

Why this statement has been updated

This Collective Statement has been amended and reissued following feedback received from the Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. The amendments clarify the role and purpose of the Gender Impact Assessment undertaken as part of the review of creche services and ensure the statement accurately reflects the Commissioner's guidance. No changes have been made to the underlying operational decision regarding creche services.

COLLECTIVE STATEMENT CRECHE SERVICES

Anthony Basford – Executive Director City Life

Thank you, Mayor, and thank you to everyone for coming tonight, and asking questions on this issue.

I also want to highlight that I understand this is a challenging issue and that it affects some parents and carers in our community. I also acknowledge that it disproportionately affects women who are primary care givers.

I've read the questions, and I will respond to the key issues raised. I will be providing a single response given the number of questions and their similarity.

Firstly, I want to re-emphasise that this was not a Council decision - the role of the councillors is to set the longer-term strategic direction of the organisation including risk appetite and financial sustainability. The decision around creches was made by City officers at the operational level – in accordance with the Local Government Act 2020, this decision has been made under CEO delegation.

City officers are required to provide frank and fearless advice to the Council, and sometimes this obligation means making difficult decisions. The role of a City officer is to be impartial and review the evidence when making decisions. We understand that this decision is at odds with the expectations of some people in the community. However, it has been made for sound reasons, carefully considered prior to the decision.

There were five key reasons for the decision:

- 1. Changing regulatory compliance requirements**
- 2. Low demand for the service**
- 3. Financial sustainability**
- 4. Providing creches is not the core business of Swim, Sport and Leisure; and**
- 5. Strategic misalignment**

When all of these factors are taken into consideration, the decision to discontinue the creche service is reasoned, responsible and strategically aligned.

There has been considerable commentary about the gender impact assessment, or GIA, that was undertaken as part of this review.

A GIA is an analytical tool required under the Gender Equality Act 2020. Its purpose is to help organisations identify how proposed policies, programs and services may affect people of different genders, so that those impacts can be understood and considered as part of decision-making.

The GIA identified that caregiving responsibilities are not equally distributed across the community, and that women and gender-diverse carers are more likely to utilise the service. The assessment found that discontinuing the service could have a disproportionate impact on these groups by reducing access to a support that assisted some carers to participate in physical activity.

The purpose of the GIA was to identify and analyse these impacts so they could be considered as part of the review process. The GIA did not determine the outcome of the review, nor was its purpose to justify or endorse a particular decision. Rather, it informed officers' understanding of how different members of the community may be affected and highlighted matters requiring consideration throughout the decision-making process.

The decision regarding the future of the creche service was ultimately made after consideration of a range of factors, including service demand, financial sustainability, legislative and regulatory requirements, operational risks, workforce impacts and the findings of the GIA. The gendered impacts identified by the GIA formed an important part of those considerations.

I will now go into some of the information on the questions specifically that have been asked.

Firstly, regarding the consideration of alternative options – we undertook this work throughout this process, but at the end of the day, no other option could ensure the adequate safety and supervision of children as required under the child safe standards, especially following recent government reforms. Other options explored included having an external operator provide services, and providing an unsupervised space within the gym/group exercise rooms, but the same issues with compliance and viability arose from these options.

On the issue of the physical and mental health outcomes for the community, this has been taken into consideration and we recognise that the creche does provide a benefit for some members in our community. However, when these positives were balanced against the other important considerations, including the increasingly complex regulatory and safety compliances, combined with early childhood education and care sector changes (good changes) such as increased childcare subsidies and free three and four year old kinder, we see an increased cost in providing the creche and a reduced demand and usage of the service. Some questions have pointed to other businesses and how they operate this service – the decisions of other businesses and their appetite for risk is a matter for them and I'm not going to comment on it.

Some questions addressed reallocating creche savings and putting them to broader healthcare: future healthcare expenditure is a matter for other levels of government and is not within the City's control. However, what we are trying to do in terms of offering the three month membership and swimming lessons for families who enrolled in creche in 2026, because we understand that there is a challenge here and especially for a few families who rely on the creche exclusively we want to ensure that we can provide some level of transition to other arrangements. That's why this is a challenging issue and many factors had to be weighed up to make the final decision.

If for some reason you have not been contacted, and it sounds like there was people that may not have been contacted, please, I do apologise if that occurred. Please contact Swim Sport and Leisure and we'd be happy to talk to you. (Members can also email membershipssl@geelongcity.vic.gov.au).

As part of the review process, Council considered a range of information sources, including service usage data, workforce impacts, legislative and regulatory requirements, and feedback received from service users and the broader community.

While this was an operational decision, and not one made by Council, Councillors were briefed at a Ward Councillor update on 17 February 2026 and Councillor Strategic Briefing on 7 April 2026.

Some questions implied that creche hadn't been marketed – the fact is that the creche offering for members has been heavily promoted in our centres, including on in-centre signage and TV screens and our website. We provide a tour for new members when they join, including the creche particularly if we're aware they have small children as a service for our members.

In terms of the budget question, the 2026-27 budget is still under development and is expected to be put to Council for endorsement in June and I'm not in a position to put any of that information out.

We've received invitations for Councillors to visit the creches – Councillors regularly visit community facilities and engage with community members and service users as part of their role. Councillors are free to accept any invitations based on their availability, interests and responsibilities.

Before we finish, I also want to correct some misinformation that seems to be circulating and we've received a number of queries on. The City has no current plans to exit the provision of long day care or kindergarten services, either under in house or external management models. We have many kindergartens that are managed by wonderful community organisations. In fact, we recently expanded provision through the opening Biala Community Hub in Mt Duneed, and will open the Yirrama Community Hub in Charlemont in 2027 with more facilities in the future development pipeline.

To close:

I want to end tonight by talking about our staff, some of whom have provided wonderful and professional care for children for a long period of time. This decision is in no way a reflection of their dedication and commitment to families, children or the City.

Some of the commentary during this process that we have seen in the community have been disappointing. Whilst feedback is always welcome about decisions that we've made, and we're open to and upfront with explaining why we're making these decisions, threats of abuse or similar conduct are completely unacceptable, and I have zero tolerance for this type of behaviour towards my staff. Feedback and questions must be posed respectfully, and in turn, we will respond in a respectful manner.

So again, thank you for your interest in this and questions that have been asked around this matter. My response will be part of the minutes of the meeting.