadvantage during their early years. As table 1 shows, there is a correlation between the AEDC results and the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) scores, which measure relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage. The areas with the lowest SEIFA scores (Kingsbury, Preston, Reservoir) also had the most children identified as being developmentally vulnerable. At a more granular level the small areas of Cheddar, Oakhill and Merrilands (all in Reservoir) and Kingsbury were all ranked in the bottom fifth of areas on the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage in 2016.³

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can have lower levels of participation in early childhood services due to barriers to access and engagement. Barriers that have been identified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children include out of pocket costs, limited awareness of services, administrative complexity, lack of transport or locally available services, a perception that the child is too young to participate, a lack of confidence in the value of early education services or fear of racism and judgment.⁴ For children from culturally diverse backgrounds barriers can include racism,

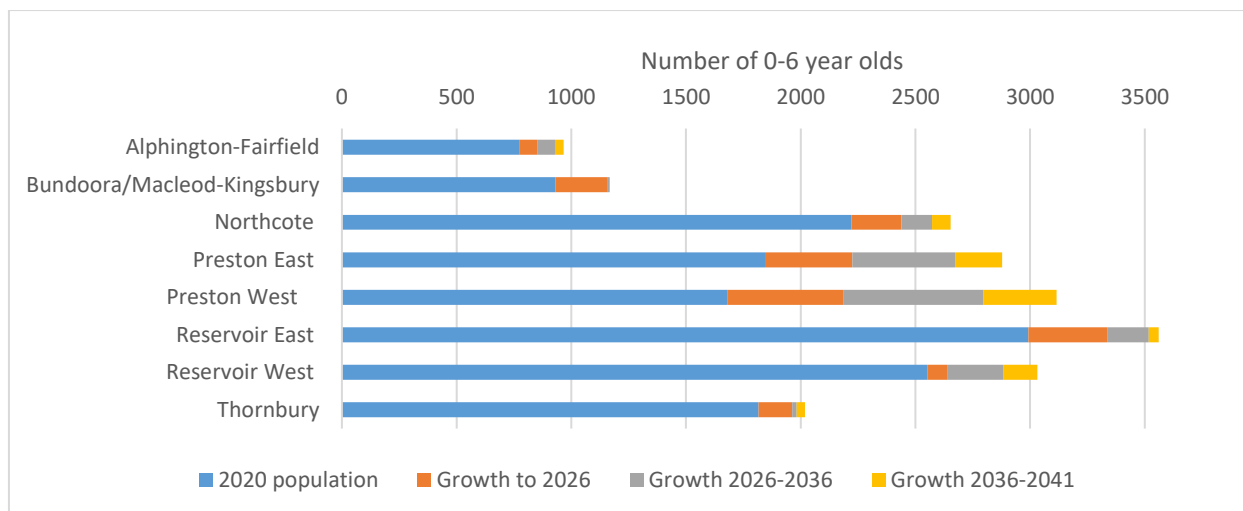
limited awareness of services and their benefits, communication and language barriers, distrust of services, fear of being judged, and structural barriers.⁵

3.2 Population growth

The City of Darebin is expected to see significant population growth over the next 20 years. From the baseline of 2016 through to 2041, the population of the City of Darebin is forecast to increase by 75,102 persons from 155,016 to 230,118 (48.45% growth), at an average annual change of 1.59%. In 2020 there were an estimated 14,813 children aged 0-6 living in Darebin. By 2041 there are expected to be 19,388 children of this age, an increase of 4,575.⁶

As figure 1 shows, the distribution of the growth in the 0-6 population will vary widely across the different local areas. For example, Preston West is expected to have 1436 more 0-6 year-old children in 2041 than it does now, whilst Alphington-Fairfield will have only 191 more. Collectively, Preston East and West are expected to account for over half of the growth in Darebin’s 0-6 year-old population in this period. Whilst growth will not be as great in Reservoir East and West, these areas have the largest 0-6 populations currently, and will continue to be home to nearly a third of Darebin’s 0-6 year-olds in 2041.

Figure 1: Forecast change in 0-6 population by area



Much of the projected growth, particularly in Preston, is expected to occur through the development of high-density housing. Some of the larger developments may provide opportunities for social infrastructure to be included as part of the development.

Forecast population growth in Darebin is informed by development assumptions across the municipality, including expected dwelling yields at identified major development sites such as the Polaris Development (Kingsbury), Oakover Village (Preston West) and others in Northcote, East Preston and Alphington-Fairfield. An additional strategic development site not included within current projections is the Preston Market site. The Preston Market has been designated as a strategic development site by the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) and is part of the VPA’s Fast Track Program. The draft precinct structure plan released for public consultation in May 2021 outlines that the Preston Market Precinct is anticipated to accommodate between 4,500 to 6,000 new residents by 2041, which is expected to generate sufficient demand for 2-3 MCH rooms and a 66-place kindergarten.⁷ Another major development that is not included in current projections is La Trobe University’s

University City of the Future vision for the Bundoora campus, which envisages additional housing for 12,000 students, staff and private residents as part of the La Trobe National Employment and Innovation Cluster.⁸ Developments such as these would significantly impact demand for services if they go ahead and would require appropriate infrastructure responses.

Developments on Darebin's borders may also impact demand for kindergarten in Darebin. One of the major developments that we are aware of is the Alphington Paper Mill site in the City of Yarra. The approved development plan for this site endorsed by the City of Yarra in 2016 included an estimated 2500 dwellings in the form of town houses and apartments.

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic is a new factor that may have an impact on demographic trends within Darebin. Whilst there is a lot of uncertainty about how the pandemic may affect population growth in the coming years, some insights have been provided by .id who suggest that COVID-19 may impact the following factors that contribute to population growth:

- Overseas migration – potential negative impact on growth
- Internal migration – potential negative impact on growth
- Natural increase (births and deaths) – some potential negative impact on growth
- Economic resilience – some potential negative impact on growth
- Resident vulnerability – some potential negative impact on growth
- Local amenity including housing affordability – potential mixed impact on growth⁹

In addition to impacts on population growth, the COVID-19 pandemic may have other long-term impacts on the Darebin community which could have flow-on impacts to demand for early years services. The uncertainty created by the pandemic underscores the importance of flexible approach to early years infrastructure planning that involves constantly monitoring key indicators of future need and demand and responding accordingly.

3.3 Key policy drivers

Funded three-year-old kindergarten

In an Australian first, the Victorian Government has committed to implement funded three-year-old kindergarten for all children.¹⁰ Darebin will join the statewide roll-out schedule in 2022. In 2022 three-year-old children in Darebin will have access to five hours of funded kindergarten per week. From 2023 services will be able to set the number of hours they offer from a minimum of five hours per week up the full 15 hours. By 2029 at full roll-out all three-year-old children should have access to 15 hours per week of funded kindergarten.

The Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform will require a large expansion of kindergarten programs and services, supported by investment across the kindergarten and childcare sector. The Victorian Government is partnering with Local Governments to plan for this expansion. All Victorian Local Governments have been invited to agree an individual Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) with the Department of Education and Training (DET). The KISPs represent an agreed view of existing kindergarten capacity in a local government area and estimates of future supply and demand of three and four-year-old kindergarten places driven by the reform and population growth. Agreed KISPs are published on the DET website as a resource for the whole Victorian early childhood sector. Darebin agreed its KISP with DET in February 2021.¹¹

The state government has allocated \$1.68 billion in infrastructure funding over the roll-out period to support the infrastructure expansion required for the reform. The KISPs will guide where DET will invest this money –

projects will only be eligible for funding in locations where the relevant KISP shows that new infrastructure is needed in order to meet demand for kindergarten places over the roll-out period.

Early Years Compact

In Victoria, the state government and local governments have agreed to work together to improve outcomes for young children and their families through the Early Years Compact.¹² This ten-year agreement (2017-2027) sets out five outcomes for young children and their families which provide a guiding framework for early years policy and strategy:

1. All young children are engaged, confident and creative learners.
2. All children are safe, cared for and experience optimal health and development.
3. Families feel well supported by high quality, inclusive services for children and families in the early years.
4. Vulnerability, location and disadvantage do not determine outcomes for young children.
5. Families are connected to culture, actively participate in community life and can access help when and where they need it.

Family Violence Reforms

Wide-ranging reforms are being implemented in Victoria as part of a 10-year plan to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.¹³ Reforms that are relevant to services that work with children and families include the Child Information Sharing Scheme, the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, and the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM). Services prescribed under these information sharing schemes include Maternal and Child Health Services, kindergartens, long day care centres and DHHS funded Supported Playgroups, and there is an expectation that all Council services will use the MARAM if they come into contact with individuals and families experiencing family violence. A key direction of many of these reforms is towards increased collaboration and integration between services to promote the wellbeing and safety of children and to improve responses to family violence.

3.4 Regulation of early childhood education and care services

Most services for children are regulated to ensure children are protected from harm and that their opportunities for learning and development are maximised. Long day care and kindergarten services are regulated by the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority under National Quality Framework which provides a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement of these services.¹⁴ Occasional Care services operate under the Victorian Children's Services Act and Children's Services Regulations.¹⁵

There are many aspects of the regulatory frameworks that are relevant to the provision of infrastructure for early years services. Amongst the most significant considerations for infrastructure planning are factors that relate to the physical environment and those that cover educator to child ratios:

- The maximum number of places that a kindergarten, long day care or occasional care centre can be licensed for is determined by the eligible floor area of its children's playroom (3.25m² per place) and outdoor play area (7m² per place).
- Educator to child ratio requirements for kindergarten and childcare services are an essential consideration when thinking about the optimal size of rooms due to the impact on staffing and financial viability. The ratios in Victoria are:
 - Birth to 36 months: one educator for every four children
 - 36 months up to and including preschool age: one educator for every 11 children
 - Over preschool age: one educator for every 15 children.

4. PRINCIPLES

Darebin City Council's approach to early years infrastructure planning and provision will be guided by the *Darebin 2041 Community Vision*:

Darebin is an equitable, vibrant and connected community. Darebin respects and supports First Nations People, values country, our diverse communities and places. Darebin commits to mitigating the climate emergency, creating prosperity for current and future generations.

Our approach will also be guided by Council's *Statement of Commitment to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* and *Towards Equality – Darebin City Council's Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019-29*, which affirm Council's obligation to respect, protect and promote the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, our responsibility to respect self-determination and recognise sovereignty, and our commitment to place recognition and rights of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a priority consideration in planning and decision-making.¹⁶ Recognising their sovereignty we will consult with Traditional Owners via the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation on all Early Years Infrastructure developments on their land. The following planning principles will also guide our decision-making:

- **Equity.** Ensuring equitable access to affordable and high-quality services across Darebin is a key objective of the Framework. Guided by *Towards Equality – Darebin City Council's Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019-2029*, we aspire to create a community where everyone can thrive and belong. The provision of early years infrastructure should contribute to reducing the impact of poverty and disadvantage on our community by ensuring that all children and families have access to the services they need to thrive.¹⁷
- **Access.** All early years facilities should be accessible and inclusive for all children and families, including those with disability, underpinned by the application of universal design principles and a commitment to inclusive spaces and practice.¹⁸ Children and families should be able to access the services they need in facilities that are conveniently located, well serviced by public transport, have adequate parking and infrastructure to support active travel and operate at hours that suit the community's needs.
- **Diversity and inclusion.** Facilities and services should be welcoming, culturally safe and inclusive for all children and families across all dimensions of diversity including, but not limited to, cultural background/identity, language, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion and family structure.
- **Connection to culture and country.** To support children's connection to culture and country we will work to recognise and respect Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in infrastructure planning and provision, for example through naming, building design, landscaping and signage.
- **Truth-telling.** Recognition of, and respect for, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in infrastructure planning and provision will also be used, as and when deemed appropriate by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Corporation and other local Aboriginal communities, as an opportunity for education and to enhance the knowledge and understanding of non-Aboriginal children and families, in the spirit of truth-telling.
- **Choice.** Council values a mixed market in the childcare and kindergarten sector, so that families are able to choose services that suit their circumstances, preferences and needs from diverse options across

community-managed services, other not for profits and commercial services, and from a range of service delivery models including both sessional and integrated kindergarten programs. We are committed to ensuring a strong community-managed childcare and kindergarten sector.

- **Quality and safety.** High quality standards in early years services are fundamental to delivering the best possible long-term impacts on children’s development, wellbeing and learning. High quality physical environments are critical to enabling high quality service provision, keeping children, families and staff safe, and providing the best possible experiences for children and families in all services. Council is committed to ensuring that all our early years facilities are fit-for-purpose and well-maintained.
- **Integrated services for the whole community.** The integration of early years services provides significant benefits to the whole community and is recognised to be particularly important for families who experience disadvantage or other barriers to accessing services.¹⁹ Whenever possible facilities should enable children and families to access a range of services at the same location and create opportunities for ‘wrap-around’ service delivery for the whole community. , They should be flexible and active community spaces that bring the community together across generations. Integration requires more than just the co-location of services; it is supported by high quality shared spaces and amenities, organisational commitment from all relevant parties, governance mechanisms, collaborative and integrated service planning and programming, facilitation and resourcing of shared functions.
- **Community engagement and collaboration.** The planning and design of early years facilities must be informed and guided by strong community engagement, to ensure that the views of the community are central to decision-making and co-design about the facilities that they will use.²⁰ Collaboration and engagement with services is also essential to ensure a cohesive and effective response to the community’s needs. Place-based planning models that bring together local stakeholders and community to develop locally tailored solutions are particularly important in areas of vulnerability.²¹ Engagement with Traditional Owners and Darebin’s Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander communities will be prioritised. Engagement will include the voices and views of children and young people in line with Council’s commitment as a signatory to the Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter.²²
- **Environmental sustainability.** Council is committed to a safe climate future for all. We aim to ensure that current and future facilities are sustainable, have low emissions and are resilient to changing climatic conditions.²³
- **Access to natural environments.** Council recognises the important role that access to natural environments plays in the healthy development of children and is committed to increasing opportunities for children to engage with nature.²⁴ Bush kindergarten programs are an important contributor to this goal. The incorporation of natural features in outdoor play spaces in early years facilities creates a stimulating environment for play, as well supporting children to become environmentally responsible and show respect for the environment.²⁵ We will recognise and respectfully draw on the knowledge of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in supporting children’s connections to nature.
- **Arts and creative culture.** Access to arts and cultural experiences in early childhood settings plays an important role in supporting children’s development and wellbeing and creates important connections between children and the wider community in which they live. Early years facilities that enable and support creative and cultural expression including through artist and community-led collaborations have the potential to deliver wide-ranging benefits to children, families and the wider community.²⁶
- **Economic development.** The significant investments in early years infrastructure recommended by the Framework have the potential to deliver substantial economic benefits to the Darebin community, during both the construction phase of infrastructure projects and on an ongoing basis through the delivery of more

jobs in early years' service delivery. In line with Council's Social and Sustainable Procurement Policy, planning and procurement for these investments should aim to ensure social, economic and environmental value and benefit for our community.²⁷

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT BY SERVICE

5.1 Maternal and Child Health (MCH)

Overview of facilities

Darebin has 21 MCH consulting rooms across 14 locations (see list at Appendix 1). Seven of the locations have two consulting rooms and seven are single room facilities. Eight of the MCH facilities are co-located with kindergarten or childcare services, four are co-located with other community facilities, one is co-located with Council's immunisation service and one centre is stand-alone. 12 of the facilities are in Council-owned buildings. For operational reasons, two of the locations are not currently being utilised.

On a geographical basis, the distribution of the MCH centres across the municipality is satisfactory (see map at Appendix 2). There are centres in each local area. There are some centres in relatively close proximity, but they are separated by major barriers such as major roads or train lines. All centres are accessible by at least one mode of public transport.

Condition and functionality

The design of MCH centres is not subject to special regulation or standards. Suggestions relating to the design and configuration of centres are outlined in the Design Guide for Victorian Children's Services²⁸ and the Maternal and Child Health Service Program Standards²⁹.

Council's preferred facility model for MCH centres is for centres to have at least two consulting rooms operating in an integrated setting with other children's services, health or community service programs. In terms of design, a modern MCH centre comprises at least two good sized consulting rooms, parent education/meeting room, suitably sized dedicated or shared waiting room, kitchen, staff amenities area, family amenities area with baby changing facilities, storage room, pram parking and nearby carparking area. In many local government areas MCH consulting and waiting rooms are increasingly being used by other family and children's service professionals and for small group activities when not required for MCH sessions.

Darebin MCH centres are generally in fair condition and most centres function reasonably well from a physical perspective. There are some functionality concerns. The most pressing issues are a lack of suitable space for the delivery of new parent groups at several locations. These groups are a core part of the MCH service and having to deliver them at a different location to individual consultations can be a barrier to parents' participation and engagement.

Supply and demand

Including the two centres that are not currently operational, Darebin's 14 MCH centres have the spatial capacity to provide 210 sessions per week. They currently provide 154 sessions, around 73% of their potential capacity. Eleven centres have spare capacity to provide more sessions if required.

There were an estimated 10,988 children aged 0-4 years resident in Darebin in 2020. Current provision of 154 sessions per week equates to one session per 71 children, which compares to a ratio of one session per 60 children commonly applied by metropolitan councils when planning the provision of MCH services. Alphington-Fairfield has the highest actual provision rate at 1:47 children, Reservoir West the lowest at 1:94 children.

Table 2: MCH supply and demand to 2041

Local Area	0-4 population 2020	Current provision (sessions)	Current ratio: children per session	Potential capacity existing facilities (sessions)	Projected 0-4 population 2041	Sessions required to achieve 1:60 children ratio 2041	Additional sessions required 2041
Alphington-Fairfield	562	12	47	20	698	12	-8 (surplus capacity)
Kingsbury	679	8	85	10	827	14	4
Northcote	1653	22	75	30	1955	33	3
Preston East	1376	24	57	40	3126	52	12
Preston West	1276	20	64	20	2303	38	18
Reservoir East	2197	28	78	40	2625	44	4
Reservoir West	1881	20	94	30	2232	37	7
Thornbury	1364	20	68	20	1483	25	5
Darebin	10988	154	71	210	15249	254	44

The 0-4 year-old population of Darebin is expected to grow to 15,249 by 2041. This will see demand for the MCH service increase by an estimated 100 sessions to 254 sessions per week by 2041. If the current centres are used to their full capacity of 210 sessions, they could cater for most of the additional demand but an additional five rooms would be needed to meet demand by 2041. The number of sessions offered will need to increase in all local areas except Alphington-Fairfield. Additional room capacity is likely to be required in Preston East and Preston West. The potential development of the Preston Market would further add to the need for additional rooms in Preston.

Maximising the number of sessions provided at existing facilities might require some families to have to travel more than they currently do to access a service. The distance families need to travel to attend sessions needs to be considered in decision-making about adjusting catchment areas for centres, to enable families to access the service as close to home as possible.

5.2 Kindergarten and Long Day Care

Overview of current provision

As of June 2021 there are 15 stand-alone kindergartens and 45 long day care services licensed to operate in Darebin. These services are listed in full at Appendix 3 and their distribution across Darebin is provided at Appendix 4.

14 of the stand-alone kindergartens are operated by not for profit community-managed organisations and one by an independent school. 11 of the stand-alone kindergartens operate in Council facilities. In total the stand-alone kindergartens are licensed for 643 places, and the services in Council facilities account for 449 of these places (69.8%).

11 of the long day care centres are community-managed services, eight are other not-for-profit services and 27 are commercial for-profit providers. Eight community-managed services operate from Council facilities. The services in Council facilities provide 520 licensed places out of a total of 3,806 licensed places across all LDC centres in Darebin (13.7% of places).

In 2019 55 services in total offered a funded four-year-old kindergarten program; this included 15 stand-alone kindergartens and 40 long day care services. 29 services offered an unfunded three-year-old kindergarten program in 2019.

Functionality and condition

Kindergarten and LDC programs operate in a highly regulated environment. The venues they operate from must be licensed with the State and Federal Government as education and care centres and venues must comply with the facility requirements specified in the National Education and Care Act and Regulations (2011 and 2012 respectively) and other relevant legislation.

The Council owned facilities are in reasonable to good condition and all comply with the requirements of the National Care and Education Act and Regulations and the building/access codes that were in place when they were constructed or redeveloped. Some centres may not comply with current access codes and would have to be made compliant, probably at significant cost, if their facilities were substantially redeveloped. A full audit of compliance issues that could be triggered across all sites has not been completed as they would be dependent on the nature and extent of any redevelopment.

The Council facilities are reasonably functional. Functionality issues have been identified in some of the facilities including: lack of staff rooms, meeting rooms or planning rooms; undersized offices; limited storage; connectivity and visibility issues.

Sector design trends

The following trends are occurring in the design of new stand-alone kindergarten facilities: a minimum of two playrooms, often three, sometimes four; the rooms are mainly 33 places to enable optimal capacity in line with the required ratio of 1 educator to every 11 children; two storey facilities are being developed on confined or constrained sites; full Disability Discrimination Act compliance; centres are being built in a manner that allows them to be converted to another use when no longer required for kindergarten.

Councils are making the following improvements/changes to the design of existing kindergarten facilities: single room facilities are expanding to 33 places and double room facilities to 66 places or 55 places if the second room is solely for three-year old kindergarten and/or occasional care; larger staff areas are being provided including bigger offices, staff planning and meeting rooms, particularly as staff numbers increase with the expansion of services; visibility is being improved to allow children to be seen at all times; playgrounds are being redeveloped to offer a mix of fabricated and natural play elements; second storeys are being constructed if an additional playroom is required and the site cannot accommodate a ground floor extension; disability access and toilets are being provided.

The trends in long day care centre design are similar to those occurring in stand-alone kindergartens: program rooms are being extended or reduced in size to match the child to staff ratios (rooms of 12 places for 0-3 year-olds and of 22 or 33 places for 4-5 year-olds); larger staff areas are being provided; visibility is being improved to allow concurrent inside and outdoor play and improve internal and external surveillance. The predominant facility model for new long day childcare centres is 100+ place facilities. Small existing centres, where feasible, are being redeveloped as 90+ place centres.

Supply and demand - kindergarten

In 2019, the 53 kindergarten programs operating in Darebin were licensed for 1514 places. 49% of these places were provided by sessional kindergarten programs and 51% by integrated programs in long day care. The estimated maximum capacity or full licensed capacity of these programs was 2654 children for 15 hours each per week. Many programs have not operated at their full licensed capacity historically and in 2019 offered places for a total of 2012 four-year-old children (their offered capacity). There are many reasons for centres not operating at full licensed capacity including operational and financial decisions, workforce availability, and real or perceived lack of demand for a higher level of service offering.

1575 children attended a funded four-year-old kindergarten program in 2019. Therefore, the programs had spare licensed capacity for 1079 children and unutilised offered places for 437 children. Enrolment numbers were close to evenly split between sessional and integrated kindergarten programs.

The four-year-old kindergarten participation rate for Darebin was 85.9% in 2019, up slightly from 83.4% in 2018. In 2018 the participation rate for local areas varied from a low of 68% in Bundoora-Macleod-Kingsbury to 99% in Northcote.³⁰ 29 services offered unfunded three-year-old kindergarten programs in 2019. As an unfunded program data on participation in these programs is not available.

The introduction of funding for three-year-old kindergarten from 2022 onwards will significantly increase demand for kindergarten places over the coming decades. The additional demand for kindergarten places that funded three-year-old kindergarten creates will be determined by a number of variables including the size of the three-year-old population, the participation rate for three-year-olds in kindergarten and the number of hours that services offer in three-year-old programs (from 2023-2028 services have flexibility to choose how many hours of funded three-year-old kindergarten they offer, between 5 and 15 hours per child). The estimated demand for funded kindergarten places to 2029 is based on assumptions about these variables agreed with the Department of Education and Training.

As shown in table 3, demand for funded kindergarten could increase by 157% over the next eight years to 2029 as operational funding for three-year-old kindergarten is rolled out at the same time as the three- and four-year-old population is expected to grow in most areas of Darebin.

Table 3: Total estimated demand for funded kindergarten places (three and four-year-old children) 2021-29

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Darebin	1,628	2,141	2,499	2,778	3,018	3,406	3,642	3,888	4,196

Joint planning completed with the Department of Education and Training, summarised in table 4, indicates that an additional 907 places will be required by 2029 to meet this demand.³¹ Three local areas (Alphington-Fairfield, Bundoora/Macleod-Kingsbury and Preston East) will have sufficient supply to meet demand through to 2029.* The other local areas will need additional capacity. Reservoir East will require the most additional capacity. The figures are inclusive of assumptions that current services will increase the number of kindergarten places they provide within existing infrastructure through operational changes. In total with operational changes it is estimated that current services could provide places for 3,365 children for 15 hours per week. The figures in table 4 are the unmet demand after operational changes have been factored in.

* The figures for Bundoora/Macleod-Kingsbury differ to those published in the Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) due to subsequent identification of a new service under construction in Kingsbury.

Table 4: Projected unmet demand to 2021-29, 3 and 4yo kindergarten, number of places (children)

Local area	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Alphington-Fairfield	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kingsbury	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northcote	0	0	0	0	0	3	42	78	123
Preston East	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Preston West	0	0	0	0	0	44	84	124	167
Reservoir East	0	0	0	1	24	191	240	284	343
Reservoir West	0	0	0	0	0	6	40	73	117
Thornbury	0	0	0	0	32	66	97	123	157
Total	0	0	0	1	56	310	503	682	907

Council's population forecasts project that the three- and four-year-old populations will continue to increase beyond 2029 and there will be an additional 561 children by 2041. As shown in Table 5, in Preston West, Preston East and Reservoir West this increase will be substantial and will significantly add to demand. These figures do not include the potential Preston Market or La Trobe University developments.

Table 5: Increase in 3 and 4 year old population 2029-41

Local area	Increase between 2029 and 2041
Alphington-Fairfield	24
Kingsbury	4
Northcote	46
Preston East	135
Preston West	204
Reservoir East	41
Reservoir West	93
Thornbury	14
Total	561

The analysis indicates that significant additional capacity will be required for three and four-year-old kindergarten in five of Darebin's eight local areas over the roll-out period for three-year-old kindergarten to 2029, and that additional capacity will also be required in at least three local areas in the following years to 2041.

Supply and demand – Long Day Care

The 45 long day care centres in Darebin are licensed for 3,806 places. This is 1 place for every 4.0 children aged 0-6 years. This is higher (better) than the Melbourne Metropolitan Area provision rate of 1: 5.3. Provision rates vary across the local areas in Darebin. Alphington-Fairfield has the highest rate 1: 2.3 and Reservoir East the lowest 1: 18.2. Reservoir East is the only area where provision is below the Melbourne average.

The distribution of Council-owned facilities is uneven. There are two Council-owned facilities in each of Northcote and Thornbury, but only one in each of Preston East, Reservoir East and Reservoir West, and none in Preston West or Kingsbury.

The services operating in Council facilities are running at very close to capacity and have waiting lists. It is understood that the private centres 'on average' are operating at about 85% capacity. The unused capacity in Centres varies across the week, with some days harder to fill than others, e.g. Fridays.

The target age cohort for long day childcare (0-6 year-olds) is forecast to increase by 4,575 in Darebin from 2020 to 2041. Applying the current provision rate in Darebin of 1 place to 4.0 children, the increase in population could generate demand for an additional 1,143 places. Demand will increase in all local areas, most significantly in Preston East and Preston West which currently have a good supply of childcare places and Reservoir East which has a poor supply. Based on recent trends, the private sector can be expected to increase supply in many locations. Council’s focus will need to be on addressing areas where the market has not provided adequate capacity (as seems to be the case in Reservoir East) and ensuring access to affordable childcare for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Table 6 – current provision and future growth in demand for long day care places

Area	2020			2041		
	0-6 year-olds	Approved places	0-6 year-olds per place	Forecast 0-6 year-olds	Increase in 0-6 year-olds 2020-41	Increase in demand – places at one place per 4 children
Alphington-Fairfield	775	333	2.3	966	191	49
Kingsbury	930	382	2.4	1165	235	60
Northcote	2221	532	4.2	2654	433	111
Preston East	1848	661	2.8	2878	1030	264
Preston West	1679	526	3.2	3115	1436	368
Reservoir East	2992	164	18.2	3561	569	146
Reservoir West	2552	642	4.0	3031	479	123
Thornbury	1816	445	4.1	2018	202	52
Darebin	14813	3684	4.0	19388	4575	1143

Note: The above figures are based on current population projections. Additional developments not factored into current projections, such as at Preston Market and La Trobe University, will generate additional demand if they proceed.

Equity and choice in a mixed market

The principles of equity and choice outlined in section four of this plan have a particular bearing in relation to the provision of kindergarten and long day care services in Darebin. In kindergarten and long day care, Council is committed to supporting a mixed market that ensures families have a choice of sessional or integrated kindergarten programs, and to maintaining a strong community-managed kindergarten and long day care sector.

Supporting community-managed services

Kindergarten and long day care services are provided by organisations that operate under a range of management types including community-managed not for profits, other not for profits and commercial for profit organisations. Council provides supports to all of these providers through a range of support services including the professional development programs and networks that we run. In our role as an infrastructure provider we are committed to providing facilities for community-managed services. We support the community-managed sector in this way for several reasons: to enable not for profit kindergarten and long day care to be financially viable; to provide families with a choice of services including community-managed services; because we believe that community-based organisations deliver positive community development benefits and social capital. Council also notes that that community-managed services have better quality ratings than private for-

profit services – the State of Early Learning 2019 report shows that a higher proportion of community-managed services received Exceeding NQS ratings than private for profit services.³²

Currently, the distribution of standalone kindergarten and community-managed long day care places is uneven across Darebin. In relation to the size of the three- and four-year old population, Kingsbury, Preston East and Preston West have fewer places in both standalone kindergarten and community-managed long day care than the Darebin average, whilst Northcote and Thornbury are above average for both these service types. Reservoir East has a high provision of standalone kindergarten places, but low provision of community-managed long day care, whilst Reservoir West is the opposite.

This is an important equity and affordability issue because of the difference in fees that families can be required to pay between sessional kindergarten programs and integrated programs in long day care due to the different state and federal government funding structures of these two service types. Affordability can be a significant deterrent or barrier to kindergarten participation particularly where there is limited access to sessional kindergarten services with lower fees in a local area. The finances of kindergarten mean that sessional kindergartens are almost exclusively run by community-managed not for profit organisations, and in Darebin the majority of these operate out of Council facilities.

Through its infrastructure investments and advocacy strategy, Council will seek to ensure equitable access to sessional kindergarten across Darebin by expanding sessional places in areas where there is currently lower provision, lower participation rates and in areas of high population growth. Council will also seek to ensure equitable distribution of council facilities within the City of Darebin and direct future capital investment accordingly.

5.3 Occasional care (OCC)

Three occasional childcare (OCC) programs operate in Darebin. The programs are licensed for a total of 67 places. Two operate from Council facilities. One is located at a recreation centre, one at a neighbourhood house and one at La Trobe University. Three other programs recently closed, at Jika Jika Community Centre, The Bridge Preston and Reservoir Leisure Centre – representing a loss of 75 OCC places. Appendix 5 provides details of the current and recently closed OCC programs.

OCC services are licensed by the Victorian Government as children's services. New Children's Services Regulations came into effect in May 2020. The new regulatory requirements applied immediately to all new providers and new services. For former licensed children's services, the changes will be phased in over two years. The main operational changes will commence on 1 January 2022. These include a new requirement that occasional care services must provide seven square metres of outdoor space per child.

The actual provision ratio for occasional childcare places across Melbourne is 1 place: 58 children aged 0-6 years. Darebin has 67 places at a provision ratio of 1 place: 221 children. To meet the 1:58 ratio, 188 places are needed immediately and a further 79 will be required by 2041. On a local area basis, there are currently no occasional care programs in Fairfield-Alphington, Preston East, Preston West, Reservoir East or Reservoir West. Considering recent closures of programs, the financial viability of OCC programs needs to be examined alongside any planning for infrastructure.

5.4 Playgroups

Facilities used for playgroups are not required to be licensed. They can be held in community centres, halls, parks, cafes or even private homes. There are currently 41 known playgroup locations across Darebin, of which 16 are Council facilities (see Appendix 6 for a list of known locations). There are playgroup locations in all localities in Darebin, but Northcote and Preston East have fewer identified locations than would be expected for their population size. As neither playgroups nor the facilities in which they operate need to be licensed, other locations may be in current use for playgroups and some of the identified locations may no longer be hosting groups. Outdoor only playgroups also operate in various locations along the Merri Creek, Darebin Creek and Bundoora Park, these have not been included.

A suitable playgroup venue should provide an accessible, safe and stimulating environment for children, carers and facilitators, preferably with both indoor and outdoor play areas that are large enough to allow children of different ages (including babies) to play safely, access to storage, toilet facilities and ideally a kitchen. A full functionality audit of current venues has been conducted, but it is known that some playgroups are currently running in small venues with functionality issues such as lack of privacy, no pram parking, noise issues, accessibility and security issues.

Council is funded by the State Government to deliver 10 supported playgroups across Darebin, with a focus on delivering these in areas of disadvantage as indicated by current AEDC and SEIFA data. Venues for supported playgroups need to provide a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for vulnerable and disadvantaged families. The preferred model for delivery of supported playgroups is to run them at venues where MCH and other services operate to facilitate access for eligible families. Kingsbury, Reservoir and Preston East have been identified as areas of significant demand and low suitable venue availability for supported playgroups.

Population growth, particularly in Preston East and Preston West, will add to the demand for playgroup venues. The roll-out of three-year-old kindergarten may also reduce the availability of rooms in kindergartens and childcare centres for use by playgroups

5.5 Toy Library

Darebin City Council operates a Toy Library that provides families with children aged 0 – 6 years access to high quality, age-appropriate toys and play equipment. The Toy Library currently operates from the Northcote Family Centre at 185-187 High St, Northcote for one session a week from 10am-12. The Toy Library previously also operated from a second location at Reservoir Community & Learning Centre. The service ceased to operate from this location in 2020 as the site was not deemed suitable to provide the service under COVID-safe requirements. As of March 2021 Council's Toy Library had 381 borrowers. Membership has remained steady over the past five years. A community-run Toy Library also operates from the Alphington Community Centre.

There are no regulations or official guidelines relating to the physical space requirements of a Toy Library. Toy Library Australia outlined the ideal elements for Toy Libraries of various membership sizes. For a large toy library of 200+ members the recommendation is for 300m² of dedicated space including a main toy library room (minimum 200m²), an adjoining storage area, and a smaller side room for informal meetings. Toy Library Australia also recommends that the library be located close to or on the same site as other early years services, community groups or services such as MCH, library, kindergarten, childcare or playgroups, close to public transport, and close to a playground and open play space.³³

Council's Toy Library service is currently being reviewed to ensure that it continues to be contemporary, accessible, affordable and responsive to Darebin's diverse community, particularly those most vulnerable and/or experiencing disadvantage. Any recommendations from the Toy Library review relating to infrastructure needs for the service should be integrated into this Framework, when available.

6. LOCALITY SUMMARIES

6.1 Alphington-Fairfield

Population

- The smallest of the localities in Darebin by population, with an estimated resident population of 10,145 in 2020. This includes an estimated 775 children aged 0-6.
- Limited population growth expected to 2041: 191 more 0-6 year-olds by 2041 compared to 2020. The growth that is projected is almost all in Fairfield.
- The development of the Alphington Paper Mill site in the City of Yarra (an estimated 2500 dwellings) may create additional demand on some services in Darebin.
- Alphington and Fairfield are two least disadvantaged suburbs in Darebin on the SEIFA index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage.

Service provision

- Two MCH rooms at the Fairfield Community Centre with capacity to satisfy projected needs to 2041.
- Five kindergarten locations provide sufficient kindergarten capacity to meet projected demand to 2029 and likely to 2041 based on current population projections. Low access to sessional kindergarten with just one stand-alone kindergarten.
- Four long day care centres provide 2.3 LDC places per 0-6 year-old – the highest provision rate in Darebin. Low access to community-managed LDC.
- No Occasional Child Care program in the locality.
- Three known playgroup locations.
- Community-run Toy Library located at Alphington Community Centre.

6.2 Kingsbury

Population

- The Kingsbury locality (which incorporates the City of Darebin parts of the suburbs of Bundoora and Macleod) is the second smallest locality in Darebin by population with an estimated resident population of 13,490 in 2020. This includes an estimated 930 children aged 0-6.
- Relatively low population growth forecast: 235 more 0-6 year-olds in 2041 compared to 2020. Potential major development at La Trobe University of housing for an additional 12,000 people would significantly increase this if it proceeds.
- The suburb of Kingsbury is the second most disadvantaged suburb in Darebin on the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage. Bundoora-Macleod is relatively advantaged. The locality recorded the poorest AEDC results in Darebin.

Service provision

- One MCH room. An additional four sessions per week beyond this centres full capacity may be required by 2026.
- Four current kindergarten programs plus a new service expected to open in 2022. Capacity expected to be sufficient to meet demand to 2029. Low access to sessional kindergarten with just one stand-alone kindergarten.
- High rate of long day care provision with three current services and new private centre expected to open in 2022. However, La Trobe University facility services a wider catchment than just the local area. No community-managed childcare.

- Occasional Child Care is provided at La Trobe University – mainly used by staff and students.
- Three known playgroup locations.

6.3 Northcote

Population

- Estimated resident population of 28,172 in 2020, of whom an estimated 2221 were children aged 0-6.
- 0-6 year-old population expected to grow by 433 from 2020 to 2041.
- Lower levels of disadvantage than the Darebin average and lower levels of developmental vulnerability in the AEDC.

Service provision

- Two MCH locations providing sufficient capacity to meet demand until at least 2026, with a small shortfall in capacity after that.
- Eight kindergarten locations including two stand-alone kindergartens and four community-managed services. Unmet kindergarten capacity expected from 2027 onwards. Unmet demand of 123 children by 2029, and another 46 children by 2041.
- Six long day care centres including two community-managed services. Current provision of LDC a little below Darebin average but above Melbourne average. Population growth will create demand for approximately 100 more places by 2041.
- One Occasional Child Care service providing 21 places.
- Three playgroup locations identified.
- Current location of Darebin Toy Library.

6.4 Preston East

Population

- Estimated resident population of 20,430 in 2020, of whom an estimated 1848 were children aged 0-6.
- Significant population growth projected. 1030 more 0-6 year-olds from 2020 to 2041, with much of the growth expected from 2036 onwards. Preston Market precinct development would add a further 4500 – 6000 to overall population growth. Note also that some of the major areas of population growth are in the central are of Preston. Services in this central area may see an increase in demand from population growth in both Preston East and Preston West.
- Locality ranks below the Darebin average on the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic disadvantage and includes some of the most disadvantaged small areas in Darebin.

Service provision

- Three MCH locations with sufficient capacity to meet demand until the mid-2030s on current population projections. 12 additional MCH sessions required by 2041 – at least one new MCH room required.
- Nine kindergarten locations, plus an additional centre opening soon. On current population projections surplus kindergarten capacity is expected to 2029 and current capacity should meet most demand to 2041. Low access to sessional kindergarten: one small community-managed stand-alone kindergarten plus one larger kindergarten at East Preston Islamic College which draws families from a wider regional catchment.
- High level of long day care LDC provision with eight centres plus an additional centre opening soon. Only one community-managed service. Population growth will create demand for an additional 264 LDC places by 2041.
- No Occasional Child Care following recent closure of OCC at The Bridge Preston.

- Four playgroup locations identified.

6.5 Preston West

Population

- Estimated resident population of 20,430 in 2020, of whom an estimated 1848 were children aged 0-6.
- Area of most significant projected population growth. 1436 more 0-6 year-olds to 2041. Note also that some of the major areas of population growth are in the central are of Preston. Services in this central area may see an increase in demand from population growth in both Preston East and Preston West. The Preston Market development can be included in this category.
- Level of disadvantage slightly below (less disadvantaged) the Darebin average.

Service provision

- One MCH location. Current MCH capacity fully utilised and will be insufficient to meet future demand. 18 additional MCH sessions will be required by 2041 – requiring two additional MCH rooms.
- Seven kindergarten locations including one stand-alone kindergarten. Additional kindergarten supply expected to be needed to cater for unmet demand: 44 children by 2026, 167 by 2029 and a further 204 by 2041.
- Six long day care centres. LDC provision is above the Darebin average, but population growth will create demand for an additional 368 LDC places by 2041. One community-managed LDC service. Currently no LDC in Council facilities in area.
- No Occasional Child Care programs.
- Seven playgroup locations.

6.6 Reservoir East

Population

- Estimated resident population of 29,540 in 2020, of whom an estimated 2992 were children aged 0-6.
- 0-6 year-old population expected to grow by 569 from 2020 to 2041.
- The most disadvantaged locality in Darebin. Two sub-areas: Reservoir East Cheddar and Reservoir East Oakhill both in the lowest quintile on SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage.

Service provision

- Two MCH locations have capacity to supply 40 sessions per week – currently provide 28 sessions. Projected demand to 2041 is 44 sessions per week, requiring four additional sessions per week.
- Six kindergarten locations, including four stand-alone kindergartens. Significant unmet demand for kindergarten projected to 2029: 191 children by 2026, 343 by 2029.
- Three long day care providers. Level of LDC provision is far below all other areas in Darebin (1 place per 18.3 children aged 0-6). Population growth will create further demand.
- No Occasional Child Care program since closure of program at Reservoir Leisure Centre.
- 7 playgroup locations.

6.7 Reservoir West

Population

- Estimated resident population of 25,846 in 2020, of whom an estimated 2552 were children aged 0-6.
- 0-6 year-old population expected to grow by 479 from 2020 to 2041.

- Merrilands sub-area in the lowest quintile on SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage. Edwardes Lake sub-area also more disadvantaged than the Darebin average.

Service provision

- Two MCH locations have capacity to supply 30 sessions in total. Kenilworth Road location not currently in use. Projected demand to 2041 is 37 sessions. Additional room may be required to meet demand. No provision in Merrilands sub-area.
- Nine kindergarten locations including two stand-alone kindergartens. Unmet demand for kindergarten projected from 2027 onwards – 40 children in 2027, 117 by 2029. A further 93 three and four-year-olds expected in area by 2041.
- Seven long day care locations including two community-managed services. LDC provision rate similar to Darebin average. 123 additional places required to maintain provision rate at Darebin average to 2041.
- No Occasional Child Care program.
- Eight playgroup locations.

6.8 Thornbury

Population

- Estimated resident population of 20,779 in 2020, of whom an estimated 1816 were children aged 0-6.
- 0-6 year-old population expected to grow by 202 from 2020 to 2041.
- Relatively advantaged – higher than the Darebin average on SEIFA Index of Relative Disadvantage.

Service provision

- Two single-room MCH locations, supplying their maximum capacity of 20 sessions at present. Capacity for five additional sessions will be required by 2041.
- 10 kindergarten locations including two stand-alone kindergartens. Unmet demand for kindergarten projected by 2025 – 32 children in 2025, rising to 157 children by 2029.
- Eight long day care centres including three community-managed services. Similar provision rate to the Darebin average. Limited growth in demand from population growth (52 places to 2041).
- One Occasional Child Care providing 20 places.
- Six playgroup locations.

7. Recommended Actions

7.1 21 Big Actions

Table 7 outlines 21 recommended actions to deliver the Early Years infrastructure needed by the Darebin community over the next 20 years.

Table 7: Early Years Infrastructure Actions

1. Monitor indicators of supply and demand across all early years services on an ongoing basis and review and adjust infrastructure planning as new information becomes available.
2. Work with providers across all early years services to optimise the level of service delivered from existing infrastructure by utilizing spare capacity where needed, adopting new schedules and operational models, utilizing innovative, flexible and best practice approaches including outreach and pop-up models.
3. Address functionality issues, where feasible and cost effective, at council-owned early years facilities to optimise service delivery and utilisation across all sites.
4. Provide additional service capacity in localities where additional capacity is needed through, where feasible and cost effective, expansion of existing facilities.
5. Consolidate MCH locations to provide a full suite of two room facilities integrated with other family/children’s services either at existing MCH locations or alternative sites.
6. Review Council’s existing property portfolio to identify opportunities to re-purpose properties for early years service delivery, where feasible and cost effective, in localities where additional capacity is needed.
7. Progress planning for the development of intergenerational hubs in the following localities: 7.1. Reservoir West (Merrilands) 7.2. Preston West 7.3. Preston East Intergenerational hubs to include at least two MCH rooms, two kindergarten rooms and multi-use spaces including playgroup spaces. Assess need and opportunity to include LDC, OCC and other services on a case-by-case basis.
8. Advocate and plan for the inclusion of a new community centre within or close to the Preston Market Precinct inclusive of two MCH rooms, two kindergarten rooms and multi-use spaces including playgroup spaces. Assess need and opportunity to include LDC, OCC and other services within the centre.
9. Progress planning for the development of new hubs in localities where unmet demand for early years services will not be met by expansion upgrades or other actions. These hubs should include a mix of services as required on a case-by-case basis.
10. Develop a property acquisition strategy to identify and acquire sites for new facilities where required to meet future needs.
11. Develop a 10-year program of capital works projects that identifies the planned Council investments in facility upgrades, renewal works, expansions or new facility developments in order to deliver the actions and priorities outlined in this plan: to increase capacity where required and improve functionality and condition of facilities. Map and monitor alignment between this program of works and routine maintenance and renewal works to ensure integration of efforts and investment to deliver and maintain high quality standards across all facilities.
12. Explore the feasibility of mixed-use development (e.g. kindergarten/childcare, social housing and private housing/commercial) on council-owned or private land, through public private partnerships. In exploring land use options, we will consult with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation as the Traditional Owners of the land.

13. Develop an advocacy strategy to encourage investment in early years facilities from a range of sources including government and private developers.
14. Provide support to community-managed kindergarten and childcare providers, including those in non-Council facilities, to pursue infrastructure projects that will increase kindergarten and/or LDC places in areas where additional capacity is needed.
15. Work with services to support them to open their facilities up to other uses by complementary services, groups and the community including at times when they are not being utilised for service delivery.
16. Review the current use and demand for Occasional Care (OCC) and other flexible child care models in Darebin, the financial viability of OCC service models and cost to increase supply. Identify options to increase supply if indicated by this review.
17. Review the current use and demand for playgroup spaces, and the functionality and suitability of current locations. Explore the feasibility of addressing functionality issues at existing sites and identify options to increase the supply of suitable venues if required.
18. Address infrastructure needs identified by the Toy Library review.
19. Develop a governance model for early years infrastructure planning that will facilitate regular and ongoing communication and engagement with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and input from relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and service delivery organisations.
20. Develop a community engagement and consultation model for early years infrastructure planning that prioritises the experiences, needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities, includes the voices and views of children and enables broad community input into decision-making.
21. Work with early years services and relevant partners to support the increased use of parks and open spaces for early years services including bush kindergarten and other programs.

7.2 Funding

The implementation of the actions contained in the Framework will require the allocation of significant resources for planning, designing, constructing, commissioning, overseeing and maintaining the facilities. Capital funds will be required to convert, extend or refurbish existing facilities or develop new facilities. Ongoing resources will be needed to maintain and renew the buildings over their lifecycles and, in many cases operational funds will be required to support expanded service delivery or the operations of facilities.

Operational resources will also be required to support change management, community engagement and stakeholder management throughout the implementation of this Framework. Many of Council’s existing early years facilities will be impacted in some way and resources will also be required to ensure continuity of service delivery through the provision of alternative accommodation for displaced programs during works at existing facilities.

Council has allocated \$18.45m in the 10-year Capital Works Plan to meet the demand created by the roll-out of funded three-year-old kindergarten. Additional funding will be required over the next ten years to deliver the actions relating to MCH, LDC, OCC, playgroups and the Toy Library. Further funding will be required in the following ten years to meet ongoing increases in demand for services created by population growth.

Accessing funding from other sources will be crucial to enable Council to deliver all that it aspires to achieve with this Framework. State Government funding as co-contributions to projects will be critical. The State Government has committed \$1.68 billion of infrastructure funding state-wide over the next decade to support

the three-year-old kindergarten reforms through its Building Blocks Infrastructure strategy.³⁴ This funding is accessible to local government and not for profit organisations in the form of grants for projects where the local Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan has identified the need for additional infrastructure to meet unmet kindergarten demand. Funding is available for a range of projects including Integrated Children's Centres, New Early Learning Facilities, Modular Kindergarten Facilities, Expansion Upgrades, Facility Upgrades and Kindergartens on School Sites. Council has the opportunity to develop a Building Blocks Partnership Agreement with the State Government, which will outline in principle agreement for co-investment in a pipeline of projects to provide greater investment certainty.

Developer contributions are another potential source of funding. It will be important to ensure Early Years infrastructure needs are considered when the Municipal Development Contribution Plan (DCP) is reviewed in future years. Also, where large redevelopment projects create additional demand for early years services within a strategic site, developers may be required to provide infrastructure (e.g. delivery of new kindergarten on site or cash contribution) to service the need generated by their project.

7.3 Implementation

A detailed Delivery Plan will prioritise the actions contained within this Framework and outline timelines and responsibilities for the implementation of agreed priorities.

7.4 Monitoring and review

The Early Years Infrastructure Framework will be treated as a 'living document'. It will be formally reviewed on a yearly basis in time for the formulation of Council's annual budget and amended after the adoption of the budget. A major review will be conducted every three to five years or as required.

7.5 Related Council plans, strategies and policies

There are many Council plans, strategies and policies that have informed the development of this plan and which will inform the delivery of the actions. These include the following key documents:

- Council Plan 2021-25 incorporating the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Community Vision (Darebin 2041)
- Statement of Commitment to Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Towards Equality –Equity, Inclusion and Human Rights Framework 2019-2029
- Disability Access and Inclusion in Darebin
- Community Engagement Policy
- Child and Youth Engagement Protocol (in development)
- Families, Youth and Children Strategy (to be developed in 2022)
- Age Friendly Darebin
- Creative and Cultural Infrastructure Framework
- Darebin Asset Plan 2023-2033 (in development)
- Breathing Space – The Darebin Open Space Strategy
- Darebin Environmentally Sustainable Design Building Policy
- Community Infrastructure Plan (in development)

8. Acknowledgements

Council would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following people and organisations to the development of this plan:

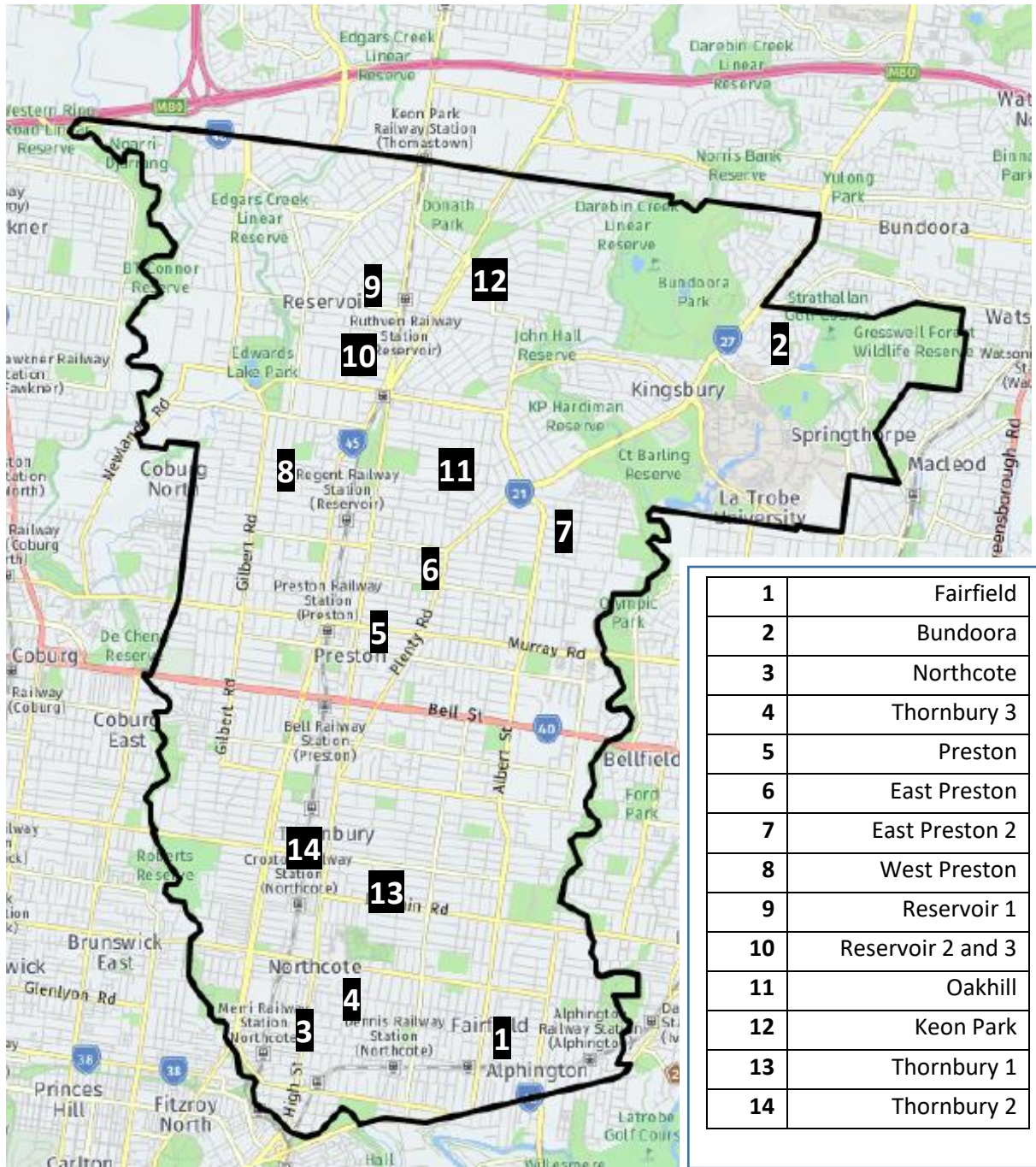
- The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation for their feedback and guidance.
- The approximately 100 residents, service users, service providers and volunteers who provided feedback on our draft plan either by completing an online survey or by participating in a group or individual discussion.
- Over 700 children from five local Primary Schools (Bell PS, Brunswick East PS, Northcote PS, Thornbury PS and Wales Street PS) who contributed to the consultation on the Northcote Golf Course in 2021. These submissions helped us to understand what children value in public spaces and facilities.
- All of organisations and individuals who helped to spread the word the about the consultation on the draft plan.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Maternal and Child Health Centres (June 2021)

Centre	Address	Local area	Setting and co-located services	Consulting rooms
Fairfield	84 Arthur St, Fairfield	Alphington-Fairfield	Residential setting Co-located with library and community room at Fairfield Community Centre.	2
Bundoora	35 Copernicus Cres, Bundoora	Kingsbury	Residential/commercial setting Co-located with community meeting and activity spaces including playgroup room at Darebin North East Community Hub.	1
Northcote	4 Oldis Ave, Northcote	Northcote	Residential setting Co-located with LDC and kindergarten at Annie Dennis Children's Centre.	2
Thornbury 3	55 Clifton St, Northcote	Northcote	Residential setting Co-located with LDC and kindergarten at Clifton Street Children's Centre.	1
Preston	270 Gower St, Preston	Preston East	Residential/civic precinct Co-located with Darebin Immunisation Service.	2
East Preston	2 Sylvester Grove, Preston	Preston East	Residential setting No co-located services.	1
East Preston 2 (not currently utilised)	7 Newton St, Preston	Preston East	Residential setting Co-located with community spaces at East Preston Community Centre (building not owned by Council).	1
West Preston	524 Gilbert Rd, Preston	Preston West	Residential/commercial setting Co-located with JS Grey Kindergarten.	2
Reservoir 1 (not currently utilised)	6-8 Kenilworth St, Reservoir	Reservoir West	Residential setting Co-located with LDC and kindergarten at Darebin Community Childcare and Kindergarten - Reservoir.	1
Reservoir 2 and 3	23 Edwardes St, Preston	Reservoir West	Civic/commercial setting Co-located with library, Decibels Youth Music Centre and community rooms at Reservoir Community and Learning Centre.	2
Oakhill	91 North Rd, Reservoir	Reservoir East	Residential setting Co-located with LDC and kindergarten at Oakhill Family Centre.	2
Keon Park	1-7 Dole Ave, Reservoir	Reservoir East	Residential setting Co-located with kindergarten and community spaces at Keon Park Children's Hub.	2
Thornbury 1	8A Newcastle St, Thornbury	Thornbury	Residential/commercial setting; Co-located with Thornbury Kindergarten.	1
Thornbury 2	2B Watt St, Thornbury	Thornbury	Residential/commercial setting; co-located with LDC and kindergarten at Yappera Children's Service (building not owned by Council).	1

Appendix 2: Maternal and Child Health Locations (June 2021)



Appendix 3: List of Kindergarten and Long Day Care services in Darebin (June 2021)

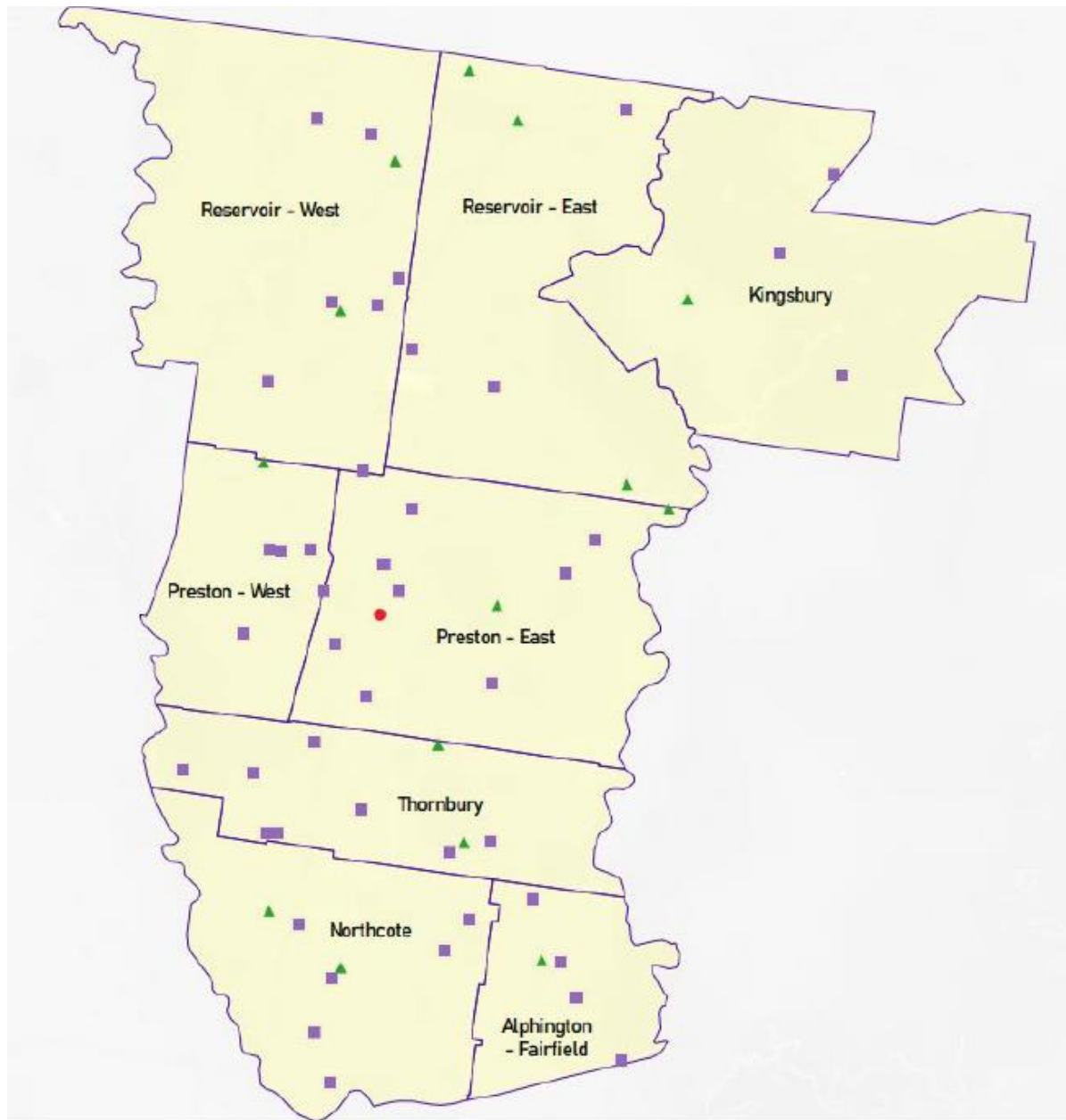
(* = services in Council-owned facilities)

Service Name	Local area (SA2)	Service Type	Management	Licensed places
Alfred Nuttall Memorial Kindergarten*	Alphington-Fairfield	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	29
Journey Early Learning Centre – Alphington	Alphington-Fairfield	Long Day Care	Private for profit	45
Perry Street Child Care Centre and Elizabeth Gorman Memorial Kindergarten*	Alphington-Fairfield	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	50
Smart Start Early Learning and Development Centre	Alphington-Fairfield	Long Day Care	Private for profit	120
The Hive Fairfield Early Learning Centre	Alphington-Fairfield	Long Day Care	Private for profit	118
Goodstart Early Learning Bundoora - Karl Court	Kingsbury	Long Day Care	Other not-for-profit	75
La Trobe University Community Children's Centre	Kingsbury	Long Day Care	Other not-for-profit	187
Maryborough Avenue Kindergarten*	Kingsbury	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	28
Paisley Park Early Learning Centre Bundoora	Kingsbury	Long Day Care	Private for profit	120
Annie Dennis Children's Centre*	Northcote	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	98
Batman Park Kindergarten*	Northcote	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	59
Clifton Street Childrens Centre*	Northcote	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	81
Nicki's Clever Cookies	Northcote	Long Day Care	Private for profit	36
Only About Children Northcote	Northcote	Long Day Care	Private for profit	93
TimeOut Educare	Northcote	Long Day Care	Private for profit	94
TimeOut Educare – Westgarth	Northcote	Long Day Care	Private for profit	130
Westgarth Kindergarten	Northcote	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	58
Darebin Childcare and Kindergarten Inc – Preston*	Preston - East	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	61
East Preston Islamic College Early Learning Centre	Preston - East	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Independent School	88
Goodstart Dalgety Street Preston (new service expected to open soon)	Preston - East	Long Day Care	Other not-for-profit	122
Gower Street Kindergarten*	Preston - East	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	29
Happy Hubbub	Preston - East	Long Day Care	Private for profit	17
Inspire Early Learning Journey Preston	Preston - East	Long Day Care	Other not-for-profit	130
Kool Kidz Preston	Preston - East	Long Day Care	Private for profit	130

Melbourne Juniors	Preston East	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	105
Nino Early Learning Adventures - Preston	Preston East	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	122
Northland Kinder Haven	Preston East	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	100
Victoria Street Early Learning & Kinder	Preston East	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	60
Wood Street Childcare Centre	Preston East	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	58
Bell Street Early Learning & Kinder	Preston West	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	61
Guardian Childcare & Education Preston	Preston West	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	110
Guardian Childcare & Education Preston West	Preston West	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	141
J S Grey Reserve Kindergarten*	Preston West	-	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	54
Nara Community Early Learning Centre	Preston West	-	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	68
Wonder World Play Centre	Preston West	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	24
Blake Street Kindergarten*	Reservoir East	-	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	27
Dewdrops Early Learning	Reservoir East	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	45
Goodstart Early Learning Reservoir	Reservoir East	-	Long Day Care	Other not-for-profit	60
Keon Park Children's Hub*	Reservoir East	-	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	68
Keon Park Kindergarten	Reservoir East	-	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	33
Oakhill Family Centre – Kindergarten*	Reservoir East	-	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	59
Oakhill Family Centre - Long Day Care*	Reservoir East	-	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	58
AMIGA Montessori Reservoir	Reservoir West	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	105
Darebin Childcare and Kindergarten Inc – Reservoir*	Reservoir West	-	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	86
Edwardes Street Child Minding	Reservoir West	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	50
Gellibrand Crescent Kindergarten*	Reservoir West	-	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	30
Goodstart Early Learning Preston	Reservoir West	-	Long Day Care	Other not-for-profit	99
Great Beginnings Reservoir	Reservoir West	-	Long Day Care	Private for profit	120
Kookaburra Kindergarten	Reservoir West	-	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	30
Merrilands Children's Centre & Kindergarten	Reservoir West	-	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	66

Starfish Early Learning Centre (Reservoir)	Reservoir - West	Long Day Care	Private for profit	116
Clyde Street Kindergarten*	Thornbury	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	29
Goodstart Early Learning Thornbury	Thornbury	Long Day Care	Other not-for-profit	44
Guardian Childcare & Education Thornbury	Thornbury	Long Day Care	Private for profit	80
Merri Community Child Care Centre*	Thornbury	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	49
Raleigh St Community Children's Centre*	Thornbury	Long Day Care	Community-managed not-for-profit	37
Sunrise Preschool and Long Daycare Thornbury	Thornbury	Long Day Care	Other not-for-profit	30
Thornbury Kindergarten*	Thornbury	Stand-alone Kindergarten	Community-managed not-for-profit	66
Thornbury Learning Centre	Thornbury	Long Day Care	Private for profit	70
Thornbury World of Learning	Thornbury	Long Day Care	Private for profit	75
Yappera Childrens Centre	Thornbury	Long Day Care	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation	60

Appendix 4: Kindergarten and Long Day Care Locations (June 2021)



KGN LDC NEW
▲ ■ ●

Note: new = new LDC service expected to open in 2021 (Goodstart Preston Dalgety Street)

Appendix 5: Current and former occasional childcare locations (June 2021)

Centre Details	Local Area	Approved places	Building Owner	Provider
Current				
La Trobe University Community Children’s Centre	Kingsbury	26	University	La Trobe University
Northcote Aquatic & Recreation Centre	Northcote	21	Council	YMCA
The Bridge Thornbury	Thornbury	20	Council	The Bridge Darebin
Recently closed				
Jika Jika Community Centre	Northcote	14	Council	Neighbourhood House
Reservoir Leisure Centre	Reservoir East	21	Council	Reservoir leisure Centre
The Bridge Preston	Preston East	40	Council	The Bridge

Appendix 6 – Known playgroup locations (June 2021)

Area	Venues	Council facilities	Other locations
Alphington-Fairfield	3	Alphington Community Centre, Fairfield Community Centre	Darebin Parklands
Kingsbury	3	Darebin North East Community Hub, Maryborough Avenue Kindergarten	Kingsbury Primary School
Northcote	3	Jika Jika Community Centre, Old Gardens Community Room	Play Nook Play Centre
Preston East	4	East Preston Community Centre, Ruthven Community Room (Ruthven Reserve Pavilion), East Preston Senior Citizens Hall	Northern Community Church of Christ
Preston West	7	JS Grey Kindergarten	Newlands Primary School, West Preston Baptist Church, Melbourne Polytechnic, Bell Primary School, Preston Mosque, Bell Street Early Learning & Kinder
Reservoir East	7	Keon Park Children’s Hub, Reservoir Leisure Centre, Blake St Kindergarten	Reservoir Views Primary School, Reservoir Baptist Church, Reservoir Neighbourhood House, St Stephen’s Primary School
Reservoir West	8	Reservoir Senior Citizens Centre	St Josephs the Worker Primary School, Reservoir Primary School, St Gabriel’s Primary School, Reservoir West Primary School, St Mark’s Church, St Andrew’s Church, Girl Guides Hall Reservoir
Thornbury	6	Thornbury Early Years Centre, Clyde Street Community Hall/SPAN Community House	St Mary’s Primary School, Penders Grove Primary School, Our Lady of Lebanon, Croxton Uniting Church

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