

## 4.2 Early Years Advisory Committee

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### SUMMARY

The role of the Early Years Advisory Committee (EYAC) is to provide advice to Council on early years issues and to promote greater awareness and understanding in the local community of early years services through the lens of the Council Child Youth and Seniors Plan 2021-2025.

The current Terms of Reference require an annual report to Council, to advise on the topics and key themes discussed by the Committee in the preceding year. This report provides the annual report of EYAC activities and achievements for 2024.

The current Terms of Reference conclude at the end of April 2025, following an administrative review in June 2019. Following review, an updated draft Terms of Reference is provided (per Attachment 1), with a marked-up version as (per Attachment 2) with a copy of the current Terms of Reference as (per Attachment 3).

The membership term for two members of the Early Years Advisory Committee will conclude at the end of June 2025. Both members have been invited to extend for a further two-year period in accordance with the Knox Council Committees Policy.

### RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

1. Note the report on the annual activities undertaken, and subsequent feedback and advice for the Early Years Advisory Committee between January to December 2024.
2. Adopt the Terms of Reference for the Early Years Advisory Committee as set out in Attachment 1.
3. Appoint the following applicants for a further term to the Early Years Advisory Committee for the period July 2025 – June 2027 presented (per Confidential Attachment 4).

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Category:</b>
1.	Professional Representative
2.	Professional Representative

### 1. DISCUSSION

The Early Years Advisory Committee acts as a voice for our local early years sector in continuously improving the planning and the delivery of early years services and to provide feedback on strategic directions and projects across the whole organisation from the perspective of children and families in Knox. The Committee's work involves promoting community awareness about the importance of early childhood health, learning and development, including responding to local community needs. The Committee represents the voice of their community on matters relating to

early years to help drive better outcomes for planning, delivery and service practices for the early years.

The Knox Community Plan 2021-2031 and Knox Council Plan 2021-2025 set the vision to plan for the needs of children and families in the community. The Child Youth and Seniors Plan 2021-2025 outlines the Council's commitment to building an accessible and inclusive community where all ages have opportunities to thrive and participate in community life. This Plan has set the strategic framework for the ongoing work and discussions with the Committee, focusing on child health, wellbeing and learning and the right to participate in matters that affect them.

The current EYAC Terms of Reference outlines the Committees key focus, which is to:

**1. Provide advice and recommendations on implementing the early years key objectives of the Child Youth and Seniors Plan as incorporated into the Community and Council Plans.**

The advice and recommendations in relation to this plan include the following:

- Agreed priorities.
- The ongoing outcomes and achievements of the Child, Youth and Seniors Plan 2021-2025 (early years) focus areas.
- Effective communication and consultation strategies to facilitate engagement with the community and other key stakeholders on the development and implementation of the Child, Youth and Seniors Plan 2021-2025 (early years) focus areas.
- Provide advice to Council on matters impacting families and children and the related services within the Knox community.
- Identify emerging key research, policy and legislative issues that might impact the implementation of the Child, Youth and Seniors Plan 2021-2025.
- Consider advice and information made available through other Council advisory and community consultation processes related to families and children and/or local early years services.

This annual report provides a synopsis of the EYAC activities and achievements for 2024.

**1.1 EYAC Topics and Key Themes for 2024**

The Committee discussed and endorsed a proposed work plan for 2024. Key themes emerged from initial collaboration discussions with members. The issues reflected Council's planning, current projects and reviewing of policies. In 2024, the EYAC met on five occasions with five formal EYAC meetings and one formal group Committee meeting specifically to discuss the Council and Health and Wellbeing Plan (Shaping our Priorities Workshop) where a few EYAC members attended on behalf of the whole Committee.

The consultations during the Committee meetings focused on the following topics, where members provided feedback and had input into the following Council Initiates, Policy and Plans:

- Knox Community Engagement Policy.
- Shaping our Priorities Workshop (Council, Health and Wellbeing Plan).
- Knox Cycling Plan.
- Knox Central Planning.

- Kindergartens in Knox.
- Gambling Policy.
- Review of EYAC Terms of Reference.

**EYAC Committee Insights and Considerations**

Throughout discussions in 2024 EYAC members identified the following three themes for Council to note:

- **Early Years Playgrounds** are an important investment in our open spaces. EYAC members’ view continued investment yields significant social, economic and health returns to our Knox community. Encouraging outdoor play fosters a natural connection, with the inclusion of elements like trees for shade, rocks and water features for enhanced play experience. They wish to see continued investment to change and make improvements, making specific mention to consider multiple ages and availability of public toilets and change facilities to encourage families to stay longer and enjoy the open spaces. In relation to their joy of using our open spaces they are concerned on the use of pesticides used in public parks and playgrounds, and would like to see considerations to alternative methods, creating gardens inclusive of planting to reduce the need for consistent spraying.
- **Children’s Voice** is an important feature for the Committee and continuing to afford opportunities for children to shape our community. They would like to understand the changing priorities, needs and challenges facing children, young people and their families. The Committee were very excited to hear Council’s endorsement of the Child Friendly City and Community Charter and will support ongoing advocacy for the Charter and Principles.
- **Family Violence** is an escalating issue for women, members raising the rate of women being tragically murdered in Australia is one in every four days. Observations of higher rates of self-reporting through the Orange Door Program, indicating that the Orange Door Program is providing the first and most accessible response for local women. Local organisations support families with resources, and provide online workshops for parents, caregivers and educators on Body Safety and Consent. Members acknowledge that we all have a responsibility to keep our community safe.

**1.2 Review of the Terms of Reference**

The EYAC members were invited to review the EYAC purpose and objectives on the current Terms of Reference at a meeting in October 2024. The members were asked first to review the Purpose Statement through a workshop activity.

The second workshop activity was to provide feedback on the current objectives, to keep, change, or remove them and replace them with something more appropriate. Table 1 outlines the members’ feedback and comments.

**Table 1 – EYAC Review of Terms of Reference**

EYAC Comments Received on Terms of Reference Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advise and Advocate for child friendly environments across all areas of Knox Council.</li><li>• Words to use – participation of families in engaging ways.</li><li>• Focus on issues that impact young children and the important people in their lives, (parents, grandparents, educators).</li><li>• To advise and support families (parents) and, therefore, children.</li></ul>
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	<p>How can the community support families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children as active citizens of Knox. Equitable access for all.</li> <li>• Provide a range of perspectives to inform matters that have an influence upon the lives of children and families.</li> <li>• Why? To have /give a voice to our young children to impact the future.</li> <li>• Broaden lens re: all things happening in the community. Incorporated 'Child's Voice'.</li> <li>• Remove reference to Child, Youth and Seniors Plan to broaden scope.</li> </ul>
EYAC Comments Received on Objectives	<p>Members undertook a Keep/Change/Remove workshop activity for the Objectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overwhelming support from all members present is to change the objectives.</li> </ul>
Further Points Made to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove reference to Child, Youth and Seniors Plan and replace with one reference to consider the Plan more broadly.</li> <li>• Incorporate "Child's Voice" into objectives.</li> <li>• Thinking about diverse families: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Multicultural/Multigenerational/LGBTIQ+/Homeless, just to name a few.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The final DRAFT of the Terms of Reference was provided to the members in the meeting in February 2025, where the members unanimously recommend the updated purpose and objectives and minor administrative changes to be formally endorsed by Council as (per Attachment 1).

Other minor changes to the Terms of Reference include administrative changes aligned with the Terms of Reference for Council's other Advisory Committees and the change of the review date from three years to every four years.

### 1.3 EYAC Selection Process and Recommendations

Membership of EYAC consists of a maximum of six community members and four professional members comprising a total of ten members and up to two Councillors. Further details are outlined (per Confidential Attachment 4).

## 2. ENGAGEMENT

**Annual Report** – members of EYAC bring a diverse range of viewpoints and advice to each meeting for debate and discussion. Through the agreed work plan and considerations on various Council projects for 2024, EYAC members have had the opportunity to consider and discuss several key issues impacting the lives of children and their families in the Knox community.

An experience shared below from a EYAC member about their participation in the Early Years Advisory Committee:

"It's great to be able to be the voice for our youngest members of the community. I feel that this Committee brings together a vast range of experiences, with all views, ideas and opinions valued. I believe we are listened to by the Council as our thoughts are shared by the Council representatives. The feedback loop, whereby some presenters come back to

us to share what has been done since our discussion is fantastic as it provides purpose for the Committee.”

**EYAC Selection Process** – it is a requirement that the appointment to a Council Advisory Committee be in accordance with the Knox City Council Committee Policy. This Policy requires that every effort be made to ensure a representative cross section of people from the municipality is selected to the Committee as appropriate.

Two Early Years Committee members have served a term of two years, coming to an end in June 2025. Both members have applied for a further term of two years from July 2025 to June 2027. As a result, and as (per Confidential Attachment 4) these 2 internal applications are recommended for a further term of 2 years.

Should Council approve the recommendation of these two applications, they will continue in their current role as Early Years committee professional members continuing from July 2025 and conclude in June 2027.

### **3. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- Data from the latest 2021 Census provides a snapshot of the young people in the Knox community. There are just over 5% of children living in Knox who are under four years of age.
- The Child, Youth and Seniors Plan 2021-2025 identifies the importance of participation in early years services and connection with support services to maximise all children’s opportunities to thrive.
- Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data indicates approximately 30% of the early years population in Knox is at risk for developmental vulnerability, however, this data can be interpreted as approximately 70% of the early year's population living in Knox are consistently on track in all developmental domains.

### **4. CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS**

Implementation of the recommendation is considered to have no direct implications or has no direct impacts upon Council’s Net Zero 2030 target, the Community Net Zero 2040, exposure to climate risks or climate change adaptation.

### **5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

The EYAC continues to play a key role in considering issues and advising Council in terms of child friendly spaces, which promote the health and wellbeing of Knox children and families into the future.

### **6. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

The Early Years Department supports the administration of Council’s EYAC. Officer time of approximately ten hours each month is absorbed within the department budget along with an annual catering and supplies allowance of \$2,600.

### **7. RISKS**

Advice and recommendations provided by EYAC contribute to mitigate Council’s risk in meeting its obligation in relation to the Child Safe Standards, particularly Standard 3 – Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken

seriously and Standard 4 – Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

## **8. KNOX COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2025**

### **Opportunity & Innovation**

Strategy 1.2 - Encourage and support opportunities for skills development and lifelong learning for all people in Knox.

### **Civic Engagement & Integrity**

Strategy 5.1 - Provide opportunities for all people in Knox to have their say.

Strategy 5.3 - Ensure our processes are transparent and decisions are accountable.

## **9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The officers contributing to and responsible for this report have no conflicts of interest requiring disclosure under Chapter 5 of the Governance Rules of Knox City Council.

## **10. STATEMENT OF COMPATIBILITY**

There are no legislative obligations under the Human Rights Charter, Child Safe Standards or the Gender Equity Act that are incompatible with the recommendation in this report.

## **11. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Attachment 4 is included in the confidential agenda, as it contains confidential information pursuant to Council's Governance Rules and Section 66 of the Local Government Act 2020, as it relates to personal information, being the names and details of prospective committee members which would be unreasonable to disclose publicly, or to disclosure before they are appointed;

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Attachment 1 - Draft Terms of Reference EYAC 2025 03 2029 03 [**4.2.1** - 6 pages]
2. Attachment 2 - Marked up Draft Terms of Reference EYAC 2025 2029 [**4.2.2** - 9 pages]
3. Attachment 3 - Terms of Reference EYAC 2022 2025 [**4.2.3** - 8 pages]