



STRATHBOGIE  
SHIRE  
COUNCIL

HEALTHY CHILDREN AND  
FAMILIES' PLAN 2012-2014



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## Why we need a Healthy Children and Families' Plan

This is Strathbogie Shire Council's Municipal Early Years Plan. It will celebrate our vision for the future of the early years; one where children and families are connected to their community, culture and place in ways that maximise their potential and improve their overall health, development, learning and wellbeing. The aim of this document is to plan ahead to improve and strengthen local support for children and families, so that all children from birth have the best start in life.

Our *Healthy Children and Families' Plan* draws on conclusive international evidence that the early years are the most crucial in children's development and strongly influence their life chances. During the period from birth to eight years, children experience more rapid brain development and acquire more skills and knowledge than in any other period in their lives.

These years are a time of great optimism and promise. Yet, they are also a time when children need high quality care and services. For this reason, our plan includes ways for making communities more child and family friendly by considering:

- Spaces and places for children and families.
- Neighbourhoods for children and families.
- Lifestyle choices for children and families.
- Services and supports for children and families.
- Economies for children and families.

The *Healthy Children and Families' Plan* outlines:

- A snapshot of Strathbogie Shire Council's children and families.
- Our current services for children and families in the Shire.
- What we are going to do in the next two years to support children and families.
- Who we are going to work with to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

We have committed ourselves to preventing violence against women in our community, with Council adopting the Women's Charter in 2011. Organisational support for annual White Ribbon Day has been included in our Chief Executive Officer's Contract – the first Council in Victoria to do so. We work under the Right to Respect policy framework to ensure our approach aligns with other levels of government. By addressing these areas through strategic planning, policy making and partnerships, we can build stronger, healthier and more child and family friendly communities into the future. Our commitment is to work with families, including grandparents and other extended family members, and the community to support the achievement of best possible outcomes for all children in our Shire.



## Our community

The Strathbogie Shire is located in north central Victoria and is made up of unique and vibrant communities. It is known for its small towns full of built heritage, rural living areas with rich and varied landscapes, and diverse agricultural enterprises. We are proud of the opportunities our residents have for physical, educational, artistic and environmental activities. Tourism is a growing contributor to our economic, social and cultural wealth. Officially, we have been called the 'Horse Capital of Victoria', and are renowned for our leading thoroughbred studs and racehorses. Strathbogie is named after an early property in the area, which was thought to be named after the valley of the Bogie River in Aberdeen, Scotland.

## Where we live

Strathbogie Shire is a predominantly rural area covering a vast geographical area of 3,302km<sup>2</sup>. While over 50 per cent of our people choose to live in the towns of Euroa, Nagambie, Violet Town and Avenel and their surrounding districts many residents choose to live in smaller rural townships and on land holdings<sup>2</sup>. Land is used mainly for agriculture, particularly wool, grain, cattle, horse studs and vineyards.

## Our population

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimate data, the Shire's total population in 2010 was 10,012. We have experienced steady growth of 1.0 per cent since 2005<sup>2</sup>. It is projected that the Shire's population will continue to grow to 10,311 by 2021<sup>3</sup>. Strathbogie Shire has of late become more popular as a lifestyle and retirement destination for people leaving Melbourne. Many have been attracted to the 'tree change' phenomenon as they seek a better life/work balance. While over the next 30 years, the population will continue to grow and will be increasingly comprised of older age groups, there is potential for the Shire to attract a younger demographic who live in the Shire but commute to the larger centres of Shepparton and Benalla for work.

## Our standard of living

As most children depend on their parents or family unit for financial support, the family's socioeconomic status is a key component in measuring child health and wellbeing. The main factors which inform socioeconomic status can include labour force status, family income, educational attainment and English proficiency of the child's parents.

Strathbogie Shire has a relatively low proportion of high income households (those earning \$1,700 per week or more) and more households with low incomes (those earning less than \$500 per week) than many other parts of regional Victoria<sup>2</sup>. In 2006, 10.0 per cent of the households earned a high income, and 28.8 per cent were low income households, compared with 14.1 per cent and 23.9 per cent respectively for Regional Victoria.



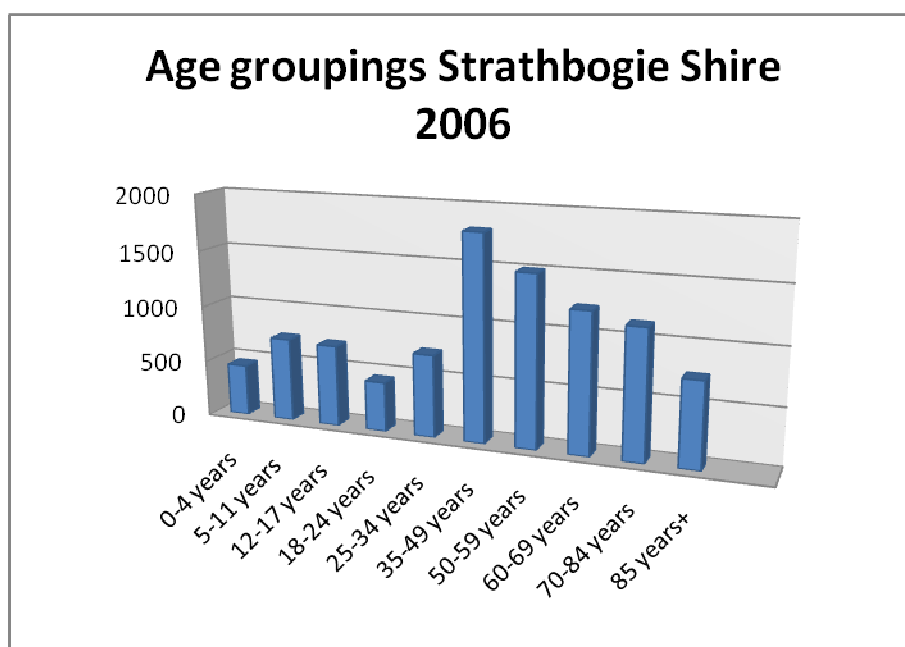
Strathbogie's unemployment rate, as of June 2010, sat on 4.7 per cent compared to the national average of 5.2 per cent<sup>1</sup>. For couple families with children aged 0 to 8 years with one parent employed and one not in the labour force, Strathbogie has one of the highest percentages (37.3 per cent) in regional Victoria<sup>13</sup>.

2006 Census data indicates that Strathbogie has a lower proportion of the population who had completed Year 12 than the Victorian average.

## Our age

At June 30, 2006 there were 572,710 children aged 0 to 8 years in Victoria, representing 11.2 per cent of the Victorian population. In regional Victoria, there were 158,283 children aged 0 to 8 years, representing 11.4 per cent of regional Victoria's population. In Strathbogie, there were 907 children aged 0 to 8 years making up 9.1 per cent of the Strathbogie population<sup>13</sup>. In 2006, 21.2 per cent of Strathbogie's population was aged between 0 and 17 compared with 25.4 per cent for Regional Victoria.

The Shire's age structure has a higher proportion of people in the older age groups (60+) than the rest of Victoria<sup>3</sup>. In addition, there are a smaller proportion of people in the 18 to 24 age group, which is often associated with movement away from the rural areas by younger people in search of educational and employment opportunities. Strathbogie Shire has the second highest median age in the state sitting at 49.7 years.





## Our children and families

### Family structure

A *'family'* is defined by the ABS as two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household. Based on the 2006 ABS data, there were 2,570 families living in Strathbogie: 28.6 per cent were couple families with children; 51.2 per cent couples without children and 8.6 per cent were one parent families<sup>2</sup>. In 2006, 0.9 per cent of the total population in Strathbogie were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent compared to 0.6 per cent across Victoria<sup>2</sup>.

### Ethnicity

As at the 2006 Census, 23.9 per cent of Australia's total population and 23.8 per cent of the population of Victoria were overseas-born. This compares to just 8.3 per cent of people in the Strathbogie Shire being overseas-born. Of those 8.3 per cent of overseas-born Strathbogie residents, 80 per cent of them speak only English. This compares to 40.7 per cent of overseas-born people Victoria-wide<sup>2</sup>.

### Birth rate

The number of births each year in the Strathbogie Shire has risen from a rate of 1.9 babies per woman in 2005 to 2.2 in 2008<sup>2</sup>. This is above the national average. Overall, Australia had a total fertility rate of 1.97 babies per woman in 2008, up from 1.92 in 2007 and the highest since 1977 (2.01). The fertility rate of a population is the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime.

### Breastfeeding rates

Breastfeeding is associated with improved nutritional outcomes for babies and decreased infections. Based on the 2007/08 figures, the percentage of infants fully breastfed on discharge from hospital in Strathbogie (56.3 per cent) was significantly lower than the percentage fully breastfed on discharge in the Hume Region (77.0 per cent) and lower than the percentage fully breastfed in rural Victoria (74.7 per cent)<sup>8</sup>.

### Immunisation rates

Based on 2009 figures, the percentage of children aged 24 to 27 months who were fully immunised in Strathbogie (93.94 per cent) and the percentage of children aged 60 to 63 months who were fully immunised in Strathbogie (96.43 per cent) were both above the Victorian average<sup>8</sup>. However, the percentage of Strathbogie children aged 12 to 15 months who were fully immunised (86.96 per cent) was lower than the Victorian average (92.39 per cent).





## Maternal and Child Health services

In 2007-08, there were 553 children aged from two weeks to three years and six months attending Maternal and Child Health (MCH) key age stage visits<sup>9</sup>. Participation rates were below the regional average for four month, 12 month and 18 month visits, but significantly above the 3.5 year old rate. Data from the Maternal & Child Health Services Annual Report (2007/2008) indicates that the main reasons for child referral were *illness* (44 referrals) and *development* (27 referrals).

## Early education

Kindergarten enrolment is associated with child wellbeing, especially for those children at risk or at disadvantage. In 2009, Strathbogie preschools had enrolments of 83.7 per cent of the population; a 9 per cent increase from 2008 figures<sup>7</sup>. This was below the state average of 92.7 per cent. In March 2010, the total number of enrolments in funded kindergarten programs for four year old children in our Shire was 125.

Strathbogie Shire has the highest numbers of average absence days for Year 1 students enrolled in government schools in regional Victoria at 16 per child<sup>13</sup>.

## Disability

In 2010, it is estimated that 27 per cent of people living in the Strathbogie Shire will have a reported disability. This figure includes over 120 children (0 to 14 years)<sup>11</sup>.

## Child protection

Child abuse and neglect are a major issue of public concern in Australia. Child abuse and neglect can be related to a number of risk factors including poor parental mental health, substance misuse, low socioeconomic status leading to economic stress and disadvantage, and family disruption. Children who are abused or neglected or have a parent who cannot protect or care for them adequately may be notified to child protection authorities. The child protection re-notification rate is supported as an indicator of child safety. The client re-notification rate is the number of clients renotified within 12 months as a percentage of the total number of clients notified during the reference period.

In 2005–06, 30.9 per cent of child protection notifications for children aged 0 to 8 years in Victoria were re-notifications. The percentage was higher in regional Victoria (34.2 per cent) than in metropolitan Melbourne (28.7 per cent). The rate of child protection re-notifications in the Strathbogie Shire is less than that of other rural Victorian areas but higher than metropolitan Melbourne. In 2008-2009, the percentage of child protection re-reports in the 0 to 8 age group for Strathbogie was 47.8% which was significantly higher than Victoria overall at 31.2%<sup>12</sup>.



## Our challenges

### Coordination of services

We believe an integrated system of services is the best way to respond to emerging needs in local communities. As a rural Council that is diverse and spread out, Strathbogie experiences significant challenges in delivering a range of equitable services to children and families across a broad range of socioeconomic and geographical scenarios within the Shire. Population dispersion of small and medium-sized rural towns, all with unique and varied characteristics, along with funding constraints place distinctive and sometimes competing demands on the early years service system. Increased coordination of visiting services is required to improve service delivery and offer more options particularly in child care. This can be achieved through improved partnerships, exchanging ideas and information, program planning, service delivery and pooling of resources.

### Communication

Convenient, accessible and coordinated sources of information on available services and programs for children and families are important in a Shire such as Strathbogie. Parents need access to information, advice and training that responds to their needs. Lack of information about relevant health and support services available across the Shire, especially for newcomers, was identified as a major concern for residents and stakeholders in recent consultations. A more coordinated and targeted approach to the provision of information is required. We also recognise the increasing need for public and private health providers to exchange information, network regularly and communicate effectively so that families and children can obtain quality services and programs.

### Infrastructure

Public spaces and services are essential for children and families. These include footpaths, playgrounds, shops, children's centres, leisure facilities, libraries and other public amenities. One of the significant challenges facing any local government is managing its assets to meet the needs of its community. The funding challenge is to get the balance right between demand to provide new and improved assets with maintenance of existing assets.

### Leadership and advocacy

Leadership, advocacy and policy direction were raised as important areas for inclusion in this plan. The needs of children and families are a real priority, strategically and operationally, in future planning for Council. We must continue to foster strong partnerships with other service providers, communities and neighbouring councils along with federal and state governments, in order to meet the challenges faced by families in the Strathbogie Shire.



## Community based services

It is appropriate that services for families and children be managed and delivered at a local level by community groups and volunteers. In this way, our diverse communities receive the specialised support they require. However, this support must be adequately resourced and appreciated. Council acknowledges that to release the capacity of communities, strong and supportive processes and systems must be put into place so that volunteer groups do not become burnt out and suffer from loss of expertise.



## How we cater for children and families

### A snapshot of our Shire

Whilst families in the Strathbogie Shire have access to a range of services that support children's health and wellbeing, for many families this access is limited. These services include playgroups, long day care, outside school hours care, kindergartens and schools, as well as health care, MCH services, community education, playgrounds and cultural experiences such as libraries and gardens.

Targeted and intensive visiting services provide further support for children and families. These include family support and counselling, specialist children's services and mental health services which may be required by families with higher needs, or in crisis and by those who have children with additional needs.

Early years services are characterised by their diversity. In Strathbogie Shire, service providers include local, state and federal governments, non-government organisations, private providers, community groups or a combination of these. Funding and regulation of early years services may also be the responsibility of one or more of these levels of government, private providers or non-government organisations.

Council contributes to the wellbeing of children and families by providing:

- Leadership for local planning and development.
- A range of direct services and community events for families.
- Support for local community organisations through community grants and facilities.
- Advice to other levels of government on how to meet the needs of Strathbogie's children and families.

Council's contribution to the early years includes substantial financial contribution to the MCH service, provision and maintenance of some facilities for preschool and child care cooperatives, support to mobile library vans and the mobile immunisation program, and the Strathbogie Community Grants Program.

### Maternal and Child Health

From the birth of their children, all families have access to the universal MCH service. MCH nurses work with families across the Shire to offer support and advice on a broad range of health and development issues. The service is provided from four centres within the Shire.

A variety of services are provided by Council's MCH service including support and advice on breastfeeding, family health, new parent groups, children's growth and key age and stage developmental assessments of children aged birth to six years, through centre-based programs and home visits. Additionally at various times Positive Parenting Programs are delivered in partnership with key agencies in various locations throughout the Shire.





## Child care

The federal government is responsible for ensuring families have access to quality child care services and provides child care benefit payments to eligible families to improve affordability. While a range of child care options, including both community-based and private long day care, occasional care, before and after school care and Active After School Programs are offered across the Strathbogie Shire, choice is limited for families depending on location and the size of the service.

In the Shire, community-based child care is highly regarded by families, leading to high demand for places. There are suggestions the current operational hours and models of care need to be assessed with a view to increasing their flexibility and responsiveness, thus improving the range of options available to meet parental demand. The issue of more convenient child care was identified as important at stakeholder group discussions.

## Playgroups

Playgroups provide developmentally appropriate quality play opportunities at a critical time in a child's development. Playgroups also enhance parenting skills, capacity, confidence and enjoyment, promote social networks and community connectedness and create pathways to other services. The main feature that distinguishes playgroups from other early years services is that the parent or caregiver attends and participates in the playgroup's activities and is responsible for their child's safety when they are at the playgroup. There are currently four playgroups operating throughout the Shire.

## Preschools and primary schools

In the Strathbogie Shire there is a range of programs offered for both three year old fun/activity groups and four year old preschool. Apart from ABC Euroa, programs are supported by community based committees of management. Preschools at Euroa, Nagambie and Avenel are governed by a cluster management model from the Goulburn Region Preschool Association, and the preschool at Violet Town is managed by the North East Regional Preschool Association. Three year old sessions are available at all preschools and enrolments are coordinated by the committees of management at each establishment. These programs are not subsidised by the state government and are dependent on four year old enrolment requirements.

There are eight primary schools in the Shire, with Euroa Primary School and Violet Town Primary School the two providers of out of school hours child care. Council recognises there are opportunities for more efficient use of current resources and infrastructure, in particular by using school buildings for a range of community activities. Additionally, there is a well established community of homeschooling families who would additionally benefit from shared resources. To achieve this we will develop strong partnerships with schools in line



with *The Schools as Community Facilities: Policy Framework and Guidelines* and explore opportunities to co-locate services and share school facilities.

## Playgrounds

Strathbogie has currently 17 playgrounds throughout the Shire, with the majority located in smaller sites and primarily targeted at children aged three to seven years. The play equipment used has been generally provided by commercial suppliers. Council undertakes an ongoing audit on all facilities to identify their current condition and the level of risk in the likelihood of an accident or injury occurring. This is documented in the Strathbogie Shire Council Playground Strategy.

## Libraries

The Goulburn Valley Regional Library, on behalf of Strathbogie Shire Council, operates three local libraries in Euroa, Nagambie and Violet Town. These offer regular Rhyme Time and Preschool Story Time sessions for parents and children to enjoy. A mobile library visits Strathbogie, Avenel and Longwood. Membership is free and open to everyone.

There are no toy libraries operating in the Strathbogie Shire at the moment.

## A coordinated approach

Throughout the first eight years of children's lives, early childhood professionals collect important information that provides a rich picture of each child's health and wellbeing. It is important that families and early childhood professionals access and share this information so that they can build a whole picture of the child. To achieve this, Council will partner with families, schools, early childhood services, health agencies, neighbouring Shires and municipalities, privately owned child care centres, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, relevant state and federal government bodies and the broader community. Better linkages between MCH, child care and preschool, and services such as playgroups, nursing mother's groups and health services will also increase the level of support and access for families to information and services required in the early years. Using an integrated approach to the provision of information on key parenting and early learning issues has been identified by community members as a key issue for our Shire.



Overview of early years services in the Strathbogie Shire	Occasional child care	Long day care	Family day care	Playgroups	Playgrounds	Maternal & Child Health	Preschool/ kindergarten	Before /after school	Before/after kinder care	Primary schools	Visiting health services	General practice	Hospital (non-public)	Libraries	Mobile libraries	Immunisation clinics	Swimming pools
Euroa	●	●		● ●	● ● ● ●	●	●	●		● ●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Nagambie	●			●	● ● ● ● ●	●	●			● ●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Violet Town	●			●	● ● ● ● ● ●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Avenel					●	●	●			●	●				●	●	●
Longwood				●	●					●	●				●		
Strathbogie				●	●					●					●		



## Our plan for healthy children and families

### Act on research

There has been increasing evidence in both national and international research of the importance of the early years in setting the stage for later life. Much of this recognition has been drawn from research on early brain development. This points to the significance of secure and caring relationships in children's early years. Nurturing and responsive care given in the first years of life, linked with quality early childhood development programs and good nutrition, can improve considerably children's learning, behaviour and health. We know we can make a difference by making sure the most appropriate supports are available to children in their local communities.

Other key research findings include:

- Children are considered active agents in life rather than passive recipients.
- Brain development is at its peak from birth to eight years.
- The number of children abused and neglected in Australia rose steadily over the past 12 years with a marked increase in child protection notifications in rural areas (Australia Institute of Health and Welfare 2006).
- Substance abuse is one of the main reasons for the increase in child abuse with up to 80per cent of child abuse cases being related to abuse of alcohol, heroin and amphetamines (Families Australia).
- Family breakdown affects over half of all marriages in Australia.
- Post natal depression affects one in seven women in Australia. Lack of treatment and support can lead to devastating impacts on the mother, the infant and family.
- Children who are the target of, or witness to, family violence are affected in their cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social development.
- Early identification and intervention are crucial to maintaining children's health and wellbeing.
- Strong partnerships enhance children's success in learning.





## Follow good models

### United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty that grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights. Australia signed the Convention in August 1990, and it came into effect for Australia in January 1991. The convention gives children and young people over 40 substantive rights. These include the right to:

- Special protection measures and assistance.
- Access to services such as education and health care.
- Develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential.
- Grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding.
- Be informed about and participate in achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner.

Strathbogie Shire Council acknowledges the convention and applies its principles to all children in the Shire without discrimination.

### Social determinants of health

Social determinants of health are the primary determinants of whether people stay healthy or become ill. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. They acknowledge that poorer people have substantially shorter life expectancies and more illnesses than the rich. Early childhood experience is a critical determinant of whether a person grows to become healthy or not. Early childhood factors such as poverty, family stability and violence, social assistance dependency and living in public housing can have long term developmental implications on an individual's health.

Strathbogie Shire Council recognises that the context in which children live their lives, including their family, school and community environments—and the interactions among these—is crucial to their future health and wellbeing. Important to Council is the impact on children of:

- Family functioning.
- Social support and networks.
- Childhood activities.
- Attendance at child care, kindergarten, preschool and school.



## Keep up to date with government policy

In recent years, there has been a greater focus from all levels of government on strengthening families and communities in order to provide children with a good start to life.

### National policy

At the moment, quality standards across early childhood education and care services vary across Australia and there is often limited information available to help families choose the best service for their children. Currently, the commonwealth government, in partnership with all state and territory governments, is making important changes to early childhood education and care in Australia.

#### National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care

As of July 2010, the *National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care* will be rolled out across Australia. This framework will set a new National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care providers in Australia by improving quality through:

- Improved staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention.
- New staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop.
- A new quality rating system to ensure Australian families have access to transparent information relating to the quality of early childhood education and care service.
- The establishment of a new national body to ensure early childhood education and care is of a high quality.

The new framework will cover long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschools.

#### The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

The *Early Years Learning Framework* is Australia's first early childhood curriculum framework which will guide early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood education programs. The framework describes the principles, practice and outcomes to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. This will help ensure consistency in the delivery of learning programs around Australia. The *Early Years Learning Framework* was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in July 2009.



## Universal access to early childhood education

On 29 November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed a new National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. Under the agreement, the commonwealth and state and territory governments have committed to ensuring that all children will have access to a quality early childhood education program by 2013, delivered by a four-year university-trained early childhood teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, or alternatively 600 hours a year in the year before formal schooling. Since then, the commonwealth government has committed \$970 million over five years to achieve universal access to 15 hours of early childhood education, of which \$210.6 million is allocated to Victoria. Victoria is in the early phase of planning for implementation of this reform.

## State policy

Victorian state regulations provide for the operation and programming of early childhood centres. The state government is responsible for regulating kindergartens, centre based long day care and occasional care services and provides funding which contributes to the provision of a kindergarten program for all eligible children in the year prior to school entry.

The Victorian State Government also plays an important role in supporting integrated service delivery for children and their families locally. It achieves this by directly providing early childhood services, including education and curriculum, preschool, Maternal and Child Health services, and parent and family support services. It also provides early intervention services for children at risk or in need of specialist assistance, as well as child protection services and child care licensing and regulation.

## Children's Services Act 1996

The main purpose of the *Children's Services Act 1996* is to provide for the licensing and regulation of children's services in the state of Victoria. It offers clear principles around the licensing and operation of children's services as well as providing enforcement, funding and administration guidance. All children's service providers in Victoria are subject to the Act.

## Children's Services Regulations 2009

The *Children's Services Regulations 1998* was updated in 2009. It was originally made under the *Children's Services Act 1996* to regulate the licensing and operation of children's services in Victoria. The regulations provide information on licensing of children's services, records, provision and display of information, staffing, children's programs, health and welfare of children and facilities.

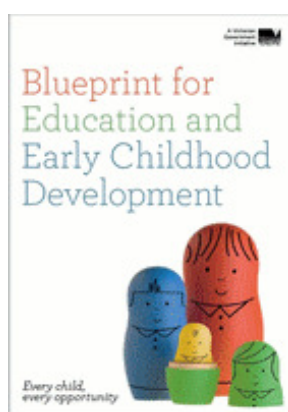


## Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood

The *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood* outlines the state government's vision for Victorian education and early childhood development over the next five years. It was written in response to the creation of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in 2007 which brought together early childhood services and schools. The document articulates shared goals for all Victorian children encompassing both early childhood services and education.

## Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

The Victorian Framework describes six key principles for professionals and five learning outcomes for children from birth to eight years, linking the learning outcomes to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. These provide a shared language for all early childhood professionals and families to use when planning for children's learning and development. The Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development launched the new Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework in November 2009.



## A Right to Respect : Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women 2012-2020

The Plan sets out short, medium and long-term measures to reduce levels of violence against women by challenging its underlying causes. Women constitute an overwhelming majority of victims of family and sexual violence: 77% of reported family violence victims and 92% of reported rape victims are women and girls. Research shows the profound and long-term toll this violence has on women's health, on families and communities, and on society in general.

The Plan's vision is for Victorian communities, cultures and organisations to be non-violent and gender equitable. Relationships are respectful and non discriminatory. Strathbogie Shire Council recognises that violence in families exists and supports the Plan, its vision and





its goals. Council will actively engage in creating community awareness and advocate for change, following the principles for A Right to Respect.

## **Addressing Violence Against Women and their Children - Action Plan Consultation Framework**

The Framework is currently in the consultation phase of its development and is based on a long term vision of women and their children living free from violence. The objective is to eliminate all forms of violence against women in the long term; to intervene earlier and to respond more effectively in the short term. The Framework is supportive of A Right to Respect.

### **Take a local approach**

Local governments are those that are closest to children – to their homes, families and communities. Municipal governments provide services that are vital to the quality of children's lives: recreation, health care services, water supply, transportation, child care options, housing and support for families.

### **Local Government Act 1989**

The *Local Government Act 1989* is the principal empowering legislation for councils in Victoria. One of the functions of council under the *Local Government Act 1989* is to provide and maintain community infrastructure in the municipal district. Council is required to ensure that facilities provided by the council are accessible and equitable.

### **Strathbogie Shire Council Plan 2009-2013**

The plan sets out a framework the Council will use for the next four years, incorporating proactive strategies that address specific goals that are important to the local community. Council acknowledges that the development of an Early Years Plan is important in achieving a healthy community.

### **Healthy Communities' Plan 2012-2014**

This plan outlines what Strathbogie Shire Council is going to do to promote good health and prevent ill health amongst its communities. It looks at the bigger picture of what is going on in our community that influences, or even contributes to, local health issues. One of the key priorities in the *Healthy Communities' Plan* is to improve access to support services for children and families. Council will achieve this by:

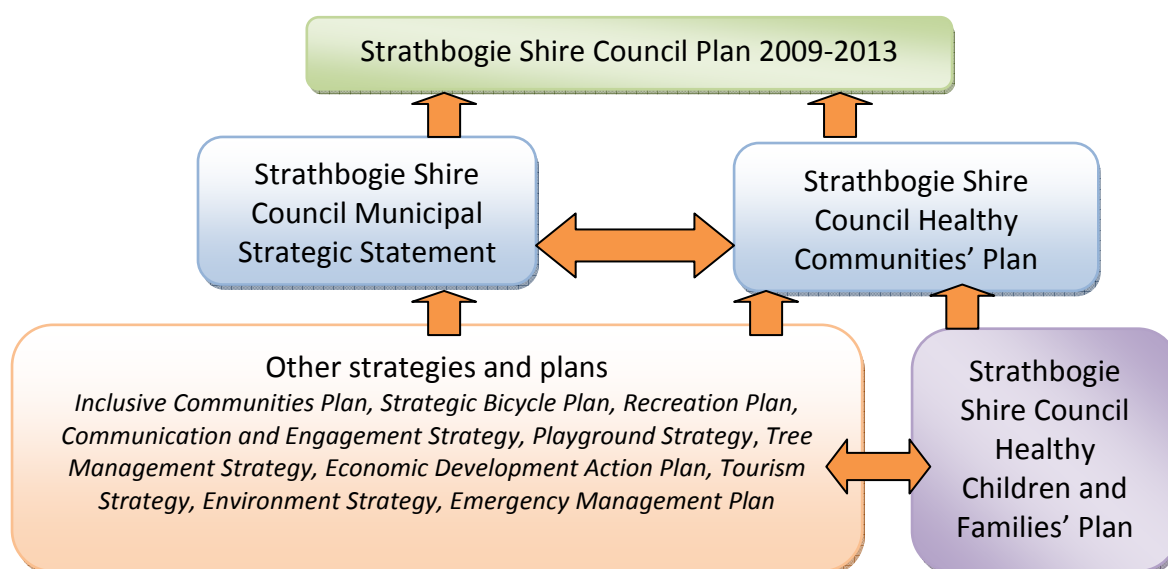
- Supporting and promoting immunisation programs.
- Supporting and promoting accessible, affordable and flexible child care options across the Shire.
- Supporting breastfeeding friendly practices and programs.



- Promoting MCH key age stage visits;
- Providing the community with information about child friendly places.
- Supporting the Early Years Service Providers' Network.

### Healthy Children and Families' Plan 2010-2014

This is Strathbogie Shire Council's Early Years Plan. It focuses on planning ahead to enhance our support for children and families throughout the Shire. It influences, and is influenced by, a series of other Council plans and strategies as well as state and commonwealth policies.





## Our commitment to children and families

### Our mission

Happy, healthy children and families

### Our vision

**Child and family friendly communities:** To support communities and build environments that welcome children and families.

**A community free from violence:** To support the communities to build awareness regarding the Prevention of Violence Against Women. To support families and children who are experiencing family violence to access appropriate services and support. To promote the right to feel safe and free of family violence.

**Inclusive services:** To coordinate child and family centred programs and activities across the Strathbogie Shire that caters to the diverse and individual needs of children and families including those from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds.

**Strong leadership:** To provide leaders who are committed, at community and municipal levels, to ensuring children's rights and interests are appropriately considered in local governance.

**Sustainable practices:** To make decisions and set directions that positively impact on children and families long term and can be sustained into the future.

**A culture of learning:** To seek up-to-date information that will generate new insights and guide decision making with the goal of improving services for children and families.

**Collaborative partnerships:** To form alliances, working alongside individuals, groups and other agencies, levels of government and businesses to increase our local capacity to create conditions that nurture children and families.

**Empowered communities:** To support and enable communities by providing efficient and adequate resources, systems and processes.

### Our key themes

- Providing safe environments: High quality infrastructure
- Involving children in our community: Building capacity
- Supporting healthy choices for children : Access to the right information
- Strengthening local support: An inclusive and integrated service system
- Planning for the future: Resourcing families
- A Right to Respect



## What we are going to do

To promote an accessible and inclusive community across the Strathbogie Shire means planning for action. Like the *Healthy Communities' Plan 2010-2014* and *Inclusive Communities' Plan 2010-2014*, our action plan is framed by five key factors. Together, these factors combine to uphold our vision of a strong, healthy and accessible community. Each addresses different aspects that influence the capacity of children and families to be involved and included in our community.

- Child and family friendly spaces and places.
- Child and family friendly neighbourhoods.
- Child and family friendly lifestyle choices.
- Child and family friendly services and supports.
- Child and family friendly economies.

By looking closely at each factor and considering the issues and priorities within our communities, we can plan actions to improve outcomes for children and families in the Strathbogie Shire over the next four years.

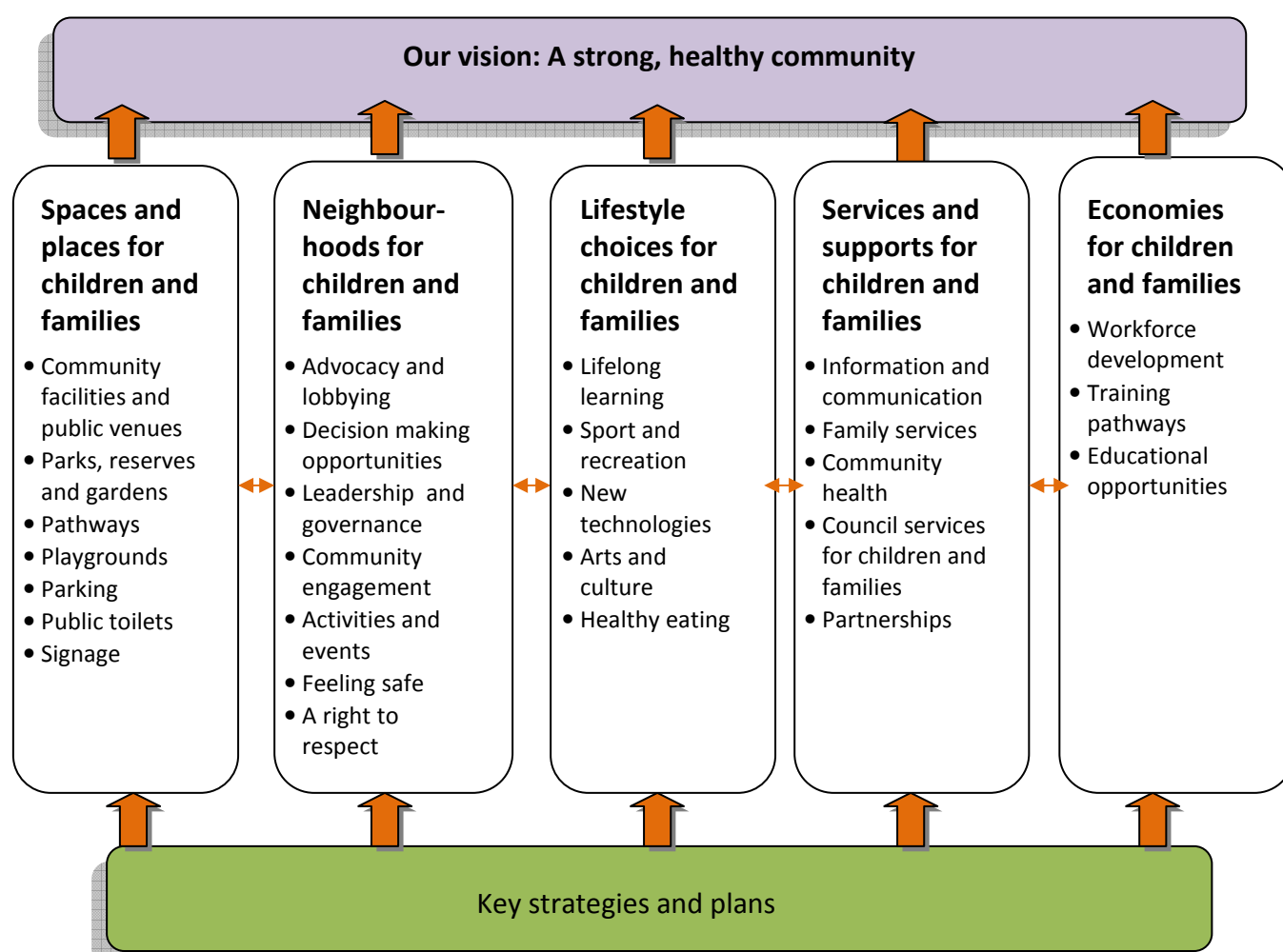


Figure 4: Strathbogie Shire Council healthy children and families' planning framework





## Factor 1: Child and family friendly spaces and places

### Why we need spaces and places for children and families

We know that child friendly communities are shaped by the environments in which families live. How we plan our buildings, parks, facilities, roads and pathways impacts on the way people participate in our community affecting their wellbeing. Where people live forms the backdrop to their lives, so it is important that, as a Council, we plan ahead for child and family friendly spaces and places.

### Key theme

- Providing healthy and safe environments: High quality infrastructure

### Key priorities

1. Plan ahead for service infrastructure that is child and family friendly
2. Provide high quality playgrounds and recreational facilities for children and families



Key priorities	Actions	Who's responsible?
Plan ahead for service infrastructure that is child and family friendly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure Council facilities are maintained in accordance with regulation requirements and quality service standards</li> <li>• Identify opportunities for the future development of family services 'hubs' that facilitate improved integration of planning and service provision</li> <li>• Investigate the provision of baby changing facilities in Council buildings used by families and children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager of Projects and Works to allocate to relevant staff</li> <li>• Statutory support/Strategic Planning/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> <li>• Statutory support/Strategic Planning/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> </ul>
Provide children's playground and recreational facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure playgrounds and recreational facilities are maintained in accordance with regulation requirements and quality service standards</li> <li>• Review the <i>Playground Strategy</i> to assess the quality of play experiences</li> <li>• Take into account inclusion principles in the upgrade of existing playgrounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager of Projects and Works</li> <li>• Manager of Projects and Works/ Manager Engineering</li> <li>• Manager of Projects and Works/ Manager Engineering</li> </ul>



## Factor 2: Child and family friendly neighbourhoods

### Why we need neighbourhoods for children and families

People have a sense of wellbeing if they are connected to others in their community and feel like they belong. Children need to feel safe, feel valued and have quality time to spend with others. By planning ahead, Council can create opportunities for children and their families to actively participate in community life.

### Key theme

- Involving children in our community: Building capacity

### Key priorities

1. Consult with children and families to identify relevant local needs and issues
2. Advocate on behalf of those children and families most at risk in the community



Key priorities	Actions	Who's responsible?
Consult with children and families to identify relevant local needs and issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure children and families are included as a key priority target group in relevant Council community consultations</li> <li>• Invite parent participation in networks, committees, community initiatives and activities relating to children and families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Development Coordinator</li> <li>• Manager Community Development/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> </ul>
Advocate on behalf of those children and families most at risk in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify groups not accessing maternal and child health services and develop strategies to increase utilisation</li> <li>• Develop strategic partnerships to strengthen the provision of support and services to children and families with additional needs or at risk of violence</li> <li>• Ensure Council staff understand and operate in compliance with child protection legislation and requirements</li> <li>• Explore options to work with agencies to improve access to appropriate support for women and children who have experienced violence and/or abuse</li> <li>• Support relevant and appropriate applications for funding and resources as opportunities arise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator</li> <li>• Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/relevant external Agencies such as FamilyCare</li> <li>• Manager Community Development/ Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/ Grants Coordinator/Community Development Coordinator</li> </ul>





## Factor 3: Child and family friendly lifestyle choices

### Why we need lifestyle choices for children and families

A child friendly community supports healthy choices and a healthy lifestyle for all family types. By participating in physical activity, expressing feelings and exercising the brain, children can feel better about themselves and strengthen their links within the community. To do all this, families need to be able to access the right information. Council has an important role in planning for opportunities that support healthy lifestyles for all children and families.

### Key theme

- Supporting healthy choices for children : Access to the right information

### Key priorities

1. Increase awareness of services for children and families
2. Promote opportunities for children and families to actively participate in their community



Key priorities	Actions	Who's responsible?
Increase awareness of services for children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and update Council's website to include information about services for children and families, and links to other providers</li> <li>• Investigate support for a Directory of Services for children and families in the Shire</li> <li>• Include information about services for children and families in Council's welcome kit</li> <li>• Develop a central database containing a list of all child and family services, including location, features, availability and cost or Link to DHS database tool.</li> <li>• Distribute parent information at key age and stage consultations through maternal and child health</li> <li>• Advertise visiting and outreach services using the media eg. releases, news stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager Community Development / Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Manager Communications/Manager Customer Service</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/Children and Family Services Coordinator</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/Nurses</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/Manager Communications</li> </ul>
Promote opportunities for children and families to actively participate in their community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a range of art and cultural events and programs for children and families throughout the Shire in partnership with other key stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Manager Community Development/Community Development Coordinator</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health</li> </ul>



- Promote library and mobile library programs and activities
- Promote initiatives that support the importance of physical activity for children

Coordinator/Children & Family Services Coordinator

- Maternal & Child Health Coordinator/Children & Family Services Coordinator



## Factor 4: Child and family friendly services and supports

### Why we need services and supports for children and families

We know that to be a strong community, we need ease of access to a range of health and community services. By building partnerships with other organisations and thinking about ways to improve access to our own services, Council can plan for healthier outcomes across the Shire for children and families.

### Key theme

- Strengthening local support: An inclusive and integrated service system

### Key priorities

1. Improve coordination of services
2. Promote children and families in Council policy and frameworks
3. Strengthen community partnerships





Key priorities	Actions	Who's responsible?
Improve coordination of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the review of referral linkages between relevant services</li> <li>• Map the range of visiting and outreach services available to the community</li> <li>• Establish a central database of services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator /Children and Family Services Coordinator/additional stakeholders</li> </ul>
Promote children and families in Council policy and frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include children and families as a key priority target group within relevant Council policies and plans</li> <li>• Develop and promote a calendar of significant days and weeks celebrating children and families eg. Children's Week</li> <li>• Advocate to other levels of government and agencies on behalf of children and families in Strathbogie</li> <li>• Implement recommendations associated with State and Federal government reforms</li> <li>• Continue to support the universal provision of maternal and child health services</li> <li>• Work with relevant partners to ensure appropriate delivery and coverage of universal immunisation services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager Community Development /Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> <li>• Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator</li> <li>• Manager Community Development/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> <li>• Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator</li> <li>• Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Health Services Officer</li> </ul>
Strengthen community partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify potential partnerships and attend relevant networks and forums</li> <li>• Investigate the feasibility of establishing an interagency child and family network to meet biannually at</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Maternal &amp; Child Health Coordinator</li> <li>• Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> </ul>



key townships in the Shire

- Provide assistance to community groups when applying for grants and encourage joint submissions between agencies
- Support community groups with training opportunities and professional development
- Community Development Coordinator/Grants Coordinator
- Community Development Coordinator



## Factor 5: Child and family friendly economies

### Why we need economies for children and families

A healthy economy contributes to children's health and wellbeing by providing opportunities for their parents and carers to develop new skills, work or be involved in the community, have enough money to participate in life and have access to goods and services locally. We know that to build a healthy economy Council must encourage economic development through job creation, training, mentoring and providing concessions and rebates for all family members.

### Key theme

- Planning for the future: Resourcing families

### Key priorities

1. Advocate for social supports for families
2. Promote local employment opportunities for parents with young children



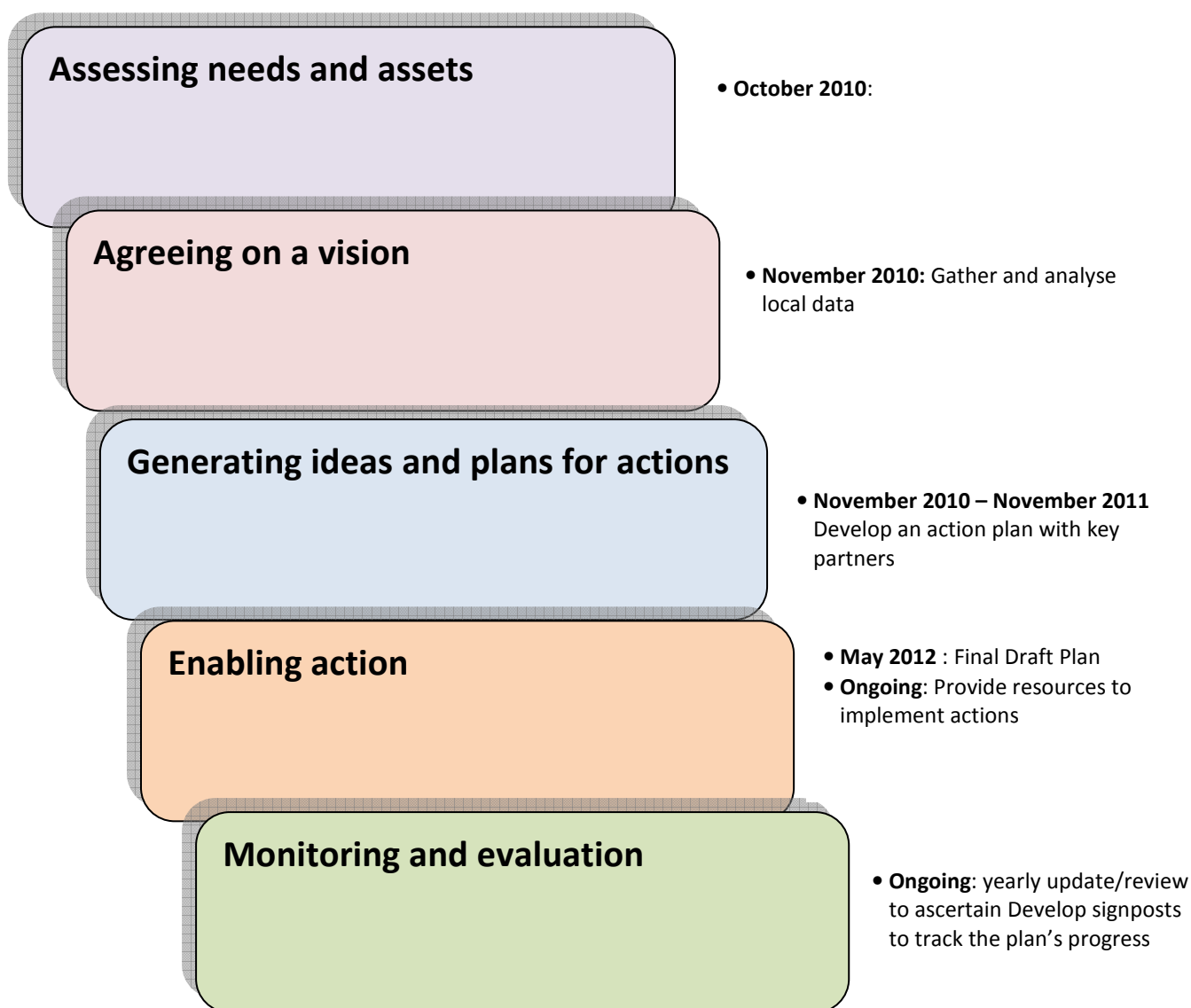
Key priorities	Actions	Who's responsible?
Advocate for social supports for families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore increased options for child care within the Shire</li> <li>• Monitor waiting lists for all forms of child care</li> <li>• Support local preschool providers to advocate for state government funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Preschool Cluster Managers</li> <li>• Preschool Cluster Managers/ABC Childcare Centre</li> <li>• Preschool Cluster Managers/Preschool Committees/Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator</li> </ul>
Promote local employment opportunities for parents with young children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing investigation in relation to provision of occasional care and long day care options and feasibility in Nagambie and Violet Town</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children &amp; Family Services Coordinator/Preschool Cluster Managers/Preschool Committees</li> </ul>





## How we plan to keep on track

Strathbogie Shire Council has followed an action planning model in the development of the *Healthy Children and Families' Plan 2012-2014*, this framework has kept the project on track and encouraged a continuous cycle of planning, consultation and evaluation. Future reviews of the *Healthy Children and Families' Plan* will use this model to guide evaluative processes.



**Figure 5: Action planning model**

To further ensure Strathbogie Shire Council's *Healthy Children and Families' Plan 2012-2014* remains relevant and meets the changing needs of our community, community signposts which identify the success of the plan will be established at the beginning of each action planning period. This model highlights the importance of involving our communities actively in identifying needs, defining priorities, taking action, evaluating and monitoring progress so that we can move towards an accessible and inclusive future in the Strathbogie Shire.



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