

ADOPTION OF CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

POP | 89/8/2-01 | #7922189

RECOMMENDATION:**That Council adopts the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.****INTERSTED PARTIES:**

Not Applicable

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report seeks Council's adoption of the proposed Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy. This is a new Policy which establishes Council's commitment to creating environments where children and young people are safe, respected and protected.

The report outlines Council's obligations under the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld), including implementation of the Queensland Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme, and summarises the work undertaken to prepare Council for these new legislative requirements.

Council's organisational self-assessment found that existing practices already support child safety. These include recruitment screening, Blue Card compliance, Employee Code of Conduct and complaints management. However, the assessment also identified the need for a contemporary governance framework to strengthen and further align these practices with the new legislative requirements and embed child safety consistently across the organisation.

To support compliance, Council has developed a Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy that:

- Establishes Council's organisation-wide commitment to child safety;
- Embeds the Queensland Child Safe Standards into governance, leadership and organisational practices;
- Defines child safety responsibilities for Councillors and all Council workers;
- Supports compliance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme and associated legislative obligations; and
- Provides the foundation for ongoing implementation through supporting administration instructions, procedures, workforce education and continuous improvement.

Adoption of the Policy represents a significant milestone in Council's broader Child Safe Organisation implementation framework and demonstrates Council's commitment to meeting its legislative obligations while strengthening governance, accountability and community confidence.

BACKGROUND:

The *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld) establishes safeguarding obligations for organisations that provide services, facilities or activities involving children. It introduced two key reforms relevant to Council: the 10 Child Safe Standards, which commenced on 1 October 2025, and the Reportable Conduct Scheme, which commenced on 1 July 2026.

Together, these reforms require Council to embed child safety across governance, culture, recruitment, risk management, complaints handling, workforce capability, reporting and continuous improvement. As the obligations apply organisation-wide where any part of Council provides services involving children, Council must demonstrate a coordinated approach supported by clear policy, procedures, reporting pathways and workforce education.

Work completed to support compliance includes:

- An organisational self-assessment against the Child Safe Standards;
- Review of Blue Card screening processes and procedures;
- Establishment of reporting officers, reporting pathways, a statement of commitment and a dedicated reporting email address available on Council's website; and
- Development of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, supporting internal administration instruction, implementation documentation and training approach.

COMMENT:

The Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy provides Council's overarching framework for meeting its child safety obligations and embedding safe, respectful and protective environments for children and young people.

It aligns Council's governance, leadership, workforce practices and reporting responsibilities with the Queensland Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Scheme.

The Policy:

- Confirms Council's organisation-wide commitment to child safety and wellbeing;
- Supports implementation of the Queensland Child Safe Standards;
- Defines governance, leadership and workforce responsibilities.
- supports safe recruitment, screening, education and reporting practices; and
- provides a foundation for ongoing monitoring, review and continuous improvement.

Implementation will be supported by the Child Safety and Wellbeing Administration Instruction, procedures, guidance material and workforce education. Additionally, the Policy is an important step in demonstrating Council's commitment to meeting its legislative obligations and progressively embedding child safety across its operations and culture.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended)

That Council adopts the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Option 2

That Council does not adopt the proposed Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy at this time and requests officers to provide further information.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

The adoption of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy forms a key component of Council's corporate governance and risk management framework by embedding child safety into organisational governance, leadership, workforce practices and service delivery.

The Policy supports compliance with the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld) and associated legislative requirements, reducing organisational risk through clear governance arrangements, defined responsibilities and consistent child safe practices.

Implementation will be supported through the internal Child Safety and Wellbeing Administration Instruction, workforce education, ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement. These measures will strengthen Council's ability to prevent harm, appropriately respond to concerns, and maintain community confidence in Council's services and facilities.

Delay in adopting a policy could impact Council's ability to demonstrate compliance and establishment of a governance framework necessary to support implementation of the Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The adoption of the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy aligns with Council's Corporate Plan 2025–2030 by supporting strong governance, community confidence and responsible service delivery.

The Policy contributes to Focus Area 5: Focused Council, which promotes collaborative, transparent and accountable decision-making and the implementation of contemporary governance frameworks. It also supports Council's commitment to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for the community.

Statutory:

The proposed Policy supports Council's compliance with all relevant legislative frameworks including:

- *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld)
- *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000* (Qld)
- *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2020* (Qld)

- Queensland Child Safe Standards
- Reportable Conduct Scheme

CONSULTATION:

Consultation was undertaken with key internal stakeholders during the development of the policy and presented at Councillor workshop.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy #7901772



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Acting Executive Manager Organisational Performance



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CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL

General Policy

CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

- Intent** To establish Cairns Regional Council's (Council's) organisational commitment to protecting the safety, wellbeing and rights of children and young people who interact with Council services, programs and facilities.
- Scope** This policy applies to all Council operations where children and young people may engage with Council services, facilities, programs, events or activities. It also applies to all persons working for or on behalf of Council, including Councillors, employees (permanent, temporary and casual), contractors and consultants, volunteers, labour hire personnel, work experience participants, and third parties.

This policy applies regardless of whether a role directly involves working with children. All workers share responsibility for protecting children and promoting safe environments.

DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Blue Card	A clearance issued under the <i>Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000</i> that confirms a person is eligible to work with children.
Child / Children	Means a person under the age of eighteen years and in the absence of positive evidence as to age, means a person who is apparently under 18 years of age.
Child harm or abuse	Means any act of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child, causing or likely to cause harm to their health, survival, development, or dignity.
Child Safe Organisation	Means an organisation that consciously and systematically: - Creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people. - Establishes processes and practices to identify and respond appropriately to concerns about children's safety.
Councillors	All elected representatives who hold (current) office with Council, including the Mayor.
Cultural Safety	Means an outcome where individuals feel their cultural identity is respected, their needs are met, and they are free from discrimination.
Facilities	All physical environments owned, operated, or controlled by Council, including buildings, outdoor spaces, parks, and recreational areas.
Mandatory reporting	Is the legal obligation to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect to relevant authorities including Child Safety Services
Safeguarding Practices	Means policies, procedures, and activities designed to prevent harm to children, ensure their wellbeing, and respond effectively if harm occurs or is suspected.
Service Delivery	Means the provision of programs, activities, resources, and support offered by Council to the community, specifically inclusive of children and young people
Workers	Of an entity, as defined in the Act, means an employee of the entity; a volunteer; a contractor, subcontractor, or consultant; an individual supplied by a provider of labour hire services; an executive officer of the entity, or another person concerned with the entity's management; or a trainee or person undertaking work experience.

PROVISIONS

Principles

Cairns Regional Council is committed to protecting the safety, wellbeing and dignity of all children and young people who interact with Council services, programs, facilities or activities.

The purpose of this policy is to establish Council's organisational commitment to child safety and to outline the governance framework, principles and responsibilities that guide the protection of children within Council environments.

This policy supports Council's obligations under relevant legislation and aligns with the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Qld)*, the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (Qld)*, and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Cairns Regional Council has zero tolerance for child abuse or harm.

Council is committed to providing a safe, positive and inclusive environment for children and young people while they are on Council premises and using Council services. This includes:

- Creating culturally safe environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Promoting inclusion and equity for children of all backgrounds and abilities.
- Empowering children to participate in decisions affecting them.
- Responding to concerns and allegations of harm with compassion and diligence.
- Responding promptly and appropriately to concerns about child safety.

Council expects all Councillors And workers to uphold these commitments.

Council adopts the Universal Principle and recognises the importance of cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Cultural safety is experienced when children feel welcome, safe, valued, included and respected.

In culturally safe organisations:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples define cultural safety and how it is measured
- Workers develop the knowledge and skills to recognise and address bias and stereotypes
- Systems and practices are improved to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Council will embed the Universal Principle across all aspects of implementing the Child Safe Standards.

Child Safe Governance

Council will maintain governance systems that ensure accountability for child safety.

This includes:

- embedding child safety within Council governance frameworks
- integrating child safety into corporate risk management
- monitoring compliance with legislative requirements
- ensuring leadership accountability for safeguarding practices.

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards

Council will implement the ten Child Safe Standards to guide organisational practice. The Child Safe Standards are as follows:

1. **Leadership and Governance**- Child safety will be embedded within strategic planning, leadership practices and governance structures.
2. **Children's Empowerment** - Children will be informed of their rights and encouraged to contribute to decisions affecting them.
3. **Family and Community Engagement** - Council will work collaboratively with families and communities to support child safety.
4. **Equity and Cultural Safety** - Council will provide inclusive environments that respect diversity and cultural identity.
5. **Safe Recruitment and Workforce Practices** - Council will implement robust recruitment, screening and supervision processes.
6. **Child-Focused Complaints Processes** - Council will maintain accessible and child-friendly reporting pathways.
7. **Workforce Capability and Training** - Workers will receive training to recognise and respond to child safety concerns.
8. **Safe Physical and Online Environments** - Council will identify and manage risks within physical and digital environments.
9. **Continuous Improvement** - Council will review and improve child safety systems through monitoring and evaluation.
10. **Policies and Procedures** - Council will maintain clear documentation outlining responsibilities and safeguarding practices.

Roles and Responsibilities

All Councillors and workers are expected to carry out the requirements specific to their role in keeping children safe.

Role	Responsibility
Councillors	Are responsible for: • Championing child safe culture across Council and at public engagements. • Endorsing and reviewing this policy and its associated procedures. • Promoting and protecting the participation, voice and safety of children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children and children with disability. • Completing Councillor appropriate child safety training and modelling expected standards of conduct.
CEO (or delegate)	As the head of an entity, the CEO (or delegate) must ensure that Council: • Implements the Child Safe Standards through systems, policies, procedures and processes.

	- Fulfil its responding and reporting obligations through systems to: - Prevent reportable conduct by workers. - Allow anyone (including staff) to report concerns about reportable conduct or convictions involving a worker. - Allow anyone to report concerns about the head of the entity directly to the Queensland Family and Child Commission (the Commission). - Investigate and respond to any reportable allegations or convictions involving a worker.
Executive Leadership Team	Are responsible for modelling the attitudes and behaviours that show they are committed to child safety and wellbeing by: - Championing the child's safe values in Council's commitment statement and Code of Conduct. - Providing guidance to workers within their respective teams as to the content and implementation of this policy.
Managers and Supervisors	Are responsible for modelling the attitudes and behaviours that show they are committed to child safety and wellbeing by: - Providing guidance to workers within their respective teams as to the content and implementation of this policy. - Ensuring that workers understand and implement child safe practices. - Taking part in regular reviews of child safe documents. - Supporting workers with training and resources.
Workers (Employees, volunteers and contractors*) *For clarity, this includes anyone who is defined as a worker of an entity under s8 of the <i>Child Safe Organisations Act 2024</i>	Are responsible for: - Upholding Council's commitment to child safety. - Complying with Council's Code of Conduct. - Meeting the requirements across all other child safe policies and procedures, including child safe recruitment practices and risk management. - Reporting all breaches of policies or any allegations of child harm or abuse to meet reporting obligations. - Completing all mandatory child safe training.

Workforce Responsibilities and Behaviour Standards

All Councillors and workers must act in ways that protect the safety and wellbeing of children.

Councillors and workers must:

- treat children with respect, dignity and fairness
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries
- comply with Council policies relating to child safety
- report concerns about child safety immediately
- participate in required training.

Councillors and workers must not:

- engage in behaviour that may harm or exploit children
- form inappropriate relationships with children
- ignore or dismiss disclosures of harm.

Council may take disciplinary action where breaches of this policy occur.

Councillor and Worker Interactions with Children

Social media use and online communication

Councillors and workers must never communicate privately with children online or on social media. Where direct online communication with a child is required for program or service delivery, consent must be sought from their parent or carer prior to direct contact being made with a child. All online communication with children must take place using a Council-issued devices and accounts.

Photography and the use of images

Photos and videos of children can only be taken with the permission of parents or carers. Parents and carers must also approve of any images used on our social media channels. It is unacceptable for Councillors and workers to take photos or videos of children, other than their own, on personal devices, or to share images without permission.

Physical contact

Physical contact with children should be kept to a minimum and only when required to support safe participation or access to a facility or service. Everyone involved in the organisation is expected to have healthy physical boundaries with children.

Gifts and benefits

Councillors and workers, must never give gifts to children, or bestow benefits of any kind to a child, unless they have direct permission from the child's parents or carers.

Child Illness and injury management

Injuries must be reported to the first aid officer and first aid administered in a safe space within lines of sight of other adults.

Unacceptable Child-to-Child Interactions

While peer relationships are a natural and important part of childhood development, certain behaviours between children and young people are unacceptable and may pose risks to safety and wellbeing.

These behaviours include:

Physical harm	• Hitting, kicking, pushing, biting, or other forms of aggression • Rough play that results in injury or distress • Unwanted physical contact, including hugging or touching without consent
Verbal and emotional harm	• Name-calling, teasing, or mocking • Threatening or intimidating language • Excluding others from activities or social groups • Spreading rumours or gossip
Sexualised behaviour	• Sexual jokes, gestures, or comments • Inappropriate touching or exposure • Simulating adult sexual behaviour • Coercing others into sexualised games or dares

Digital misconduct	• Cyberbullying via messaging apps or social media • Sharing inappropriate or explicit content • Taking or distributing images of others without consent • Engaging in private online conversations without adult supervision
Boundary violations	• Encouraging secrecy or hiding interactions from adults • Manipulating or coercing others into unsafe behaviour • Imitating adult relationships in a romantic or sexual context

All Councillors and workers must:

- Monitor child-to-child interactions during programs and services.
- Intervene promptly and appropriately when unacceptable behaviour occurs.
- Report incidents in accordance with the Child Safe Reporting Procedure.
- Support children involved with compassion and discretion.
- Promote positive peer relationships through education and modelling respectful behaviour.
- Encourage children to speak up if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

Recruitment and Screening

Council will ensure that recruitment and screening processes support the safety of children.

These processes include:

- identifying roles involving contact with children
- conducting appropriate background and reference checks
- complying with Blue Card screening requirements
- maintaining a Blue Card register
- monitoring worker suitability over time.

Responding to Concerns and Allegations

Council will respond promptly to any suspicion, disclosure or allegation of harm involving a child.

Workers must report concerns in accordance with Council procedures and legislative requirements.

Council will ensure that reports are managed appropriately and that the safety and wellbeing of children remains the priority.

Reportable Conduct Scheme

Council will comply with the **Reportable Conduct Scheme commencing 1 July 2026**.

This includes:

- establishing procedures for identifying and reporting reportable conduct
- notifying the relevant regulator within required timeframes
- investigating allegations involving workers
- ensuring procedural fairness during investigations
- providing appropriate support to affected children and families.

Child Safety Risk Management

Council recognises that some programs and activities present higher risks for children. Council will implement a risk management approach that includes:

- assessing risks in activities involving children
- implementing supervision and safety controls
- monitoring facilities and programs
- reviewing incidents to improve safety practices.

Publication, communication and engagement

Council will:

- Publish the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy on Council's website.
- Encourage feedback from children, families, and community members.
- Provide opportunities for children to express what makes them feel safe.

Reporting and investigation

Council's Child Safe Administration Instruction sets out requirements and procedures for complaints, allegations, disclosures and reports, and external reporting obligations.

Training and support

Training is mandated for Councillors and workers regarding their role and responsibility within a Child Safe Organisation. We will provide ongoing training and education in child safety and protection to workers that provide direct services to children and young people.

All Councillors and workers will:

- Receive induction and periodic child safety training to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and are confident to identify, respond to, and report child abuse and harm.
- Be supported to understand and apply child safe practices.
- Be monitored for compliance with child safety obligations.

Policy review and continuous improvement

This policy will be reviewed in accordance with Council's policy review process or immediately following any critical incident or legislative change.

Human rights

Council acknowledges that just like adults, children have human rights across the full spectrum of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Children also have special rights because of their vulnerability, such as the right to protection from exploitation and abuse, the right to be cared for and have a home, and the right to have a say in decisions which affect them.

Council is committed to recognising and protecting these rights when creating policies and procedures that shape the frameworks, standards, behaviours, and actions of Council. An assessment of this Policy determined that it does not limit or affect any human rights under the *Human Rights Act 2019*, and the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Privacy and Information Management

Council will ensure that personal information about children is managed with care and confidentiality in line with *Public Records Act 2023 (Qld)* and the *Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld)*

Relevant Acts

Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)

Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Qld)

Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988

Criminal Code Act 1899 (Qld)

Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)

Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld)

Local Government Act 2009 (Qld)

Public Records Act 2023 (Qld)

Right to Information Act 2009 (Qld)

Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)

Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (Qld)

Related Documents

Child Safe Administration Instruction

Code of Conduct for Councillors

Code of Conduct (Employees)

Working with Children Check (Blue Card)

Procurement Policy

Youth Council Engagement Protocol Administration Instruction

Complaints Management Administration Instruction

Complaints Management Policy

Risk Management General Policy

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This policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council.

Director responsible for Review:

Director People and Organisational Performance

ORIGINALLY ADOPTED: {Enter Date}

CURRENT ADOPTION: {Enter Date}

DUE FOR REVISION: {Enter Date}

REVOKED/SUPERSEDED: {Enter Date}

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Ken Gouldthorp
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER