

Policy – Council – Child Safety & Wellbeing

Date amended:	June 2022
Date of next review:	May 2025
Adopted by:	Council
Date adopted:	June 2022
Responsible officer:	Director Corporate & Community Services

1 INTRODUCTION

Council has a duty to protect the children and young people under their care. This procedure guides Council and its employees on implementing and meeting the eleven new Child Safe Standards in place from 1 July 2022, by:

- taking a proactive and preventative, risk-based approach to establishing a safe (including culturally safe) environment for children and young people,
- taking steps to empower children and young people on their rights and in participating in decisions affecting them, and
- collaboratively implementing systems and providing training to enable and support the reporting of child safety risk concerns or allegations.

1.1 Purpose and scope

This policy demonstrates the commitment of the Pyrenees Shire Council, its leaders, staff, and volunteers to child safety and the maintenance of an environment focused on the protection of children.

The policy applies to all Councillors, employees, contracted staff, contractors, and volunteers of the Pyrenees Shire Council, and any outsourced providers of services on behalf of Council.

1.2 Child Safe Principles

The Child Safe Standards are underpinned by the understanding that all children are vulnerable. However, three overarching principles require Council to consider the increased vulnerability of:

- Aboriginal children
- those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- children with disabilities
- same sex attracted and intersex children and young people

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These groups of children and young people may be particularly vulnerable to being victimized and may face challenges in reporting an incident of abuse.

1.3 Maintaining staff wellbeing

Dealing with child abuse issues can be extremely distressing for staff. If support or counselling is needed – or just someone to debrief with – Council’s Employee Assistance Program can help and is free for the first three sessions: call Ballarat Community Centre on 1800 054 172.

2 STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

The Pyrenees Shire Council is committed to being a Child Safe Organisation and has a zero tolerance to abuse or harm to children, young people, or any other person. We recognise our legal and moral responsibilities in keeping the children and young people in our care safe from harm.

Council is committed to creating a culturally safe environment where children feel safe, are empowered, valued, and protected – where all children have a voice and are listened to, their views respected, and provided with opportunities to contribute to the planning, design, and development of our services and activities that might impact them.

The safeguarding of children and young people will be done in accordance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards 2022.

2.1 The Pyrenees Way

“The Pyrenees Way” describes our safety vision: how the Pyrenees Shire Council manages its health, safety, and wellbeing obligations – including the safeguarding of children and young people – representing a culture where safe and protective work practices and attitudes are reflective of the “way we do things at Pyrenees Shire Council”.

Safeguarding our children is part of the way we do our work – it is not a stand-alone activity. Eliminating and reducing risk of harm is the responsibility of everyone in the Pyrenees Shire Council workplace and areas of influence.

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3 CHILD SAFE STANDARDS 2022

New Child Safe Standards were introduced in July 2022. The eleven new Standards set out minimum requirements and outline the actions organisations must take to keep children and young people safe.

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

Council must ensure:

- A child’s ability to express their culture and enjoy their cultural rights is encouraged and actively supported.
- Strategies are embedded within the organisation which equip all members to acknowledge and appreciate the strengths of Aboriginal culture and understand its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children and young people.
- Measures are adopted by the organisation to ensure racism within the organisation is identified, confronted and not tolerated. Any instances of racism are addressed with appropriate consequences.
- The organisation actively supports and facilitates participation and inclusion within it by Aboriginal children, young people, and their families.
- All of Council’s policies, procedures, systems, and processes together create a culturally safe and inclusive environment and meet the needs of Aboriginal children, young people, and their families.

Child Safe Standard 2

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

Council must ensure:

- The organisation makes a public commitment to child safety.
- A child safe culture is championed and modelled at all levels of the organisation from the top down and bottom up.
- Governance arrangements facilitate implementation of the child safety and wellbeing policy at all levels.
- A Code of Conduct provides guidelines for staff and volunteers on expected behavioural standards and responsibilities.
- Risk management strategies focus on preventing, identifying, and mitigating risks to children and young people.
- Staff and volunteers understand their obligations on information sharing and recordkeeping.

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Child Safe Standard 3

Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

Council must ensure:

- Children and young people are informed about all of their rights, including to safety, information, and participation.
- The importance of friendships is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, to help children and young people feel safe and be less isolated.
- Where relevant to the setting or context, children and young people are offered access to sexual abuse prevention programs and to relevant related information in an age-appropriate way.
- Staff and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children and young people to express their views, participate in decision-making and raise their concerns.
- Organisations have strategies in place to develop a culture that facilitates participation and is responsive to the input of children and young people.
- Organisations provide opportunities for children and young people to participate and are responsive to their contributions, thereby strengthening confidence and engagement.

Child Safe Standard 4

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

Council must ensure:

- Families participate in decisions affecting their child.
- The organisation engages and openly communicates with families and the community about its child safe approach and relevant information is accessible.
- Families and communities have a say in the development and review of the organisation's policies and practices.
- Families, carers and the community are informed about the organisation's operations and governance.

Child Safe Standard 5

Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

Council must ensure:

- The organisation, including staff and volunteers, understands children and young people's diverse circumstances, and provides support and responds to those who are vulnerable.
- Children and young people have access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are culturally safe, accessible and easy to understand.

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- The organisation pays particular attention to the needs of children and young people with disability, children, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex children and young people.
- The organisation pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal children and young people and provides / promotes a culturally safe environment for them.

Child Safe Standard 6

People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

Council must ensure:

- Recruitment, including advertising, referee checks and staff and volunteer pre-employment screening, emphasise child safety and wellbeing.
- Relevant staff and volunteers have current working with children checks or equivalent background checks.
- All staff and volunteers receive an appropriate induction and are aware of their responsibilities to children and young people, including record keeping, information sharing, and reporting obligations.
- Ongoing supervision and people management is focused on child safety and wellbeing.

Child Safe Standard 7

Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused

Council must ensure:

- The organisation has an accessible, child-focused complaint handling policy which clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of leadership, staff and volunteers, approaches to dealing with different types of complaints, breaches of relevant policies or the Code of Conduct, and obligations to act and report.
- Effective complaint handling processes are understood by children and young people, families, staff and volunteers, and are culturally safe.
- Complaints are taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly.
- The organisation has policies and procedures in place that address reporting of complaints and concerns to relevant authorities, whether or not the law requires reporting, and cooperates with law enforcement.
- Reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met.

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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

Council must ensure:

- Staff and volunteers are trained and supported to effectively implement the organisation's child safety and wellbeing policy.
- Staff and volunteers receive training and information to recognise indicators of child harm including harm caused by other children and young people.
- Staff and volunteers receive training and information to respond effectively to issues of child safety and wellbeing and support colleagues who disclose harm
- Staff and volunteers receive training and information on how to build culturally safe environments for children and young people.

Child Safe Standard 9

Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

Council must ensure:

- Staff and volunteers identify and mitigate risks in the online and physical environments without compromising a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.
- The online environment is used in accordance with Council's Codes of Conduct and child safety and wellbeing policy and practices.
- Risk management plans consider risks posed by organisational settings, activities, and the physical environment.
- Organisations that contract facilities and services from third parties have procurement policies that ensure the safety of children and young people.

Child Safe Standard 10

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved

Council must ensure:

- The organisation regularly reviews, evaluates and improves child safe practices.
- Complaints, concerns and safety incidents are analysed to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement.
- The organisation reports on the findings of relevant reviews to staff and volunteers, community and families, and children and young people.

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Child Safe Standard 11

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

Council must ensure:

- Policies and procedures address all Child Safe Standards.
- Policies and procedures are documented and easy to understand.
- Best practice models and stakeholder consultation informs the development of policies and procedures.
- Leaders champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.
- Staff and volunteers understand and implement policies and procedures.

4 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The following will be undertaken to implement the Child Safe Standards 2022 and ensure Council compliance:

- Establish a working group representing Council areas regularly involved with children and/or young people and community volunteers.
- Undertake a risk-based gap analysis of existing Council processes and controls against the revised Standards.
- Identify and document in a Child Safe Strategy what is reasonably required to ensure compliance, focusing on:
 - The areas where additional controls or process improvement may be required and can reasonably be implemented.
 - The level of collaboration required / desired with our communities and children / young people.
 - Essential resource requirements.
 - Training requirements for staff who are actively involved with children and young people.
 - Awareness programs for all other staff.
 - Information provision for our community (e.g., website).

5 REFERENCES

5.1 Council documents

- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Child Safety Response and Reporting Procedure
- Child Safety Reporting Checklist
- Recruitment procedure
- Child Safe Standards FAQs (Frequently asked questions – under development)
- Child Safe Standards – Guidelines for Managers and Supervisors (under development)

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5.2 Legislation

- Child Safe Standards 2015 (Vic)
- Children Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Failure to Disclose Act 2014 (Vic)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
- The Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012 (Vic)
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)
- Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)
- Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme 2016 (Vic)

5.3 Criminal offences

- Failure to protect a child from sexual abuse (2015)
- Failure to disclose child sexual abuse (2014)
- Grooming offence (2014)

5.4 Consultation and impact

Pyrenees Shire Council is committed to consultation and cooperation between management and its employees. Development of this procedure was conducted in consultation with relevant staff and consultative committees prior to approval. It is considered that this procedure does not impact negatively on the rights identified in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. A Gender Impact Assessment was conducted and necessary changes to the document made as required.

6 VERSION HISTORY

Version Number	Issue date	Description of change
1.0	August 2017	Initial release
2.0	March 2022	Review
3.0	June 2022	Further review and update to meet needs of new Child Safe Standards following further information and guidance

All Procedures and other guidance documents must be reviewed within 4 years. This document will be reviewed in a 3-year cycle.

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