



DRAFT

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**TOWARDS 5000
COMMUNITY
CHILDCARE STRATEGY**

v#####

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GSC
GILGANDRA
SHIRE COUNCIL



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY.

Gilgandra shire is home to a long standing "meeting place" between three Aboriginal nations - **Wiradjuri, Gamilaroi and Wailwan** - and we proudly continue to be a meeting place for family, friends, locals and visitors alike.

Gilgandra Shire Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live, work and play. We pay our respects to our Elders past, present and emerging, and thank them for the contribution they have made, and continue to make, in the cultural identity of our nation.





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Executive Summary

Increasing the supply of local childcare is foundational to the Gilgandra Region achieving many of the outcomes we aim for in our Gilgandra Region Community Strategic Plan 2032 – including growing our population Towards 5000.

Adequate childcare enables

- children to develop well
- parents and carers to put the time they need to into work, education, community and other priorities
- businesses to grow and operate efficiently
- the region to attract and retain residents

Currently, however, the Region faces a number of challenges

- there is no Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) service for primary school aged children in the region
- there are waiting times of 6 – 24 months for many parents and carers seeking to access childcare for children aged 0 – 5 years, with children aged 0 – 2 years having the most restricted supply
- the childcare shortage is affecting children's school-readiness and contributing to the vulnerability of some families – whereas adequate childcare can help address both those issues
- employers – including critical services like health - report the lack of childcare makes it harder for them to attract and retain staff in the region, and means their current staff are often not able to increase their availability for work when that is their preference. Local parents and carers confirm this
- there are severe workforce shortages across childcare nationally, impacting local services

Council is committed to working with the community to address these challenges as they affect the Region's ability to achieve its goals. There are a lot of local strengths which are critical for the Region to build on, including existing ECEC providers and schools. Delivering childcare is not something Council is necessarily well positioned to do itself, as it is a sector which requires specialist skills and has substantial regulatory requirements. However, Council is prepared to take action with partners as needed.

Having conducted research and consulted the community, Council's ambition is to advocate to government, and partner with local childcare providers, schools and others, to

- expand the supply of Long Day Care and/or Preschool places in central Gilgandra, including by
 - » actively supporting the two existing providers to expand their operations
 - » promoting the region to prospective new providers through information and active support
- establish an Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) service in central Gilgandra
- encourage new providers of Family Day Care to establish for families outside of Gilgandra township
- facilitate a functioning childcare workforce pipeline with education partners
- This ambition is detailed in this Community Childcare Strategy.



Welcome

Gilgandra Shire Council (GSC) has developed this strategy to guide its work with the community to match the provision of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) across the Gilgandra Region to the community's needs and aspirations.

'Early childhood education and care' (ECEC or childcare) includes Long Day Care, Family Day Care and Preschool for children before they enter primary school (usually up to the age of 5 years), and also includes Outside-School-Hours-Care (OSHC) services for children attending primary school up to the age of 12 years.

Childcare builds up communities. High quality and accessible childcare helps kids to thrive now and later in life. It supports caregivers to engage in work and study, and strengthens their links with local communities and services. Childcare is a key ingredient in supporting local places of employment to attract and retain a diverse local workforce.

Good childcare is part of the village it takes to raise a child. It can help reduce children and families' isolation, and keeps parents in touch with professionals who prioritise their children's safety, wellbeing, learning and development.

Quality, standards and learning frameworks for ECEC services across Australia are administered by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), an independent national authority with governance arrangements linked closely with State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments. In NSW, the Department of Education is responsible to monitor the quality of childcare provision. The Commonwealth sets national ECEC policy directions, including the provision of subsidies to families.

GILGANDRA COMMUNITY CHILDCARE STRATEGY

We want Gilgandra to be an attractive and nurturing place for families with children. Childcare is an important contributor towards: improving outcomes for local children, enabling parents and carers to work or study as much as they want to, attracting people to the area, and boosting the workforce available for employment. Having enough childcare is vital for Gilgandra to achieve its goals for growth and wellbeing.

VISION

The Gilgandra Region welcomes families by having a vibrant childcare sector which meets their needs and which enables our children, community and businesses to grow and thrive.

Gilgandra Shire Council will work with the local community and NSW and Commonwealth partners to foster the growth of more local childcare places to meet the needs of our population.

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE DRIVERS

- Community based advocacy for resources
- Supportive Council policies and plans
- Active support for existing and new childcare providers
- A functioning childcare workforce pipeline
- Community valuing and accessing of childcare

Effective leadership, coordination and communications to support all the above

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- GSC: Community Strategic Plan
 - 1.2 A community with intergenerational infrastructure and facilities
 - 1.3 A community where services enhance liveability
- 2.1 An active and thriving community

3.1 A Region with resilient and innovative businesses

3.2 A Region growing Towards 5000

3.3 A Region that capitalises on opportunities for economic growth

4.1 An innovative Council that is an employer of choice within the community

4.2 A progressive Council engaged with the community

4.3 A Council valued by its community

- GSC: Community Engagement Plan
- Commonwealth and NSW policy and budget measures regarding ECEC.

STAKEHOLDERS

- ECEC providers: Aussie Kindies Early Learning, Gilgandra Preschool, Tooraweenah Preschool, Mendooran Preschool, Gulargambone Preschool
- Prospective ECEC providers
- Gilgandra Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC)
- Gilgandra Local Aboriginal Medical Service (GLAM)
- Family support providers
- All local schools
- Gilgandra Youth Service (GYS)
- Gunnedah Family Day Care and Dubbo FDC
- Employers
- Gilgandra Shire Council (GSC) and Council staff
- VET providers and Universities
- Commonwealth and NSW Departments of Education
- Members of Parliament
- Adjoining Shires
- Local Government NSW

ACTIONS

Council will pursue the following actions to strengthen its planning, activate the community towards shared goals, and support a vibrant Early Childhood and Education (ECEC) sector.

Plans and policies

1. Include childcare actions within its strategic and operational plans.
2. Develop policies to enable Council to appropriately support the development of additional childcare places by ECEC providers

Community activation

3. Establish a Community Interest Group to advocate to the NSW and Commonwealth Governments
4. Promote the benefits of quality Early Childhood Education and Care to the whole community

More local childcare

5. Work with local partners to establish an Out of School Hours and Vacation Care service.
6. Support existing and potential Early Childhood Education and Care providers through practical measures, including assistance with sites and capital works
7. Document a Prospectus for existing and potential ECEC providers, outlining the level of local demand and the ways in which Council is willing to assist
8. Coordinate a strategic approach to funding opportunities with local ECEC providers
9. Encourage additional Family Day Care businesses
10. Support the local childcare workforce pipeline
11. Explore with adjacent Councils the establishment of joint childcare strategies

OUTCOMES AND SUCCESSES

1. The supply of local childcare places meets the needs of a growing community
2. An OSHC and Vacation Care service in Gilgandra
3. More Long Day Care and Preschool places for children in the Gilgandra Region

4. More Family Day Care places for children out of town
5. Improved Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) results for children starting school – showing they are more ready for school and less vulnerable
6. Greater equity in outcomes for Gilgandra's children in relation to non-regional areas
7. Parents and carers report having the choice of more work, study and/or recreation
8. Population growth Towards 5000 – more people and businesses move to the Region
9. Employers report fewer issues attracting and retaining staff due to childcare
10. The supply of Early Childhood Educators meets the demand for ECEC places
11. Vulnerable families are accessing the childcare they and their children need
12. Council staff are able to access the childcare they need, and are more satisfied and productive

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

1. Encourage someone you know to think about a career in childcare
2. If you want to be part of a community team advocating for more childcare in the Region, register your interest with Council's Economic Development team
3. If you live out of town you may want to think about delivering a Family Day Care service for families in your area. You can contact Gunnedah Family Day Care for more information and start-up advice. You can also register your interest with Council's Economic Development team
4. If you have children aged 0 – 5 years, think about when is right for you to enrol them in either Long Day Care or Preschool to assist them be school-ready
5. Thanks to everyone who responded to Council's 2024 survey about childcare!





HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS STRATEGY

This Strategy aims to improve access to high quality early childhood education and care for children aged 0-12 years, now and into the future, by means of high-level planning in line with the broader Gilgandra Region Community Strategic Plan.

To make sure that our Childcare Strategy is based on up-to-date evidence on quality childcare we conducted a desktop review.

To make sure that we fully understood local childcare strengths, barriers, challenges and opportunities we engaged with the local community. Community engagement was a critical part of the process because it also strengthened networks between Council and community stakeholders for future collaboration and joint advocacy to Commonwealth and State Governments for improvement of regional childcare options.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community consultation was guided by an Engagement Plan prepared by Insight Consulting.

SURVEY

An online community survey was conducted between 6 March and 15 April 2024 which asked people about local childcare experiences and priorities. Paper versions were completed by some respondents. The survey was an important tool for gaining a picture of what families, childcare providers and local businesses are experiencing now and what they would like to see in the future.

The survey was published on the Gilgandra Shire Council website and circulated by Council through:

- Council's Facebook page
- emails to key stakeholder groups to share within their networks
- an all-residents mail-out of a flyer with a QR code linking to the survey.

The survey received 130 responses.

INTERVIEWS

In March and April 2024 interviews were conducted with thirteen organisations, including:

- Providers of local early childhood education and care - Family Day Care, Long Day Care and Preschools
- Local schools
- Barnardo's Gilgandra
- Gilgandra Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Gilgandra Youth Services and Gilgandra Shire Council.

EMERGING FINDINGS WORKSHOPS

Once the interviews and survey had been analysed, Insight facilitated two workshops (7 May 2024) to feedback the information gathered to key stakeholders and test emerging findings with them. One workshop was with elected Councillors and Council's Executive Leadership Team, the other was open to the community.

The 14 community workshop attendees included representatives from Gilgandra Public School, St Joseph's Catholic School Gilgandra, Barnardo's, Gilgandra Shire Council, the Local Aboriginal Land Council, the Local Health District and a local community member who was a parent and an employer.

RESEARCH

DESKTOP REVIEW

Insight Consulting conducted a review of current literature and research-based frameworks to develop a strategic analysis of:

- current and projected demographics and shifting family preferences for children's services, and the implications for future local service demand
- current and projected workforce supply and demand

- the changing policy and quality/ compliance environment for children’s services, broader contextual factors for regional childcare in Australia
- contemporary local government strategies for childcare, including successful models being used in similar areas, and innovations for promising practice
- current and foreseeable supply, quality and sustainability of local children’s services, and any areas of over-supply or gaps in early childhood, family daycare, preschool, before and after school care and holiday care.

ANALYSIS

- A service directory detailing nature of services provided, availability and capacity is at Appendix 1.
- A SWOT analysis of childcare services in the Gilgandra region.

COUNCIL DELIBERATION

An initial workshop with Council (March 2024) outlined the findings of the desktop review and started to explore possible directions for the community consultation to explore.

This was followed in May by the Emerging Findings workshop outlined above.

Drafts of the Report and Strategy were submitted to Council for review in May 2024. After a period of public exhibition and feedback from the community and Council, the Strategy was finalised in June 2024. (tbc)





THE COMMUNITY CHILDCARE STRATEGY

VISION

The Gilgandra Region welcomes families by having a vibrant childcare sector which meets the needs of local families and which enables our children, community and businesses to grow and thrive.

GOALS

GROW OUR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMY

Childhood education and care underpins strategies in our Community Strategic Plan to support existing and new businesses and economic growth, and to attract and retain skilled workers to the Gilgandra Region.

To pursue these goals we need to support the local childcare industry to grow in step with our population and industries, by increasing the childcare available locally and finding ways to support the attraction, retention and professional development of childcare staff.

ENABLE LOCAL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO THRIVE

High quality childcare that is open to everyone will help our next generation be ready for school and achieve better long-term outcomes.

ENABLE PARENTS AND CARERS TO WORK THEIR PREFERRED HOURS

Reliable accessible childcare helps parents and carers plan their futures and participate in the local workforce or education as much as they wish. It also enables parents and carers to connect with the community and self-care, contributing to community life.

MAXIMISE SERVICE ACCESS

Address access barriers and challenges for families out of town and for vulnerable families.

To reach these goals, Council's role is to **plan** for increased services, **network** to achieve service quality and growth, and **support** families, service providers and other stakeholders.

For many actions, other stakeholders – especially ECEC providers and schools - need to play a leading role. This plan outlines Council's role in stimulating and supporting actions by a range of stakeholders for the good of the Region.





OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

OBJECTIVE	ACTION
<p>1 Gilgandra Shire Council's future plans and policies prioritise growth in the provision of Early Childhood Education and Care services.</p>	<p>1.1 Include actions to prioritise local childcare availability, access and quality in Council's next Delivery Program and Operational Plan, under Community Strategic Plan 2032 strategies, especially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.3.4 Ensure availability and delivery of community services for current and future needs 1.3.7 Encourage quality and variety of educational and training options for the Gilgandra Region 3.1.1 Support existing and new businesses and encourage growth 4.1.1 Enable an engaged workforce with suitable skills, available in the right place at the right time. <p>See the Action Plan table (Appendix 2) which links CSP Strategies to Childcare actions.</p>
	<p>1.2 Consider ways to prioritise the development of additional centre-based and home-based childcare places across the Gilgandra LGA. Strategies may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate provision for new/expanded ECEC facilities within Council's land use strategies • Develop policies to enable Council to appropriately collaborate with existing and new ECEC providers to support the development of additional childcare places (rather than directly deliver services itself – requiring specialist expertise). Ensure Council policy settings enable the below actions, including 3.1, 3.2, 7.1 and 6.4 • Publish a policy to waive infrastructure fees for centre-based and home-based childcare facilities
	<p>1.3 Update the Gilgandra Shire Council Development Control Plan Section 16 'Childcare Centres' to reflect the current regulatory arrangements for childcare facilities under the NSW Department of Education and to align with the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Childcare Planning Guideline (2021).</p>
<p>2 Further develop the Gilgandra Region as a child-friendly community.</p>	<p>2.1 Consider further development of a vision for Gilgandra as a child-friendly Region (for example through the Youth Strategy), and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Council protocol for consulting with children and young people and their families on plans that impact children's wellbeing • Incorporate opportunities for child-friendly spaces into public spaces, Council facilities and local planning supported by a policy regarding Council-related developments • Design and implement a concise child and youth impact assessment tool to inform Council policy and strategy development

Network >>>

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

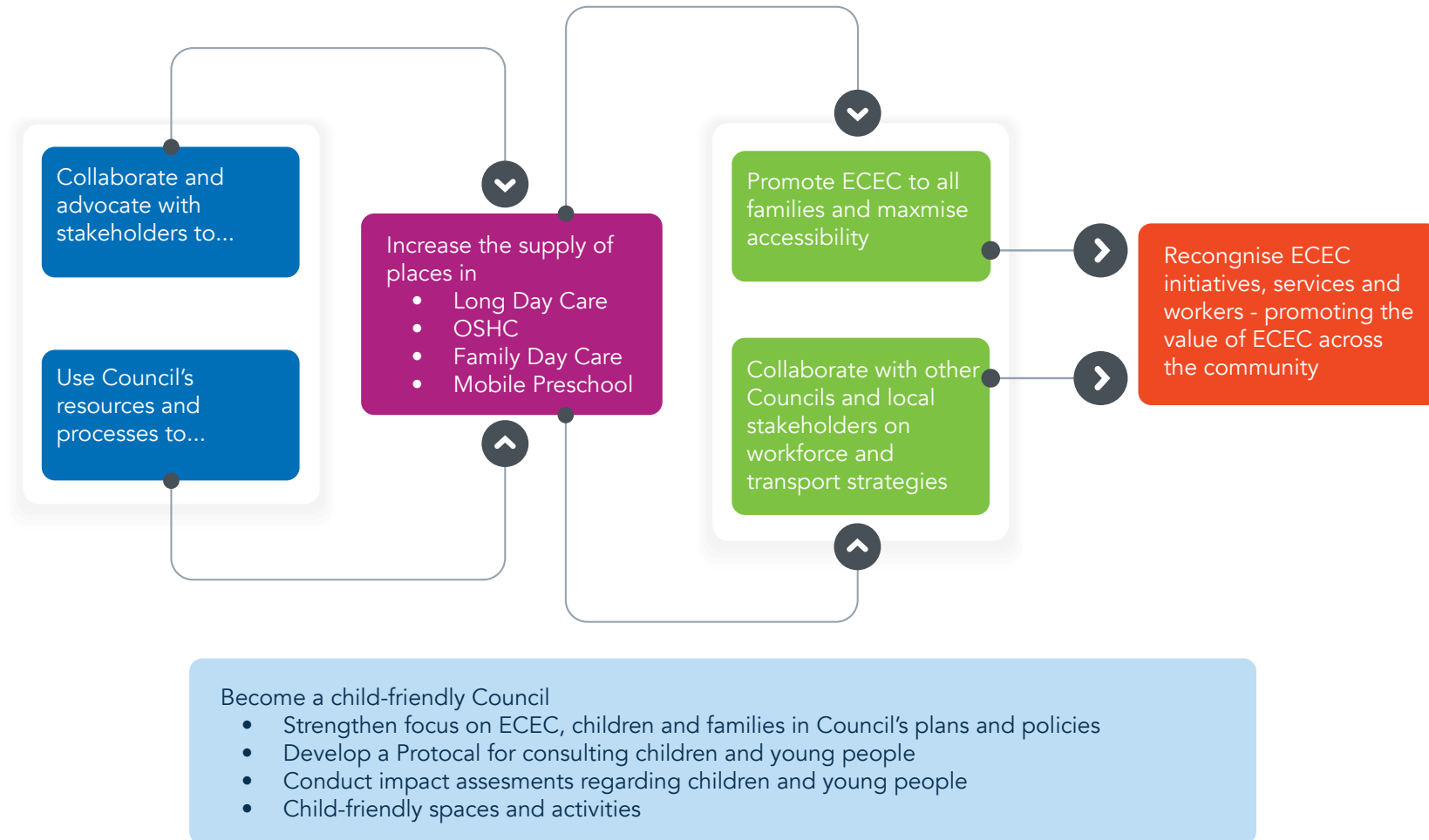
OBJECTIVE	ACTION
3 Collaborate with local stakeholders to advocate for improved childhood education and care services and outcomes in the Gilgandra Region.	<p>3.1 Establish a Community Interest Group (preferably with representation from schools, family support services, First Nations organisations, disability services, ECEC providers and other key stakeholders) to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate to the NSW and Commonwealth governments for greater resourcing for regional childcare, and for Gilgandra specifically • Collaboratively develop proposals and respond to funding opportunities • Monitor the quality, quantity, diversity and sustainability of the local childcare sector and collaborate on responses to key issues, including overall supply, access for vulnerable families, workforce challenges and options for families outside of town • Facilitate ECEC related networking among relevant stakeholders <p>Ideally, an independent advocate will chair this group with Council coordinating and providing secretariat services.</p>
	<p>3.2 Coordinate a strategic approach to funding opportunities with relevant ECEC providers – identifying the region’s priorities, planning around anticipated opportunities, and agreeing ways in which Council will assist in each application process. Priorities for the immediate term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in places available for children aged 0 – 5 years through Gilgandra’s existing Long Day Care and Preschool services and/or the attraction of a new provider – with a clear focus on more places for 0 – 2 year olds. Aim for at least 70 LDC places in town. • The establishment of a local Out of School Hours Care and Vacation Care service for 5 – 12 year olds • Support for new and existing Family Day Care providers – especially outside of central Gilgandra • Building the local childcare workforce • Promoting the value of ECEC to all families and maximizing access <p>Because funding is generally allocated to registered ECEC providers they will need to lead the development of funding applications – with Council’s support.</p>
4 Help build strong connections between local ECEC services and those families and communities known to benefit most from accessing.	<p>4.1 Work with local providers to promote the benefits of quality Early Childhood Education and Care to the whole community, with specific strategies for vulnerable families who do not yet access services</p> <p>This could be led by ECEC services with participation by Council and other community service providers.</p>
5 Collaborate with neighbouring Councils on shared childhood education and care challenges such as workforce and transport.	<p>5.1 Explore with adjacent Councils the establishment of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shared childcare transport services • a shared Mobile Preschool service for outer areas • a joint casual childcare worker pool

Support >>>

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

OBJECTIVE	ACTION
6	<p>Work closely with existing childhood education and care services and other key stakeholders to proactively address service gaps and sector challenges.</p>
	<p>6.1 Work with local schools, potential providers and Gilgandra Youth Service to establish Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and Vacation Care service. If necessary, Council will consider underwriting the viability of the services for two years (within stated limits) to enable successful establishment and ensure service delivery - including for Council's own staff. This may involve the provision of transport.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a business case to upgrade facilities for Gilgandra Youth Service and for delivery of OSHC on-site until/unless a school location is operating. This would include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Exploring the use of Hunter Park Recreational Park Precinct upgrades for this purpose » Expanding and formalising GYS' current role regarding primary school aged children » Obtaining required provider and service approvals » Providing resources for GYS to deliver approved services
	<p>6.2 Document in a prospectus the local demand for childcare, Council's commitment to growing the region, and the ways in which Council is willing to assist existing and potential ECEC providers. Promote this opportunity to local and external providers of LDC, Preschool, FDC and OSHC.</p>
	<p>6.3 Support the local childhood education and care workforce pipeline through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning and partnerships between schools, VET providers, Universities and local ECEC providers • Sponsoring professional development for ECEC staff • Assisting with sector-wide public awareness, promotion and recruitment strategies • Council recognition of the achievements of ECEC services and staff in public ways • Advocacy through the Community Interest Group (see 3.1) <p>While Council may need to coordinate stakeholders and convene meetings, ECEC and education providers will need to play a leading role in any actions.</p>
	<p>6.4 Negotiate with existing and potential Early Childhood Education and Care providers regarding Council's options to support them increase the supply of local childcare through practical means including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiving fees • Assisting with Development Applications • Assisting with funding applications to NSW and Commonwealth agencies • Providing low-cost leases for service sites • Contributing project management or capital works for new or expanded service sites • Providing management expertise to boards or committees • Building the local childcare workforce pipeline, and assisting with attraction and retention strategies <p>Any ECEC wishing to expand or establish within the LGA will need to take the lead in this work, with Council's active support.</p>

PROPOSED ROLE FOR COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY IN BOOSTING ECEC SUPPLY AND ACCESS AND ENHANCING THE REGION'S ATTRACTIVENESS TO FAMILIES.



WHY DEVELOP A COMMUNITY CHILDCARE STRATEGY FOR GILGANDRA?

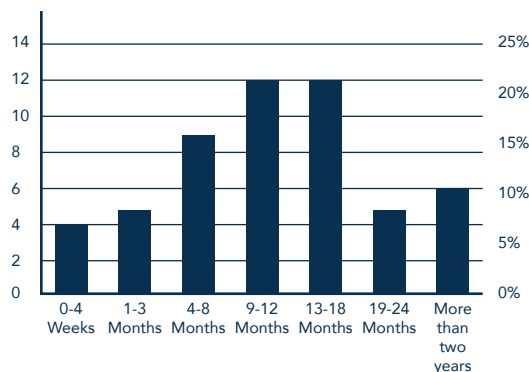
Addressing the shortage of childcare places is a key pathway towards achieving several of Council’s strategic objectives for the Region – including growing the population Towards 5000 and having an active and thriving community.

The Gilgandra Region currently has no Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) service, one central Long Day Care service that provides 49 early childhood education and care places (0-5 years), four dispersed Preschools (in and out of the LGA) which collectively provide 122 early childhood education and care places (3-5 years), and several individual Family Day Care operators.

According to detailed national analysis conducted by the Mitchell Institute, in 2021 the Gilgandra Region had approximately one childcare place available for every five children aged 0 – 4 years, instead of having the suggested minimum level of at least one place for every three children. The number of places available per child aged 0 - 4 years in Gilgandra was about half that of the national and NSW medians but was better than some adjoining Local Government Areas (LGAs).

The Mitchell Institute’s analysis that there is a need for additional childcare places in the Region, was verified through interviews and a community survey. In the following graph of survey responses about childcare waiting periods, the number of respondents is on the left, while the percentage of respondents (of those who answered this question) is on the right.

How long did you have to wait for childcare last time you placed a child? (within the last 3 years)



Two thirds of respondents who were able to answer this question had experienced a wait of more than nine months (35 respondents, 66%), including over 40% (23 respondents) who had waited more than 12 months.

Interviews with local stakeholders confirmed that both vulnerable families and working parents are having trouble accessing the types and hours of childcare they need. It is important that there be capacity for occasional care within local services, as well as ongoing places.

Through the survey respondents confirmed that more childcare would contribute to greater availability for employment, education or training. Just 9% of people who answered this question indicated that having greater childcare availability would not increase their availability for work or education.

Three quarters of respondents indicated that they would be available at least one day more each week if they could access more childcare, and more than a quarter wanted to work or study an additional 3 days or more.

Overall, just in this survey, there were more than 50 people who would work or study more than an additional day each week if they could access more childcare.

When asked if the availability of childcare affects their satisfaction with living or working in the Region, 69% of 130 respondents said childcare affects their satisfaction “a lot” or “more than most other things.” Sixteen respondents (22% of answers) said that they had considered leaving the region because of the lack of suitable childcare options.

Research confirms that childcare brings significant benefits for children and for their families, as outlined below.



CHILD AND FAMILY BENEFITS

Children’s brains develop rapidly between 0-3 years, and continue to develop throughout childhood

Scientific research on early brain development shows positive early childhood interactions at home and in services such as ECEC – which focus on emotional, social, cognitive and language development – can have lifelong positive effects for young children.

High-quality early childhood education and care settings have long-term impacts on children’s educational and wellbeing trajectories

Australian research and data matching projects have found that children who participate in early childhood education and care are more likely to be ready for school (have sufficient social, emotional, concentration and learning skills) and less likely to be developmentally vulnerable. ECEC participation is associated with higher test results in English, maths and science. Services need to be high-quality in order to improve children’s outcomes, and low-quality services have a neutral, or sometimes negative, long-term impact. ‘Quality’ in ECEC settings includes children’s physical environment; emotional care and support; learning and development support; routines; and behaviour support.

High-quality early childhood education and care can protect children from the negative impacts of disadvantage

Children experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability at home are more likely to experience short- and long-term positive outcomes from participating in early childhood education and care.

Through the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) which measures children’s development soon after commencing school, we know that in 2021 Gilgandra (21.6%) was comparable with the rest of NSW (21.2%) in terms of the proportion of children who were developmentally vulnerable in one or more of the AEDI’s five domains. Unfortunately, a greater proportion of children in Gilgandra (16.2%) were developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains than across NSW (10.5%), and this has steadily risen in Gilgandra since 2015 (when it was only 5.2%). Quality childcare is a core strategy for addressing this challenge.

Through the survey, 31 of 73 parents and carers said that a lack of childcare had affected their life choices. Parents and carers benefit from childcare through having more time for other priorities, including employment, education/training, self-care, and community connection.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

While the region faces some challenges in relation to childcare it also has important strengths we can build on, including existing ECEC services, local schools, Gilgandra Youth Service, community organisations, an active Council and a resourceful and committed community.

While Gilgandra’s population has been stable over recent years, the region recently recorded one of the highest birth rates in Australia. Families in the Region are already experiencing waiting lists and gaps for childhood education and care services – especially for children aged 0-2 years and aged 5-12 years.

Despite this growth in our youngest age groups it is difficult to plan for centre-based childhood education and care services in some of our smaller towns, where low populations mean that minimum feasible enrolments will not be reached in the foreseeable future.

To improve service access for these families, we are considering a broad range of initiatives including:

- supporting family daycare and mobile preschool initiatives, and
- investing in community transport so that children can get to centre-based services in larger town centres.

We heard in our community survey that families want local Outside School Hours Care services for children of primary school age, so that they have somewhere safe and reliable to go before school, after school and during the holidays when their parents are working. Our Strategy includes options to pursue a quality Outside School Hours Care service for Gilgandra.

In the survey you told us that childhood education and care is important to the community because parents want to return to work and plan their careers, and because children learn vital social and school readiness skills when they have the opportunity to attend high-quality Early

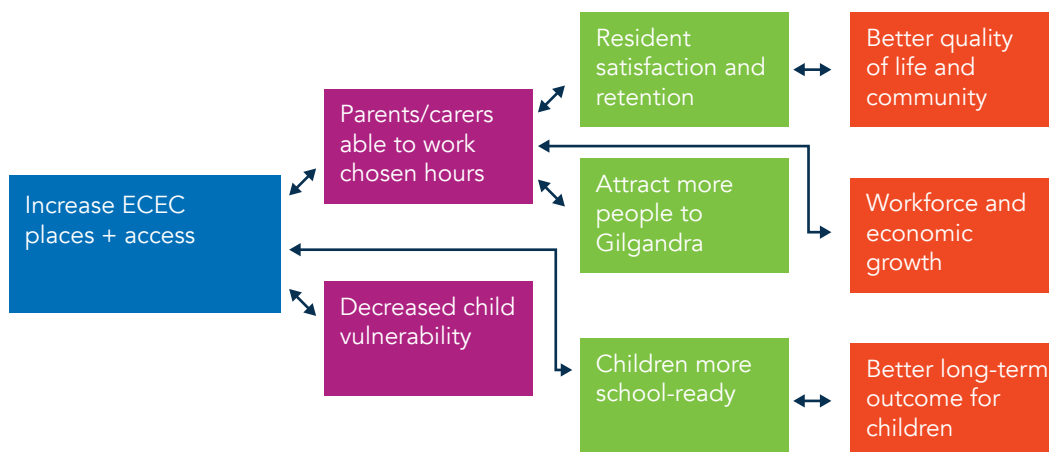
Childhood Education and Care services. Local employers report that a lack of childcare places has impacted their ability to attract and retain the skilled staff they need.

These messages reflect current research evidence that childcare drives local labour force participation and improves long-term outcomes for kids, especially in education.

Increasing the supply of childcare within the Region will assist

- Deliver better school-readiness and long-term outcomes for children
- Increase workforce supply and business productivity
- Increase the satisfaction and incomes of parents and carers living here
- Increase the attraction and retention of families, employees and businesses
- Strengthen community connections and vibrancy
- Address (in part) regional inequity

A PROGRAM LOGIC FOR ACTION





APPENDIX 1

DIRECTORY OF CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES FOR GILGANDRA (2024)

PROVIDER		NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)	NUMBER OF PLACES	COST PER DAY*
Aussie Kindies Early Learning 23 Barden Road, Gilgandra (02) 6847 0099	Mon – Fri 6.30am – 6.30pm	Meeting NQS	49	\$139 average
Gilgandra Preschool 6 Court Street, Gilgandra (02) 6847 2330 admin@gilpreschool.com.au	3-5 Years Mon – Fri, school terms 8am – 3:30pm	Exceeding NQS	60	\$109.62 average
Tooraweenah Preschool Bridge Street, Tooraweenah (02) 6848 1060 toorapreschool@hotmail.com	3-5 Years Wed – Fri, school terms 8am – 3:30pm	Meeting NQS	19	(fee relief avail)
Gulargambone Preschool 8 Yalcogrin Street, Gulargambone (02) 6825 1280 director@gularpreschool.com.au	4-5 Years Mon – Thu, school terms 8am – 3:30pm	Working Towards NQS	23	\$114.28 average
Mendooran Preschool 29 Napier Street, Mendooran (02) 6886 1167 mendooranpreschool@bigpond.com	3-5 Years Mon – Wed, school terms 8am-3:30pm	Meeting NQS	20	\$114.28 average
TOTAL PLACES			171	

* There are also several Family Day Care operators supported by Gunnedah FDC.

KEY COLOUR

Central Gilgandra location	Within Gilgandra LGA	Within 50km of Central Gilgandra but outside of LGA
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THEME 1 *Live*

OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

CSP OUTCOME

1.2 A community with intergenerational infrastructure and facilities

CSP STRATEGIES	DP AND OP ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME LEAD UNIT/S
1.2.2 Ensure public facilities are maintained, renewed and upgraded in line with Asset Management Plans	<p>1 Develop a business case to upgrade facilities for Gilgandra Youth Services and for delivery of OSHC and Vacation Care on-site until/ unless a school location is operating. This would include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring the use of Hunter Park Recreational Park Precinct upgrades for this purpose Expanding and formalising GYS' current role regarding primary school aged children Obtaining required provider and service approvals Providing resources for GYS to deliver approved services 	Economic Development. Asset Management. Year 1.

CSP OUTCOME

1.3 A community where services enhance liveability

CSP STRATEGIES	DP AND OP ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME LEAD UNIT/S
1.3.4 Ensure availability and delivery of community services for current and future needs	<p>2 Work with local schools, potential providers and Gilgandra Youth Service to establish an Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and Vacation Care service. If necessary, Council will consider underwriting the viability of the service for two years (within stated limits) to enable successful establishment and ensure service delivery - including for Council's own staff. This may involve the provision of transport.</p> <p>3 Negotiate with existing and potential Early Childhood Education and Care providers regarding Council's options to support them increase the supply of local childcare places through practical means, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waiving fees Assisting with Development Applications Assisting with funding applications to NSW and Commonwealth agencies Providing low-cost leases for service sites Contributing project management or capital works for new or expanded service sites Providing management expertise to boards or committees Building the local childcare workforce pipeline, and assisting with attraction and retention strategies <p>Any ECEC wishing to expand or establish within the LGA will need to take the lead in this work, with Council's active support.</p>	Economic Development. Youth Services. Yr 1 - 3. Economic Development & Activation Capital Projects Development & Building Control. Marketing & Communications. Yr 1 & ongoing.

<p>1.3.5 Retain and expand health and medical services</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>Explore with adjacent Councils the establishment of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared childcare transport services • A shared Mobile Preschool service for outer areas • A joint casual childcare worker pool <p>Boosting childcare availability (Actions 1-3 above) will assist this CSP strategy. Health providers report the lack of childcare is affecting their workforce</p>	<p>Growth and Liveability Yr 4.</p>
<p>1.3.7 Encourage quality and variety of educational and training options for the Gilgandra Region</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>Support the local childcare workforce pipeline through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning and partnerships between schools, VET providers, Universities and local ECEC providers • Sponsoring professional development for ECEC staff • Assisting with sector-wide public awareness, promotion and recruitment strategies • Council recognition of the achievements of ECEC services and staff in public ways • Advocacy through the Community Interest Group (see 14 below) <p>While Council may need to coordinate stakeholders and convene meetings, ECEC and education providers will need to play a leading role in any actions.</p>	<p>People and workplace culture Year 1 & ongoing</p>

THEME 2



OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

CSP OUTCOME			
2.1 An active and thriving community			
CSP STRATEGIES	DP AND OP ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	LEAD UNIT/S
Promote and encourage a healthy lifestyle	6	Consider further development of a vision for Gilgandra as a child-friendly Region A. Incorporate opportunities for child-friendly spaces into public spaces, Council facilities and local planning, supported by a policy for Council-related development	Growth and Liveability Infrastructure Yr 3.
	7	Work with local providers to promote the benefits of quality Early Childhood Education and Care to the whole community, with specific strategies for vulnerable families who do not yet access services This needs to be led by ECEC services once there are places available, with participation by Council and other community service providers. <i>Childcare is a vital way that families with young children connect with others and find the support and community they need.</i>	

THEME 3

Grow



OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

CSP OUTCOME

3.1 A Region with resilient and innovative businesses

CSP STRATEGIES	DP AND OP ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	LEAD UNIT/S
3.1.1 Support existing and new businesses and encourage growth	8 Document in a prospectus the local demand for childcare, Council's commitment to growing the region, and the ways in which Council is willing to assist existing and potential ECEC providers. Promote this opportunity to local and external providers of LDC, Preschool, FDC and OSHC.	Economic Development & Activation Marketing & Communications.	Yr 1.

CSP OUTCOME

3.2 A Region growing Towards 5000

CSP STRATEGIES	DP AND OP ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	LEAD UNIT/S
3.2.1 Attract and retain skilled workers to Gilgandra Region	<i>Boosting childcare availability (Actions 1-3, 5, 8 above) will assist attract and retain skilled workers in the Region.</i>		
3.2.2 Develop appropriate land use strategies	9 Incorporate provision for new/expanded ECEC facilities within Council's land use strategies.	Strategic Landuse Planning	Yr 1.

CSP OUTCOME

3.2 A Region growing Towards 5000

CSP STRATEGIES	DP AND OP ACTIONS	TIMEFRAME	LEAD UNIT/S
	<i>Boosting childcare availability (Actions 1-3, 5, 8 above) will assist attract and retain businesses in the Region, and increases the scale and availability of the workforce.</i>		

THEME 4

Lead



OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

CSP OUTCOME

4.1 An innovative Council that is an employer of choice within the community

CSP STRATEGIES

DP AND OP ACTIONS

TIMEFRAME LEAD UNIT/S

4.1.1 Enable an engaged workforce with suitable skills available in the right place at the right time

- Boosting childcare availability (Actions 1-3, 5, 8 above) will enable some Council staff to choose to work more hours and will assist attract suitable staff to the Region.

CSP OUTCOME

4.2 A progressive Council engaged with the community

CSP STRATEGIES

DP AND OP ACTIONS

TIMEFRAME LEAD UNIT/S

4.2.1 Inform and empower community input into decision making

10

As part of becoming a more child-friendly Region, establish a Council protocol for consulting with children, young people and their families on plans that impact children's wellbeing.

- Design and implement a concise child and youth impact assessment tool to inform Council policy and strategy development

Integrated planning and reporting.
Yr 4.

CSP OUTCOME

4.3 A Council valued by its community

CSP STRATEGIES

DP AND OP ACTIONS

TIMEFRAME LEAD UNIT/S

4.3.2 Monitor and evaluate Council's strategic planning documents

11

Include actions to prioritise local childcare availability, access and quality in Council's next Delivery Program and Operational Plan, under Community Strategic Plan 2032 strategies, especially

- 1.3.4 Ensure availability and delivery of community services for current and future needs
- 1.3.7 Encourage quality and variety of educational and training options for the Gilgandra Region
- 3.1.1 Support existing and new businesses and encourage growth
- 4.1.1 Enable an engaged workforce with suitable skills, available in the right place at the right time.

Integrated planning and reporting
Yr 1.

4.3.3 Ensure a financially sound Council that is responsible and sustainable

By working to support private/NGO providers of childcare Council is not exposing itself to risks experienced by other Councils where specialist expertise for the childcare regulatory and business environment is required.

4.3.4 Maximise external funding opportunities to complement strategic plans

12 Develop policies to enable Council to appropriately collaborate with existing and new ECEC providers to support the development of additional childcare places (rather than directly deliver services itself – requiring specialist expertise)

Governance

Yr 1.

13 Coordinate a strategic approach to funding opportunities with local ECEC providers – identifying the region’s priorities, planning around anticipated opportunities, and agreeing ways in which Council will assist in each application process. Priorities for the immediate term include:

Economic Development & Activation

Yr 1 -5

- An increase in places available for children aged 0 – 5 years through Gilgandra’s existing Long Day Care and Preschool services and/ or the attraction of a new provider – with a clear focus on more places for 0 – 2 year olds. Aim for at least 70 LDC places in town.
- The establishment of a local Out of School Hours Care and Vacation Care service for 5 – 12 year olds
- Support for new and existing Family Day Care providers – especially outside of central Gilgandra
- Building the local childcare workforce
- Promoting the value of ECEC to all families and maximizing access

Because funding is allocated to registered ECEC providers they will need to lead the development of funding applications – with Council’s support.

4.3.5 Provide an advocacy role on behalf of the community

14 Establish a Community Interest Group (preferably with representation from schools, family support services, First Nations organisations, disability services, ECEC providers and other key stakeholders) to

Economic Development & Activation. Marketing & Communications.

Yr 1 - 5

- Advocate to the NSW and Commonwealth governments for greater resourcing for regional childcare, and for Gilgandra specifically
- Collaboratively develop proposals and respond to funding opportunities
- Monitor the quality, quantity, diversity and sustainability of the local childcare sector and collaborate on responses to key issues, including overall supply, access for vulnerable families, workforce challenges and options for families outside of town
- Foster ECEC related networking among relevant stakeholders

Ideally, an independent advocate will chair this group with Council coordinating and providing secretariat services.



GILGANDRA
SHIRE COUNCIL
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