

# Shoalhaven City Council Child Safe Strategy



# Shoalhaven City Council – Child Safe Strategy

Shoalhaven City Council (the Council) is committed to providing a child safe environment where children are safe and feel safe, and their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. We value and support inclusion, diversity and equality. Council supports the empowerment and participation of children within Council and the broader community. We take children seriously when they raise concerns regarding their wellbeing, or when we see that they are being harmed in any way.

The Child Safe Strategy proposes to strengthen the safety of children in the Shoalhaven community and drive compliance with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and the New South Wales Child Safe Standards (the Standards) which are audited by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG).

Local councils, including Shoalhaven City Council, are considered child-related organisation given their role in providing local community services to children and as the representative for the community, including members of the community who are children. Council provides direct services to children through libraries and aquatic centres, as well as indirectly through activities such as events and community engagement, and through leasing facilities to community organisations that work directly with children.

Robyn Stevens, CEO of the Shoalhaven City Council under the Children's Guardian Amendment (Child Safe Scheme) 2021 is committed to and responsible in ensuring that our organisation implements the Child safe Standards through systems, policies and processes.

Whilst the OCG has not set a timeframe for councils to undertake this work and put these policies and procedures in place, councils must be able to show that they are taking action to become child safe. The Act gives the OCG strong powers to compel councils to comply if they cannot demonstrate consistent progress.



Robyn Stevens  
Chief Executive Officer

## Purpose

The Child Safe Strategy (the Strategy) will help drive the development of a child safe culture and build safeguarding capacity across the Council, services and activities by providing:

- Support in the practical and consistent application of Child safe Standards
- opportunities to identify and improve children's safety and wellbeing
- clear direction and guidance to address risk and respond to harm proactively and effectively
- a clear explanation of the roles and responsibilities, legal/policy obligations and best practice for effective safeguarding
- minimise barriers to community and family engagement
- higher levels of child safety and wellbeing amongst the community.

## Provide and update public information about the child safe strategy

Standard 3 requires organisations to keep families and communities informed and involved in child safety. Throughout the development and implementation of this strategy, Council will routinely publish and update information on the Council's website as well as other public/social media and information forums to keep family and communities informed.

When key indicators, as set out below, are developed and endorsed they will be publicly circulated to keep Council personnel, families and the community informed and updated.

# Development and implementation of Child safe indicators

The Child safe strategy includes the following key child safe indicators that will be developed and implemented:

1. Develop a statement of commitment to child safety through community wide circulation, which will inform the community of the Council's commitment to embedding a culture where the safety, wellbeing, and participation of all children in the Shoalhaven community is paramount.
2. Develop a child safe operational framework which will include the Council's policy basis for prevention of and response to reports and concerns of abuse and form part of the induction process for new employees and ongoing training and education of Council personnel. which will include:
  - a. Part 1: Overview – What does the Child Safe Framework do?
  - b. Part 2: Prevention - screening, recruitment, training and educating Council and the community.
  - c. Part 3: Recognising indicators of abuse and supporting disclosures.
  - d. Part 4: Responding to and reporting child safety reports and concerns.
  - e. Part 5: Information sharing and record keeping.
  - f. Part 6: Redress and support for victims and survivors of abuse.
3. Revision of human resource policies including the code of conduct to ensure they are child safe.
4. Establish a role and appoint a child safe delegate within current resources to support the CEO implement and maintain the Child Safe Standards.
5. Develop a child safe risk management and action plan.
6. Develop and roll out a child safe training plan for staff based on the practical application of the child safe operational framework.
7. Implement a structure of ongoing review and annual reporting.



## Outcome – To be a Child safe organisation

The purpose and outcome of the implementation of the Standards is to be a child safe organisation which creates, fosters and maintains a culture, adopt strategies and acts to prevent harm and respond consistently with best practice if harm to a child is caused. The expected outcomes include:

- children feel empowered, their voices valued and there is an expectation that children are consulted in an age appropriate and child friendly way.
- the Council's child safe strategy and operational framework is extensively communicated and understood by Council personnel and community members.
- every Council personnel feels responsible for child safety and understands the child safe expectations of their role and responds appropriately to disclosures, reports, and concerns of harm.
- Council personnel understand the limitations of what they are responsible for and the internal and external responsibilities reporting pathways to minimise the risk of failed responses.
- creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed.
- creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting harm.

## Shoalhaven City Council – Key Indicators of Child Safety

Shoalhaven Council are committed to the following key indicators that will support a child safe organisational culture:

- Empower children and consider their views about decisions that affect their safety and wellbeing.
- Acknowledge the cultural diversity of families and are sensitive to how cultural diversity may impact child safety.
- Respect and support children's rights to privacy.
- implement strategies to embed and enhance a culture of child safety and wellbeing through the leadership, governance, and culture of our organisation.
- Take proactive steps to prevent child abuse and identify risks early so that such risks may be removed or reduced.
- Involve families, carers and relevant communities in decision making processes that support the development of a child safe culture.
- Support programs and services to help children develop the knowledge and skills to understand and maintain their own personal safety.
- Apply robust human resources, recruitment, induction and performance review practices for all staff, contractors and volunteers.
- Build capacity through regular training and education about how to recognise the nature and indicators of child abuse and other harm; respond to safeguarding risks and build culturally safe physical and online environments for children.
- implement specific policies, procedures, training, a Code of Conduct, and a set of Child Safe Standards to support the achievement of a child safe culture that sets clear standards for Council and staff about how they:
  - o Behave towards and engage with children.
  - o Meet their obligations in responding to and reporting child safety concerns and reports including how they share information and keep records.
- Listen to concerns about the safety of children, and suggestions to improve the child safety processes in place.
- Prioritise the response to any child safety concerns and implement clear procedures that set out individual and organisational obligations in the response to and reporting of child safety concerns.
- Support programs, services and child safe initiatives that raise community awareness about the needs to consistently prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children.
- Recognise the impact of harm on children who are abused and the need to support them and their families. continuously review and improve our child safe practices to protect children from abuse and use child safety reports and concerns as opportunities to identify systemic causes and failures and foster continuous improvement as a child safe organisation.

# Shoalhaven City Council– Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

**All children have a right to feel safe and be safe.**

Shoalhaven City Council is committed to embedding a culture where the safety, wellbeing, and participation of children in our community is paramount. Shoalhaven City Council is committed to fulfilling its obligations and following best practice to identify and respond to risk and harm of children within our community who engage in activities and services provided by Shoalhaven City Council.

Shoalhaven City Council embraces the diversity of children in our community, particularly the needs of children who:



- are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



- have lived experience of disability



- are from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds



- are unable to live at home



- are of diverse sexualities and genders

Shoalhaven City Council is committed to always acting in the best interests of children, nurturing their wellbeing, respecting their dignity, ensuring their safety, and protecting them from abuse and other harm.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse. All reports, disclosures and concerns about child safety are treated very seriously. Shoalhaven City Council is consistently working to improve individual and organisational capacity to understand risk and recognise harm for effective prevention, response and support of anyone who is harmed.

Shoalhaven Council and its staff, contractors and volunteers have legal and moral obligations to respond to all disclosures and concerns including contacting authorities where relevant when we are concerned about a child's safety.

Shoalhaven City Council are committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and the implementation of the Child Safe Standards including the key indicators that will support a child safe organisational culture.

Statement endorsed by the Shoalhaven City Council on 26 February 2024.

Information on how to raise a concern relating to the safety and wellbeing of a child in the Shoalhaven Community, including making a confidential report, can be found in the [ChildSafe Framework](#).

