

Department of Planning and Environment

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Office of Local Government Child Safe Action Plan

August 2023





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning and Environment acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

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Office of Local Government Child Safe Action Plan

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Message from the Deputy Secretary

The Office of Local Government (OLG) is honoured to present the Office of Local Government Child Safe Action Plan outlining how we will work with councils across NSW to improve the safety of our children. When the NSW Government adopted the 10 Child Safe Standards created by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, it recognised that local government had the opportunity to be a key driver of cultural change in our communities.

The local government sector plays a key role in the lives of our young people through early childhood, school aged and youth services, leisure and recreation facilities such as swimming pools, libraries, parks and sporting fields as well as through employment of young people.

The 128 local councils in NSW are well aware of the importance, and are actively working towards becoming child safe organisations. OLG commends NSW councils for proactively embracing the positive opportunities the Child Safe Standards (Standards) represent. Councils are creating policies, actively training their staff, and making public commitments to promoting child safe practices. These actions are leading cultural change and making communities in NSW safer for children.

OLG would also like to acknowledge the work of the Office of the Children's Guardian in leading this work across all sectors in NSW. OLG will continue to support the work of the Office of the Children's Guardian and local government by raising awareness of the Standards and build capability in local government to implement the Standards.

The following action plan sets out OLG's commitment to promoting best practice in child safe standards, the strategies that will guide our work and the activities we will undertake with those we regulate.

I am keen to ensure we are all working together effectively to deliver the services and standards our growing communities need.

Brett Whitworth
Deputy Secretary, Local Government

Introduction

What is a Child Safe Action Plan?

The *Children's Guardian Act 2019* (the Act) aims to protect children by seeking to embed the Child Safe Standards as the primary framework guiding child safe practice in organisations throughout NSW.

The Act requires OLG, as a prescribed agency, to develop and publish a Child Safe Action plan describing how we will work to promote awareness of the Standards across local government and how we will build the capability of local government to implement the Standards to ultimately improve the safety of children in NSW.

What is the Office of Local Government?

The Office of Local Government is the NSW Government agency responsible for strengthening the sustainability, performance, integrity, transparency and accountability of the local government sector.

OLG is a key conduit between the NSW Government and the local government sector, serving as a regulator and trusted advisor to our state's local councils, county councils and joint organisations.

By supporting our councils and helping grow their capacity we can ensure a robust and sustainable local government sector, which will ultimately deliver strong and vibrant communities for people across NSW.

OLG has a policy, legislative, investigative and program focus in regulating the State's 128 local councils. The agency also works collaboratively with the local government sector to support local councils deliver for their local communities. OLG is part of the NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

What is the Local Government Sector?

Local Government is the third tier of government in Australia. In NSW they manage their own business under the legislative framework provided by the *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW).

There are 128 councils, 9 county councils, and 13 Joint Organisations across our cities and regions – with mayors, councillors and staff working hard to serve communities across our state.

Our state's councils employ nearly 50,000 people and invest more than \$13 billion each year in the delivery of services and infrastructure, so they have a vital role to play in the social and economic wellbeing of NSW.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role and responsibilities of Office of the Children's Guardian and OLG as a prescribed agency

The role of the Office of the Children's Guardian

The Office of the Children's Guardian has the role of implementing the Child Safe Scheme across NSW. To do so, the Office of the Children's Guardian assists organisations implement the Standards in several ways, including to:

- Provide guidance to prescribed agencies in developing Child Safe Action Plans through consultation and review of plans.
- Provide generic and sector-specific support to build capability in organisations to implement the Child Safe Standards.
- Engage with key stakeholders, including children and the broader community, to raise awareness of the Child Safe Standards.
- Monitor, investigate and enforce the Child Safe Standards through ongoing risk assessments of priority sectors and organisations.

The role of the Office of Local Government

OLG is a prescribed agency under the Children's Guardian Act. As a trusted regulator and capacity builder OLG is responsible for enabling councils to better serve their communities and build their capability to implement the policy and regulatory changes of Government.

OLG will assist councils implement the Standards in several ways, including to:

- Create and implement the OLG Child Safe Action Plan.
- Incorporate the Standards into relevant policies and guidelines produced by the OLG.
- Provide sector leadership and opportunities for engagement to raise awareness of the Standards.
- Communicate with the sector to increase awareness of child safety responsibilities.
- Support councils to build their capability to implement the Standards.
- Promote the availability of resources and tools created by Office of Children's Guardian and other organisations. These include templates, training, checklists and case studies.

Developing the Child Safe Action Plan

Engaging the local government sector

Prior to preparing this Child Safe Action Plan, OLG engaged with the sector to understand current levels of awareness, preparedness and sought feedback on the types of support councils need.

Two key activities were undertaken:

- OLG attended the Child Safe Standards: A Local Government Perspective Forum (Forum) hosted by Cumberland City Council at Granville on 5 September 2022. The Forum was a peer network of officers from across local government supported by Local Government NSW (LGNSW).
- From 15 September to 7 October 2022, OLG surveyed all councils in NSW.

Ninety-five councils participated across the two activities, representing 74% of councils in NSW.

Engagement Highlights:

- Engagement was high with more than 200 surveys completed, in addition to the 124 council officers attended the Forum.
- Of those engaged, 59% were from regional and rural councils and 39% from metropolitan councils.
- 53% of participants were council managers or team leaders.
- 95 of the State's 128 councils were engaged.
- The majority of participants were aware of the Standards and heard about them from their own council or the Office of the Children's Guardian.
- Most participants were aware of training being held in their council.
- Most councils engaged had an approved framework and were in the process of implementing it, including adoption of key policies and staff training.

OLG found that key challenges exist for councils in resourcing cultural change, especially to create awareness and understanding of the Standards across diverse organisations where many staff have no direct contact with children and young people.

Councils raised concerns about the difficulty of explaining the relevance of the Standards to all staff. Participants also indicated a desire for support from OLG in the form of best practice guides, templates and training specific to local government.

The Office of the Children's Guardian has developed an interactive online training package for local government which addresses the need for sector support and guidance. OLG will promote the availability of the training package and other resources such as case studies and model guides the Office of the Children's Guardian has created, to councils.

When asked what else needs to be done to implement the Standards, Forum participants requested further advice and information about:

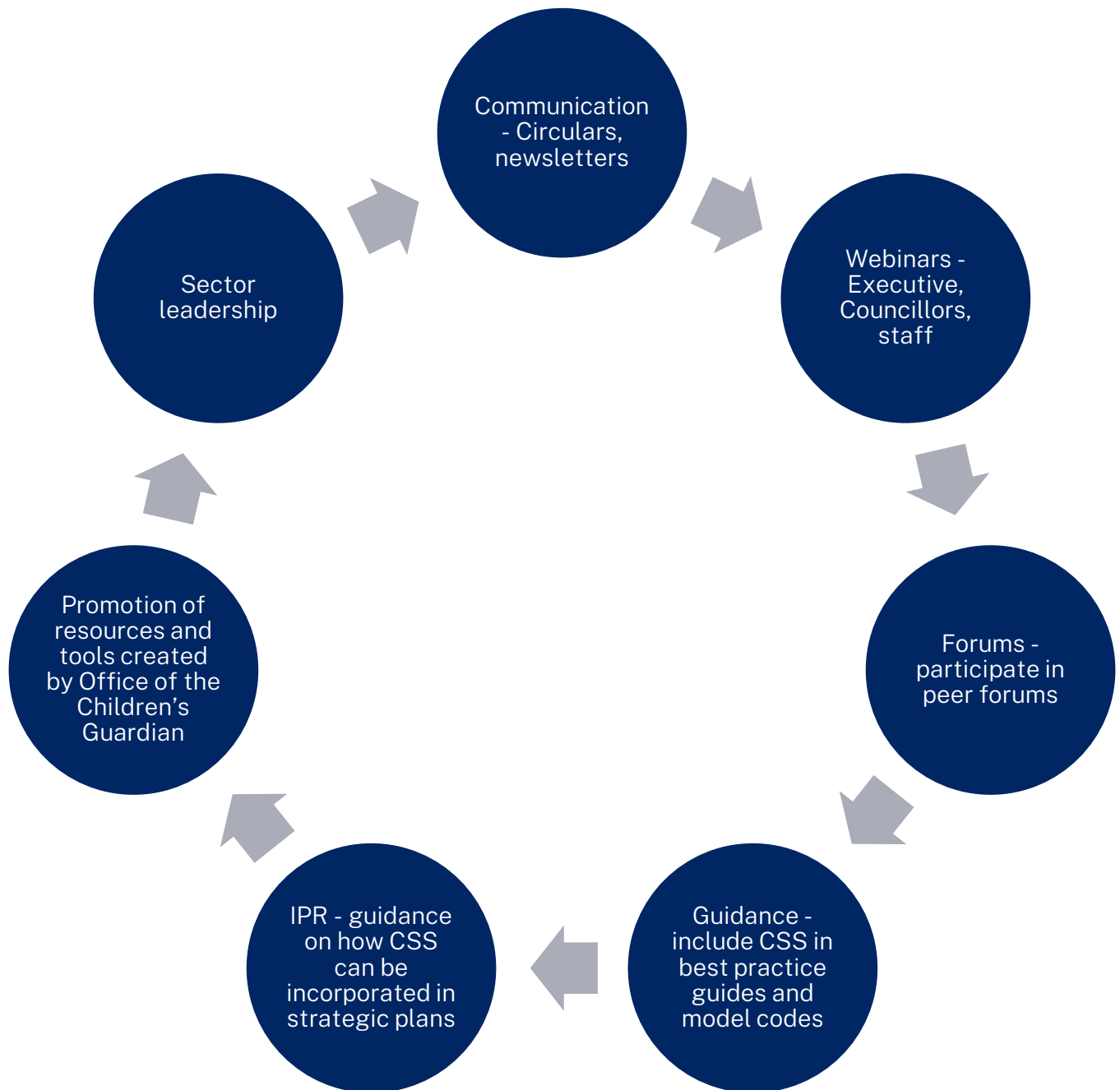
- Internal review and continuous improvement processes,
- How to support and educate their local communities, and
- How to appropriately engage with children.

The engagement exercises also demonstrated a high level of confidence amongst councils that they can implement the Standards and that the Standards are appropriate for their organisations.

Sample comments from respondents to the survey and forum activities

- *“A challenge is a change in thinking and understanding around Child Safe being everyone's responsibility - particularly for areas that don't work directly with children, and how to include children of all ages in effective decision making”.*
- *“The commitment needed by councils must be scalable and not just be seen as another level of paperwork burden.”*
- *“We have just reviewed the procurement policy and included the CSS in it, it will be a case of having to look at each policy and strategy as they're developed or reviewed, educating the area as to why the standards are relevant and helping them incorporate them.”*
- *“We will gradually move forward with the implementation and hopefully we can adopt model policies developed by others.”*
- *“Standard 8 “Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur” will be challenging. We hope for useful resources to help us develop procedures or a set of guidelines that inform and educate staff and the community about safety.”*
- *“Communicating with children through appropriate channels and in ways that are relevant and will encourage open and candid feedback.”*
- *“On the whole child safety is currently being pushed from the bottom of the organization and not the top.”*
- *“I think the diversity of staff and services across a Council creates some challenges in making child safe everyone's business. Resources and support specific for local government would help with this.”*
- *“Redesigning and implementing physical changes in public spaces to improve child safety is a challenge.”*
- *“Getting the message out to children, families and communities is difficult when we're struggling a bit to articulate it internally ourselves. I think we all want to get the response to complaints component right, but we're also conscious that it is incredibly complex and sensitive.”*

OLG Child Safe Action Plan at a glance



OLG will promote awareness and capability throughout the local government sector through communication and provision of guidance materials .

OLG Child Safe Action Plan

Strategy 1: Awareness raising

Objective: Child safe organisations and the community are aware of the Child Safe Standards

Actions	Completion date	Owner	Desired outcomes	Data points
Conduct annual awareness survey across local government sector	October 2022	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Baseline data about awareness in local government of Standards	Survey
Information and key links available on OLG website	September 2023*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Council staff aware of statutory obligations, the role of Office of the Children's Guardian and OLG, and resources available	Complete and updated
Participate in the Child Safe Forum	September 2023*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Engage with the Local Government Sector	Complete
Distribute circular to all councils outlining councils' responsibilities and where to find more information	September 2023*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	General Managers and senior staff aware of statutory obligations, the role of Office of Children's Guardian and OLG	Distribution
OLG CSAP approved by the Office of the Children's Guardian	September 2023*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Publish CSAP on OLG website	Complete
Conduct annual awareness survey across local government sector	October 2023*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Comparison data about awareness in local government of Standards	Survey

Actions	Completion date	Owner	Desired outcomes	Data points
Include content in Hit the Ground Running education program for new and returning elected councillors	October - December 2024*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Elected officials aware of statutory obligations, the role of Office of the Children's Guardian and OLG	Completion
Review and update OLG CSAP	June 2025*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Review and build awareness of statutory obligations, the role of Office of the Children's Guardian and OLG	Completion
Articles in OLG monthly newsletter to council	Twice per year – anticipated to be June (Child Safety Week) and September (Child Protection Week)*	Communications Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Promotion of Standards to all councils	Distribution
Reference to Standards in OLG Model Codes, Practice Notes and Guidelines where relevant	Ongoing	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	General Managers and senior staff aware of statutory obligations, the role of Office of the Children's Guardian and OLG	Completion
Report on CSAP progress in Annual Report	Annual	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Review and build awareness of statutory obligations, the role of Office of the Children's Guardian and OLG	Completion
Participate in engagement and awareness building activities	As available	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Promotion of Standards to all councils	Participation

Actions	Completion date	Owner	Desired outcomes	Data points
Review and update OLG CSAP	Every 4 years, in line with IPR cycle*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Review and build awareness of statutory obligations, the role of Office of the Children's Guardian and OLG	Completion
Ultimate outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW children and young people are safe in the organisations that they learn, play and live in. • Reduction in child abuse in organisational settings. • Improved responses and reporting of child abuse. 				

* Anticipated completion date

Strategy 2: Capability Building

Objective: Child safe organisations build their capability to implement the Child Safe Standards

Actions	Completion date	Owner	Desired outcomes	Data points
Participate in Child Safe Standards Local Government Forum	September 2023*	LGNSW/LG peer network	Council staff learn more about Standards and have opportunity to ask questions of expert presenters.	Participation
Run webinar on Standards for council staff	October 2023*	OLG in partnership with Office of the Children's Guardian	Council staff learn more about Standards and have opportunity to ask questions of expert presenters.	Webinar held
Issue responses to frequently asked questions (FAQ) post webinar	October 2023*	OLG in partnership with Office of the Children's Guardian	Council questions are answered	FAQs released

Actions	Completion date	Owner	Desired outcomes	Data points
Run webinar on Standards for council staff – tie into Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) cycle	March 2024*	OLG in partnership with Office of the Children’s Guardian	Council staff learn more about Standards and have opportunity to ask questions of expert presenters.	Webinar held
Develop guidance on how Standards fit into IPR framework	March 2024*	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Encourage greater alignment of Standards with council’s strategic plans	Completed and promoted
Provide a liaison officer as key OLG point of contact	Ongoing	Policy and Sector Development, OLG	Council staff learn more about Standards and have opportunity to ask questions of expert presenters.	Enquiries are followed up in timely and effective manner
<p>Ultimate outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW children and young people are safe in the organisations that they learn, play and live in. • Reduction in child abuse in organisational settings. • Improved responses and reporting of child abuse. 				

* Anticipated completion date