Overview: draft Kindergarten Asset Management Plan

Yarra Ranges Council is planning for the long-term future of its kindergarten facilities, to help ensure future generations of local families can continue to access safe, welcoming and inclusive early learning spaces.

Recent changes in early childhood education, including the Victorian Government's Best Start, Best Life reforms, are increasing funded kindergarten hours for children across the state. These changes have been factored into Council's draft Kindergarten Asset Management Plan (KAMP).

The draft KAMP outlines how Council plans to invest in its 40 kindergarten facilities over the next 20 years. It considers recent and projected population changes, the conditions of the buildings, accessibility and how vulnerable different parts of the community might be.

What's not covered by the draft KAMP?

For the most part, Council's role in relation to kindergartens is to provide and maintain kindergarten facilities, including managing lease agreements with Early Years Management organisations and kindergarten providers maintaining the physical buildings. The draft KAMP focuses strictly on this role.

It does not cover aspects of kindergarten service delivery that Council does not directly manage, such as session times and hours, staffing, enrolments and family preferences. These are managed by kindergarten providers and the Victorian Government. While they can influence demand for kindergarten services, they are outside the scope of the draft KAMP. Council will continue to monitor these trends, particularly as community needs change.

The one exception is the Sherbrooke Family and Children's Centre, where Council has a direct role in delivering kindergarten services.

What does the draft KAMP aim to achieve?

The draft KAMP will help Council:

- Continue to maintain and lease safe kindergarten facilities.
- Prioritise investment where it is most needed.
- Improve accessibility and inclusion for children and families.
- Support fair and equitable access to kindergarten services across Yarra Ranges.
- Ensure Council's kindergarten buildings remain financially sustainable into the future.
- Work with the Victorian Government and other providers to respond to changing community needs.

How were priorities identified?

Council assessed each kindergarten facility in the municipality using a decision-making framework based on a range of factors, including:

- Current and future demand for kindergarten places.
- Building condition and maintenance requirements.
- Accessibility and suitability for children and families.
- Community needs, including levels of social and economic disadvantage.
- Availability of other kindergarten options nearby.

The decision-making framework was developed using data, evidence and analysis. It was tested with early childhood professionals, asset managers and Councillors, and informed by feedback from a stakeholder focus group that included parents, service providers and Early Years Managers.

Key findings

The assessment found that:

- Kindergarten demand, available places and community needs vary across Yarra Ranges. Some communities may need additional kindergarten places in the future, while others are expected to have more places available than required.
- There are opportunities to improve accessibility at several facilities, particularly in communities that face greater barriers to accessing services.
- The preferred approach is for Council to invest in and improve existing kindergarten facilities rather than building new kindergartens or expanding Council's current portfolio.

Full details of the identified priorities across Yarra Ranges are included in the draft KAMP available at https://shaping.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/KAMP

Proposed recommendations

Over the life of the KAMP, Council will:

- Update accessibility assessments and seek grant funding for facility improvements.
- Monitor changes in kindergarten supply and demand.
- Advocate for State Government investment where additional services are needed.
- Continue maintaining and upgrading facilities as funding becomes available.
- Review priorities regularly to ensure the KAMP responds to changing community needs and government policy.

Full details of the proposed recommendations are included in the draft KAMP available at https://shaping.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/KAMP

Looking ahead

The KAMP is a long-term plan that will be reviewed regularly and updated as new information becomes available. Council will continue to monitor kindergarten demand, community needs and funding opportunities. As these factors change over time, the priorities in the KAMP may also change.