



Introduction

This engagement report outlines the consultation undertaken to inform the **Municipal Early Years Plan 2026-2030 (MEYP)**.

This report summarises the engagement approach, participation, key findings, and how community input informed the draft Plan.

Project details

Background

The MEYP sets Council's strategic direction for services, supports and environments for children aged 0-6 years and their families over a four-year period.

The Plan is developed in alignment with Council's obligations under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and supports integrated planning across early years services.

Project purpose

The purpose of the MEYP 2026-2030 is to:

- guide Council's planning, delivery and advocacy for early years services
- respond to the needs and priorities of children, families and carers
- support positive early childhood outcomes across the municipality

Engagement purpose and scope

The purpose of engagement was to gather community and stakeholder input to:

- understand current experiences of early years services and supports
- identify priority areas for the next four years
- inform the development of the draft MEYP

Engagement focused on services and supports for children aged 0-6 years and their families within Frankston City.

Summary of engagement results

Stage 1 community engagement was undertaken between 2 March and 1 April 2026. This included engagement with 538 community members.

Stage 1: Community engagement on the Municipal Early Years Plan 2026-2030

Engagement with a total of **538 community members**.

Stage 1 engagement aimed to:

- inform the community about existing services
- consult with families, carers and early years providers on service gaps and emerging needs
- involve the community in shaping the priorities and actions for the draft Plan

More detail on Stage 1 engagement outcomes is provided in **Appendix 1**.

Participant demographics

Demographic data was collected to understand the profile of participants who contributed to the engagement.

The majority of respondents were parents and carers (86.7%), with smaller representation from grandparents, early years professionals and Council staff.

Most respondents identified as women (85.6%), with more limited participation from men and gender-diverse respondents. The largest age group represented was 25–39 years (74%), which aligns with parents and carers of young children.

Responses were received from across the municipality, with higher participation from Frankston (central), Seaford and Carrum Downs.

A smaller proportion of respondents identified as:

- speaking a language other than English (9.1%)
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (3.2%)
- a person with a disability or long-term health condition (3.2%)

These results indicate that feedback primarily reflects the perspectives of families currently accessing early years services. This has been considered in the interpretation of engagement findings.

How has the community's input influenced the draft MEYP

The draft MEYP has been drafted following Stage 1 engagement and reflects the feedback and data collected.

Key changes proposed in the draft include:

- priority areas aligned with community feedback
- improved access to early years services and programs

- improvements to communication and information pathways, including clearer guidance on available supports and how to access services (e.g. Maternal and Child Health, breastfeeding support and sleep and settling services)
- actions supporting community connection and wellbeing
- inclusive and equitable approaches to service delivery

How has this project complied with Community Engagement Principles?

Purpose

All community engagement projects must have a clearly defined purpose, objective and scope.

Why did we need community input into this project, and how has it been used?

- The purpose of this engagement was to understand how families and service providers experience early years services in Frankston City, and to identify priorities for future planning.
- Community input was used to inform the development of the draft MEYP 2026-2030, including priority areas, service considerations and opportunities for improvement.

What are the objectives?

- To involve the community in shaping Council's early years planning.

What is the scope?

Aspects of the MEYP Plan that **were NOT** able to be influenced in this engagement include:

- services that are highly regulated and governed by external service agreements
- requests for new infrastructure or facilities

Aspects of the Framework that **were able** to be influenced in this engagement include:

- services funded and delivered by Council, including playgroup development
- opportunities to improve aspects of existing services
- service delivery approaches and access to services
- communication and information sharing

Where feedback related to new or upgraded infrastructure, Council has existing processes through long-term infrastructure planning. Consideration of these requests is subject to:

- alignment with strategic plans
- availability of funding
- business case development
- future community engagement and Council endorsement

Representation

We ensured participants are diverse and representative of the community by:

In the Engagement Plan, we aimed to achieve a participation target of approximately **200 community members**, representing a broad range of demographics and cohorts across the municipality.

Participation in Stage 1 exceeded this target, with **538 respondents**, including:

- parents and carers
- grandparents
- early years' service providers
- council early years staff

Engagement methods were designed to support participation across a range of demographic groups including targeted and place-based approaches.

While participation was strong across the community, the majority of respondents identified as parents/carers (86.6%), with higher participation from women. This has been considered in interpreting results and will inform future engagement approaches.

Demographic	Specific group (or all)	What support was needed to ensure participation?
All suburbs and age groups	All suburbs across the municipality	Online engagement was delivered via Engage Frankston Promotion through multiple communication channels In-person engagement in locations with historically lower online participation (e.g. Frankston North, Carrum Downs) Printed materials distributed through playgroups, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and community locations
Gender	All - particularly focusing on increasing input of women (GIA recommendation)	Online engagement was supported by broad promotion Intercept surveys were conducted at early years services (e.g. immunisation sessions, Baby makes 3 sessions, playgroups, MCH appointments) Engagement activities were undertaken at family-focused community settings (e.g. playgroups, events, library programs)

People with a disability or long-term illness	All	Materials were distributed through relevant local networks and services supporting children and families
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples	All	Engagement was undertaken at community events, including the Get Your Reconciliation – Fun Run and Community Event Materials were distributed through relevant local networks and service providers
People with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds	All	Translation functionality was available via Engage Frankston Distribution of materials through relevant local networks.
Relevant stakeholder groups	Internal staff	Engagement was undertaken with Early Years staff and internal teams Information was shared through internal communication channels The engagement was promoted through newsletter and community networks

Supported

We provided participants with reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement by:

- Conducting the engagement over a four-week period between **2 March to 1 April 2026**
- Engaging early in the planning process before the draft Plan was developed
- Using multiple engagement methods including:
 - Online survey via Engage Frankston
 - In-person engagement at community events
 - Intercept surveys at early years services (e.g. immunisation sessions, Baby Makes 3 sessions)
 - Facilitating engagement at early years services with children and parents at playgroups and kindergartens
- Providing promotional materials in community locations including libraries, playgroups and community centres
- Enabling access to information online via Engage Frankston

Informed

We provided participants with access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation by:

- Explaining how feedback would be used
- Outlining the scope of influence
- Providing contact details for further questions
- Committing to report back on outcomes

Report

We are reporting back to the community on how this engagement has influenced Council decision-making in the following ways:

- Publishing an engagement summary on Engage Frankston
- Publishing this engagement report
- Demonstrating how community feedback has informed the draft Municipal Early Years Plan

Risk management

The following specific risks were identified during the engagement planning phase, with mitigation strategies implemented throughout the engagement.

Risk	Possible impact	Successful mitigation
Meeting community expectations	Council may not be able to implement all requested changes	Clearly communicate what can and cannot be influenced and provide transparency regarding financial sustainability
Receiving responses from limited cohorts	Reduced diversity of responses	Identify target cohorts and undertake targeted engagement activities to support participation
Feedback focused on specific topics (e.g. kindergarten registration, parenting programs)	Narrow range of feedback across services	Design survey questions to capture feedback across a range of early years services and address key topics through communication.
Predominantly female participation	Limited representation of other genders	Provide targeted engagement opportunities for males and gender diverse participants and include gender data collection in survey

Next steps

The next steps for this project are:

- review community feedback
- finalise the MEYP 2026-2030
- present to Council for adoption

Appendix 1

Outcomes of Stage 1 engagement activities

This appendix provides a summary of the quantitative and qualitative findings from Stage 1 engagement. Responses were analysed to identify patterns, frequency of topics and common themes.

1. Overview of responses

Stage 1 engagement included both quantitative and qualitative data collection through an online survey.

- Total respondents: 538
- Free-text responses: 1,500+ across 39 questions
- Community respondents: 490+
- Service providers: 48

Free-text responses were received across topics including:

- Early years services
- Parks and public spaces
- Information access
- Parenting programs
- Early learning and kindergarten
- General feedback

2. Quantitative results

The survey included quantitative questions to capture community views on early years services, service access and user experiences. The results are summarised below.

2.1 Agreement statements

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements relating to early years services and supports in Frankston City.

Responses indicate levels of agreement across topics including access to services, safety of public spaces, and access to healthy food.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Public parks are safe and easy to get to	78 (14%)	301 (56%)	105 (20%)	48 (9%)	6 (1%)
Council supports healthy active lifestyles	58 (11%)	284 (53%)	146 (27%)	47 (9%)	3 (1%)
I know how to access early years supports	77 (14%)	271 (50%)	126 (23%)	57 (11%)	7 (1%)
My family has reliable access to healthy food	218 (41%)	239 (44%)	49 (9%)	27 (5%)	5 (1%)

2.2 Service experience

Respondents who had accessed services were asked to rate their overall experience. Responses were collected across a range of Council-run early years services.

Service	Positive	Neutral	Negative	n (raters)
Immunisation	89%	8%	1%	326
Supported Playgroup	81%	18%	1%	149
Early Learning & Kindergarten	81%	13%	4%	22
MCH Services	78%	16%	5%	406
First Time Parents Group	78%	16%	5%	238
Sleep and Settling Outreach	75%	21%	3%	84
Breastfeeding Support	74%	19%	6%	135
Kinder Registration	56%	29%	14%	181

2.3 Access to services

Respondents were asked whether they were able to access services when needed within Frankston City. Responses varied across services.

Service	Could not access	Was able to access	Unmet need rate
Breastfeeding Support	61	141	30%
Sleep and Settling Outreach	40	92	30%
Supported Playgroup	25	157	14%
First Time Parents Group	29	248	10%
Immunisation	34	342	9%
Kinder Registration	15	188	7%
MCH Services	24	418	5%
Early Learning & Kindergarten	1	23	4%

3. Free-text responses

The survey included free-text questions to capture detailed feedback on early years services, experiences and priorities. The responses are summarised below.

3.1 Overview

- Total responses analysed: 1,328 community responses
- Responses coded to themes:
 - One theme: 601 (45%)
 - Multiple themes: 289 (22%)
- Response without a clear theme: 438 (33%)

Rank	Theme	Responses	% of all 1,328	% of 890 themed
1	T1: MCH Services	270	20.3%	30.3%
2	T2: Parks and Public Spaces	191	14.4%	21.5%
3=	T3: Information Access & Service Navigation	130	9.8%	14.6%
3=	T4: Playgroups & First Time Parents Groups	130	9.8%	14.6%
5	T5: Community Connection & Parental Wellbeing	120	9.0%	13.5%
6	T6: Kindergarten & Kinder Registration	118	8.9%	13.3%
7	T7: Inclusion and Access Gaps	100	7.5%	11.2%
8	T8: Cost of Living & Financial Hardship	70	5.3%	7.9%
9	T9: Breastfeeding Support	59	4.4%	6.6%
10	T10: Immunisation	51	3.8%	5.7%
11	T11: Sleep and Settling	36	2.7%	4.0%
12	T12: Service Integration and Referral	30	2.3%	3.4%

4. Summary of themes

Free-text responses were grouped into key themes based on topics raised across the survey. The following provides a summary of what respondents commented on within each theme.

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Services

Referenced in 270 responses (20.3% of free-text responses).

This was the most frequently referenced topic in free-text responses. Feedback described a range of experiences with MCH services.

- Continuity of care (seeing the same nurse across appointments)
- Consistency of advice provided
- Communication style and approach
- Appointment availability and booking systems
- Inclusion of fathers and non-primary carers

Parks and Public Spaces

Referenced in 191 responses (14.4% of free-text responses).

Respondents provided feedback on local parks, playgrounds and outdoor spaces used by young children and families.

Topics raised included:

- Safety within parks and playgrounds
- Maintenance, cleanliness and condition of facilities
- Proximity and access to local parks
- Availability of age-appropriate equipment
- Access to amenities such as seating, shade and toilets

Information Access and Navigation

Referenced in 130 responses (9.8% of free-text responses).

Responses referred to how families access and receive information about early years services.

Topics raised included:

- How families find information about services
- Clarity and accessibility of information
- Awareness of available programs
- Preferred communication methods, including online and in-person

Playgroups and Parent Groups

Referenced in 130 responses (9.8% of free-text responses).

Respondents commented on playgroups, first-time parent groups and similar programs.

Feedback included:

- The role of programs in supporting connection and shared experiences
- Awareness of programs and how they are promoted
- Availability of places and access to sessions
- Opportunities for participation across different groups of parents and carers

Community Connection and Wellbeing

Referenced in 120 responses (9.0% of free-text responses).

Responses referred to broader experiences of connection, support and wellbeing for families with young children.

Topics raised included:

- Opportunities to connect with other families
- Access to informal and community-based support
- Support for parents and carers
- Participation in community activities and programs

Kindergarten and Registration

Referenced in 118 responses (8.9% of free-text responses).

Respondents provided feedback on early learning access and the kindergarten registration process.

Topics raised included:

- Registration processes and timelines
- Access to kindergarten places
- Transition between early learning stages
- Session times and availability

Inclusion and Access

Referenced in 100 responses (7.5% of free-text responses).

Responses referred to how well services meet the needs of different community groups.

Topics raised included:

- Access for different family types
- Culturally appropriate services and supports
- Access for children with additional needs
- Inclusion of fathers, carers and different household structures

Cost of living

Referenced in 70 responses (5.3% of free-text responses).

Respondents referred to the impact of cost on participation in services and activities.

Topics raised included:

- Affordability of programs and services
- Cost as a factor in accessing activities
- Financial pressures affecting family participation

5. Service provider feedback

Service provider feedback complemented community responses and provided additional insight into service access, coordination and family needs. The following summarises this feedback.

Feedback was received from approximately 48 respondents (around 8% of total respondents).

Service providers provided feedback based on their experience supporting families and delivering or referring to early years services. The feedback covered a range of services and system-level considerations and aligned with topics raised by community respondents.

Service providers referred to:

- Awareness of services and referrals pathways
 - how families find out about services

- the role of services and professionals in providing information
- opportunities to improve communication pathways
- Access to services
 - availability of services for families
 - awareness of service eligibility and access pathways
 - referral processes between services
- Service delivery and coordination
 - coordination between services and organisations
 - opportunities for collaboration and partnerships
 - integration of services across the early years system
- Family needs and support
 - experiences of families accessing services
 - support for a range of family circumstances
 - access to appropriate services for different needs
- Specific services and programs
 - Maternal and Child Health Services
 - playgroups and parent programs
 - early learning and kindergarten
 - sleep and settling and breastfeeding supports

6. Summary of key messages from community feedback

Analysis of responses identified the following key messages from the community:

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services are a key focus for families

Feedback frequently referred to consistency, quality and experience of MCH services.

Parks and public spaces are valued by families

Respondents valued local parks and highlighted the importance of safety, maintenance, amenities and accessible design.

Clear and accessible information supports families to connect with services

Feedback identified a preference for clear, accessible and proactive communication about available services.

Playgroups and parent programs support connection and participation

Playgroups were identified as valued services, with feedback relating to awareness, availability and access.

Community connection and wellbeing support families

Responses referred to the importance of opportunities for connection, support for parents and carers, including parental mental health, and access to peer support and community networks.

Access to kindergarten and registration processes are important to families

Feedback referenced the registration process, access to places, and session availability.

Inclusive and accessible services are valued by the community

Respondents referred to the inclusion of second-time parents, fathers, culturally diverse families, children with disability and homeschooling families.

8. Cost of living influences participation in services and activities

Feedback highlighted the role of financial pressures in shaping access to services and participation in activities.

These messages reflect the most frequently raised themes across community responses and have informed the priorities and development of the draft Municipal Early Years Plan.