

Council Policy



Policy Title:	Child Safety and Wellbeing
Policy Number:	1.21
Focus Area:	Lead and advocate for our community
Responsibility:	Governance
Meeting Adopted:	20 February 2024 [200224/17]

OBJECTIVE

This Policy has been developed in alignment with state and federal legislation and outlines Council's requirements to minimise risk to children and young people and to ensure their safety and wellbeing across all areas of Richmond Valley Council's operations.

It also informs Councillors, staff and volunteers of Richmond Valley Council about their obligations to act to protect the rights of children and young people and the important role they play in ensuring their safety and wellbeing.

SCOPE

This Policy applies to all Council Officials and all activities and facilities which involve contact with children and young people, including but not limited to:

- Community events;
- Community programs;
- Community engagement activities;
- Richmond-Upper Clarence Regional Library;
- Casino Indoor Sports Stadium;
- Visitor Information Centres;
- Public facilities, including parks and reserves;
- Community spaces hired out by Council;
- Attendance at external facilities, such as visits to schools;
- Attendance at private residences; and
- Traineeships, work experience, under-age employees and volunteer programs.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Richmond Valley Council is committed to be a child safe organisation and share the understanding that children's safety is a universal responsibility. The Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates Council's commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in our local government area.

The Policy reflects a culture of shared responsibility for child safety and will help to ensure that every person who works for or with Council is aware of their responsibilities for upholding child safety principles. Council recognises its duty to ensure children and young people who access our services are safeguarded from harm, recognising that feeling safe can be as important as being safe.

DEFINITIONS

<i>Abuse</i>	A term that is used to describe different types of harm or maltreatment. In this document it refers to types of harm or maltreatment that children and young people may experience.
<i>Child</i>	A person aged under 18 years. Note that under child protection legislation a child is defined as aged under 16 years for mandatory reporting purposes, and as aged under 18 years for the reportable conduct scheme.
<i>Child-related Position</i>	Positions involving work with children and/or young people where the work normally involves being face to face or where contact is more than incidental.
<i>Council Official</i>	Councillors, employees, volunteers, consultants and contractors.
<i>Mandatory Reporting</i>	The legal requirement for any person delivering a service to children or young people, or in management of a service for children or young people, to report concerns for a child at risk of significant harm.
<i>Reportable Conduct</i>	Any offensive behaviour or misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of a child or young person, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ill treatment of a child;- Assault against a child;- Neglect or failure to protect a child from abuse or a harmful environment;- Inflicting psychological harm on a child; and- Sexual offence or misconduct, with or in the presence of a child.
<i>Wellbeing</i>	A sense of comfort, happiness and health.
<i>Working with Children Check (WWCC)</i>	An official clearance to work with children and young people provided by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian in relation to anyone in a position classified as one involving child-related work.
<i>Young Person</i>	A person that is 16 or 17 years of age.

BACKGROUND

In 1990, Australia was one of 194 countries that committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The outcome being that organisations and people working with children in NSW share responsibility for keeping children safe.

In 2017, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the need for action to make organisations across Australia safe for children. Among the recommendations, was the development of standards to ensure a nationally consistent approach to embedding child safe cultures within organisations that engage with children and young people, and to act as a vehicle to give effect to the Royal Commission recommendations.

DEFINITION OF A CHILD-SAFE ORGANISATION

The Office of the Children’s Guardian (OCG) was appointed to provide oversight of the provision of safety, welfare and wellbeing of children via implementation of the *Children’s Guardian Act 2019*.

The OCG provides the following definition of a child-safe organisation:

Child-safe organisations create cultures, adopt strategies and act to prevent harm to children, including sexual abuse.

The Australian and New Zealand Children’s Commissioners and Guardians (ANZCCG) define a child-safe organisation as one that systematically:

- *Creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed*
- *Creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting harm*
- *Responds appropriately to disclosures, allegations and suspicions of harm.*



CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

Richmond Valley Council is committed to implementing the Child Safe Standards:

STANDARD 1:

Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

STANDARD 2:

Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

STANDARD 3:

Families and communities are informed and involved

STANDARD 4:

Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account

STANDARD 5:

People working with children are suitable and supported

STANDARD 6:

Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused

STANDARD 7:

Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training

STANDARD 8:

Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur

STANDARD 9:

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved

STANDARD 10:

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

Richmond Valley Council aims to embed the 10 Child Safe Standards into organisational leadership, culture and practice through the actions outlined below.

STANDARD 1:

Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

- Leaders and staff champion a set of adopted behaviours:
 - We lead by example
 - We take responsibility
 - We do what we say
 - We embrace change
 - We are community focused
 - We are in this together.
- Leaders incorporate risk management of child abuse into decision making and actively monitor risk to child safety.
- Leaders promote a culture of reporting.
- Provide professional development opportunities for Councillors and Council Officers.
- Build awareness of child protection through Council's communication channels.
- Promotion of Child Protection Week and associated initiatives.
- Requirement for staff working in child-related positions to have a current Working with Children Check (WWCC).
- Induction and ongoing training to address Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

STANDARD 2:

Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

- Consult with children when Council is developing plans, strategies and events.
- Commitment to developing communication initiatives that use child-friendly language.
- Display child-friendly posters in key Council sites where children visit, for example, libraries, so that they know who to reach out to if they feel uncomfortable.

STANDARD 3:

Families and communities are informed and involved

- Council's Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy to be readily available on Council's website.
- Distribute child safety information through relevant communication channels.
- Use of child-friendly language where possible.

STANDARD 4:

Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account

- Work to increase knowledge amongst staff with regard to elements that increase a child's vulnerability to harm.
- Leaders and staff adapt activities and services to ensure all children feel included.
- Information is presented in a variety of formats to support and enable improved accessibility.
- Review Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) to ensure children are included.
- Partner with relevant community and government organisations to ensure we have the most current knowledge and understanding of children's needs.
- Liaise with Council's Aboriginal Liaison Officer in the review of policies to ensure diversity in representation of views.
- Display a commitment (through communication and action) to the principles of equity creating opportunities for all community members regardless of age, race, gender, ethnicity or disability to participate in community and civic life.

STANDARD 5:

People working with children are suitable and supported

- Leaders expect that recruitment does not rely solely on the WWCC; with the provision of ongoing training opportunities for staff seen as critical.
- Recruitment processes involve a range of interview questions to establish staff suitability, with reference checks carried out on prospective employees.
- Promotion of Council's Statement of Commitment during recruitment.

STANDARD 6:

Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused

- Leaders create a culture where complaints are taken seriously, and all adults take responsibility for the safety of children.
- Leaders clearly explain that breaches of Council's Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action.
- Accessible procedures are provided to enable children, staff and others to make complaints.
- Confidentiality in complaint-handling processes.
- Review of policies and procedures to enhance child safety processes where applicable.
- Regular review of Council's Complaints Management and Mandatory Reporting Policy, ensuring clarity of information regarding the appropriate reporting channels.
- Provide ongoing support to a child or young person during the complaint process.

STANDARD 7:

Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training

- Leaders provide ongoing education and training opportunities for staff.
- Raise awareness of the Complaints Management and Mandatory Reporting Policy, together with the Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.
- Leaders encourage young employees to participate in decisions that affect them.

STANDARD 8:

Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur

- Leaders set clear expectations for behavioural standards for staff interacting with children and young people in physical and online settings.
- Risk assessments to be undertaken to identify areas where adults have opportunities to interact with children unsupervised.
- Add child protection as a risk to relevant business units within Council's Risk Management Framework.
- Regional libraries membership of eSafe Library program. Posters are displayed with information on who young people can contact if they feel unsafe when they are in the library buildings.

STANDARD 9:

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved

- Leaders maintain and promote a culture of continuous improvement to ensure that policies and procedures are implemented.
- Children are supported to provide feedback and this information is acted upon.
- Review of Council Policies every four years, or sooner if legislative changes warrant it.

STANDARD 10:

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe









- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, together with Council's Code of Conduct and complaint handling procedures are publicly accessible.
- Documents are maintained in accordance with NSW record keeping requirements.
- Identification of workplace 'champions' to take the lead in implementation of child safety initiatives and principles.

CHILD SAFE CODE OF CONDUCT





This Code of Conduct applies to:

- Councillors;
- Staff (including full-time, part-time, casual, temporary, term and agency staff);
- Volunteers; and
- Contractors engaged by Richmond Valley Council.

WE WILL

-  Treat children and young people with respect and value their ideas and opinions
-  Act as positive role models in our conduct with children and young people
-  Avoid any unnecessary physical contact with children and young people
-  Report any misconduct or inappropriate behaviour
-  Contact police if a child is at immediate risk of abuse, by phoning 000
-  Encourage young people to access resources for their overall health and wellbeing
-  Report any suspicions based on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm to a supervisor or the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111.
-  Report any cyberbullying of a young person to www.esafety.gov.au/

WE WILL NOT

-  Shame, humiliate, oppress or degrade children or young people
-  Unlawfully discriminate against any child
-  Engage in an activity with a child or young person that is likely to harm them
-  Initiate unnecessary contact with a child or young person
-  Be alone with a child or young person unnecessarily
-  Show favouritism through the provision of gifts or inappropriate attention
-  Arrange contact, including online contact, outside of Richmond Valley Council's approved services, programs and activities
-  Photograph or video a child or young person without the consent of the child and their parent or guardian
-  Engage in discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of a child or young person
-  Use inappropriate language in the presence of a child or young person

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Position	Responsibility
General Manager	To lead Councillors and staff (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of and compliance with this policy.
Leadership Group	To communicate, implement and comply with this policy; whilst promoting principles of child safety.
People and Culture	To encourage and implement recruitment and employment related processes that comply with this policy.
All Council Staff, Volunteers and Contractors	To comply with and follow the requirements of this policy.

STAFF TRAINING

Council will provide ongoing training and education (as deemed appropriate) in child safety and protection to staff and representatives that provide direct services to children and young people.

Child safety training and inductions will also be provided to all staff to ensure staff are aware of their legal responsibilities and are confident to identify, respond to and report child abuse.

This policy is available on Council's Intranet, together with the public-facing website: www.richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au.

REFERENCES

Council policies & plans

- Code of Conduct
- Complaints Management and Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Community Strategic Plan
- Community Engagement Policy
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- Library Code of Conduct

Legislation

- *Children's Guardian Act 2019*
- *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*
- *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012*
- *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*
- *Local Government Act 1993*

Resources

- NAPCAN www.napcan.org.au
- Australian Human Rights Commission <https://childsafe.humanrights.gov.au>
- SNAICC - National Voice for our Children www.snaicc.org.au/resources
- Office of the Children's Guardian <https://ocg.nsw.gov.au>

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed by Council at the time of any relevant legislative changes, compliance requirements or at least every four years.

Version Number	Date	Reason / Comments
1	18/10/2022	New policy
2	20/02/2024	Review incorporating the addition of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key Responsibilities• Staff Training• Appendix A – Positions that require a WWCC• Appendix B – Office of the Children's Guardian Online Child Safety Self-Assessments

The Child Safe Standards



APPENDIX A – POSITIONS REQUIRING A WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK (WWCC)

Council has identified the following roles that that require a working with children check, due to the nature of their work involving interaction with children on more than an incidental basis.

Position
General Manager
Manager Regional Library
Casino Library Coordinator
Library Technician – Collection and Marketing
Library Assistant / Branch Librarian
Coordinator Programs and Events
Mobile Library Operator
Sports Stadium Coordinator
Sport & Recreation Officer
Sports Stadium Assistant
People Engagement Coordinator
Training and Development Officer

APPENDIX B – OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN’S GUARDIAN ONLINE SAFETY SELF-ASSESSMENTS

Self-Assessments are completed by a number of staff across Council from time to time, to check the organisation’s performance and progress towards embedding the Child Safe Standards into practice. The reports from the assessments offer suggestions on what we, as Council, can do next, and into the future, to make our organisation safer for children.

Assessments were last carried out in January 2024 by the following staff:

- Manager Regional Library
- Sports Stadium Coordinator
- People Engagement Coordinator
- Governance Administration Officer.

Outcome of self-assessments

- Council is emerging and growing in capabilities to implement the Child Safety Standards. We are working towards a more proactive and resilient approach.
- Council is performing strongly in the following areas:
 - Leadership, culture and governance;
 - Family and community involvement;
 - Physical and online environments;
 - Equity and diversity; and
 - Human resource management.
- The areas identified for improvement include:
 - Participation and empowerment;
 - Child-focused complaints process;
 - Training;
 - Continuous review and improvement; and
 - Policies and procedures.

The Office of the Children’s Guardian has resources available such as videos, handbooks, guides and free training: www.ocg.nsw.gov.au.