

1. PURPOSE

This policy reflects the strong commitment of the Horsham Rural City Council, management, staff and volunteers to child safety and the establishment of Council as a Child Safe Organisation. It provides an outline of the measures Council has developed to keep people safe from any Harm, including Abuse, and reflects Council's legislative responsibility in meeting the requirements of Child Safe Standards.

While seven mandatory Child Safe Standards have been in effect in Victoria since 2016, the Victorian Government announced eleven new Standards will replace the current seven commencing on 1 July 2022. The eleven new Standards were made to support greater national consistency, reflecting the National Principles for a Child Safe Organisation developed following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Betrayal of Trust Enquiry).

Child Safe Standard 1 – Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued

Child Safe Standard 2 – Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

Child Safe Standard 3 – Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

Child Safe Standard 4 – Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

Child Safe Standard 5 – Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

Child Safe Standard 6 – People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

Child Safe Standard 7 – Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused

Child Safe Standard 8 – Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training

Child Safe Standard 9 – Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

Child Safe Standard 10 – Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved

Child Safe Standard 11 – Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

2. STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

Horsham Rural City Council is committed to providing and promoting child safe environments. Council has zero tolerance for Child Abuse and aims to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children feel safe and secure and have fun. This includes the physical, emotional, cultural and social wellbeing of all children.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Councillors, staff and volunteers at Horsham Rural City Council.

This policy acknowledges that there is a continuum of Abuse of children and views all such events, regardless of whether they are seen as 'Harm' or 'Abuse', as damaging.

4. PRINCIPLES

4.1 Children and young people – Standards 2, 3, 4

Council staff and volunteers encourage children and young people to express their views. As an organisation and as individuals we listen to their suggestions, especially on matters that directly affect them. We actively encourage all children and young people who use our services to 'have a say' about things that are important to them.

Wherever applicable, we teach children and young people about what they can do if they feel unsafe. We listen to and act on any concerns children, young people, or their parents, raise with us.

4.2 Valuing diversity – Standards 1, 4, 5

We value diversity and do not tolerate any discriminatory practices. To achieve this we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and their families
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children and young people regardless of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, or financial situation
- welcome children with a disability and their families and act to promote their participation
- seek appropriate staff from diverse cultural backgrounds.

4.3 Recruitment – Standards 6, 11

Council applies best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of staff and volunteers. We interview and conduct referee checks on all staff and require Police Checks and Working with Children Checks

for relevant staffing and volunteer positions. Our commitment to Child Safety and our screening requirements are included in our recruitment practices and on Council's website.

4.4 Supporting staff and volunteers – Standards 2, 6, 8

Council seeks to attract and retain the best staff and volunteers. We provide support and supervision so people feel valued, respected and fairly treated. All staff are required to undertake Child Safe Standards training.

4.5 Reporting a child safety concern or complaint – Standards 7, 11

Council has two Child Safety Officers (Kevin O'Brien, Director Communities and Place and Mandi Stewart, Manager Community Services and Safety) with the specific responsibility for responding to any complaints made by staff, volunteers, parents or children. Details of the appointed Child Safety Officers will be made available on the intranet and internet. All concerns should be reported in accordance with the Reporting a Child Safety Concern Procedure. Where a complaint relates to a staff member, contractor or Councillor, the associated complaints processes are detailed in the Complaint Procedure but should also be reported in accordance with the Reporting a Child Safety Concern Procedure.

When an adult has a 'reasonable belief' that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child they have an obligation to report it to police, (unless exemptions apply). Failure to disclose the information to police is a criminal offence.

Likewise, people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but did not act to protect the child, are guilty of the criminal offence 'failure to protect'.

4.6 Privacy – Standards 7, 9

While safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern, Council is committed to protecting an individual's right to privacy. All personal information considered during the process of report or investigation will be dealt with in accordance with Council's Privacy Policy unless there is a legislative requirement to disclose.

4.7 Risk Management – Standards 7, 8, 9, 11

Council recognises the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for Child Abuse or Harm to occur and this informs all associated policies, procedures and activity planning. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, Council proactively manages the risks of Abuse to the physical, emotional, cultural and social wellbeing of all children.

4.8 Reportable Conduct Scheme

The Reportable Conduct Scheme focuses on the investigation and reporting of allegations of certain types of Abuse or misconduct by employees, contractors or volunteers. The following constitute Reportable Conduct

against a child: sexual offences, sexual misconduct, physical violence, significant neglect, significant emotional or psychological harm.

Under the Reportable Conduct Scheme, it is the responsibility of HRCC’s Chief Executive Officer to have systems in place to:

- prevent Child Abuse and, if Abuse is alleged, ensure allegations are brought to the attention of the appropriate person for investigation and response
- ensure the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) is notified and given updates on the response to the allegation. Further information can be obtained through the [CCYP](#) website, [Reportable Conduct Scheme](#) or [Reportable Conduct Scheme Information Sheets](#)

5. COMMUNICATION

Internet, Intranet, posters, handouts, annual report, staff and volunteer induction/guidance documents and material (including Staff Code of Conduct), training programs.

6. RESPONSIBILITY

Policy Owner: Manager People & Performance

7. DEFINITIONS AND KEY TERMS

Definition	Meaning
Abuse	Any act committed against a child that involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • neglect or abuse of a physical, emotional, psychological or cultural nature • Physical violence • Sexual offences
Child/Children	A person under the age of 18
Child Safety Officer	A Council employee with a specific responsibility for responding to any issues associated with child safety – Kevin O’Brien, Director Communities & Place and Mandi Stewart, Manager Community Services & Safety
Child Safe Organisation	An organisation which takes deliberate steps to protect children from physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and cultural Abuse, and neglect. Child safety is proactively embedded in all areas of the organisation.
Child Safe Standards	Refers to the 11 Standards made under section 17(1) of the <i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> .
Harm	Describes an event that is seen as possibly less detrimental than ‘Abuse’ but is clearly not in a person’s best interest of promoting their safety and wellbeing.
Reportable Conduct Scheme	Seeks to improve organisations’ responses to allegations of Child Abuse and neglect by their workers and volunteers. The scheme is established by the <i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> .

8. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Document	Location
Victorian Child Safe Standards	Commission for Children and Young People
<i>Working with Children Act 2005</i>	Working with Children Act 2005
<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i>	Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005
<i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i>	Children, Youth and Families Act 2005
Reporting a Child Safety Concern Procedure	Intranet
Working with Children Policy and Procedure	Intranet
Staff Code of Conduct	Intranet
Complaint Resolution Policy and Procedure	Intranet

9. DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version Number	Approval Date	Approval By	Amendment	Review Date
01	20 November 2017	Council	New Policy	20 November 2020
02	22 August 2022	Council	Amendments to Victorian Child Safe Standards	22 August 2026