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How is this council involved in running children's services within this municipality?

Children's Services in this municipality come under the division of Corporate Services in our council. There are two other divisions, City Works and City Planning. The council owns and operates four children's centres, one occasional care centre, a family day care scheme with about 55 carers, three outside school hours centres and an early childhood intervention team.

The General Manager (GM) of the council is the licensee of our children's services and holds the governance responsibilities on behalf of the council. In practice, however, the everyday responsibilities within our council are implemented as follows: the Director of Corporate Services reports to the GM; and my position reports to the Director of Corporate Services. The centre directors and coordinators of children's services report to me, and their staff report to them.

The council also leases buildings to a small number of community-based children's services providers and they are also included on our maintenance schedule, while the council does not have any children's program related work responsibilities in connection with these services. However, my role as the Children's Services Manager for the council does include providing advice on early childhood matters to all other service providers and developers in the local government area.

Can you describe the key functions of your job in terms of leadership roles expected of you as the manager of children's services for the council?

I established a management team comprising these centre directors and coordinators of our council services. I mentor them by providing advice, support, information and professional development including facilitating leadership opportunities. I also ensure that everyone in this management team is proactive in providing advice and support to their own centre staff. Building relationships with all staff is essential so they also know they can approach me and feel comfortable asking for any advice and guidance from me. My job also involves working in the local community, including providing information and training opportunities for other service providers in our local government area (LGA); meeting with developers to advise on development applications; and providing information and advice to families both within our services and in the wider community. In terms of council owned and operated services, I'm responsible overall for ensuring the implementation of high-quality, well-utilised and cost-effective early and middle childhood services within our LGA. My work also includes the development and management of an overall budget for our children's services; and the design and monitoring of goals and strategies for these services within their own operational plan and within the council's city plan and social plan guidelines.

What does the word 'governance' mean in terms of your work as a manager of children's services in a local council?

In our council, governance is part of the Corporate Services division. This role is largely related to policy development and compliance within all areas of the council. Council staff manage delegations, property, risk, servicing of meetings for the council and its committees, Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 and conflict/s of interest. It involves utilising knowledge of the relevant Acts, and in particular the *Local Government Act*, to inform sound and ethical decision-making and ensure

effectiveness and efficiency of operations.

Governance in relation to children's services involves staying up to date with and ensuring our services comply with specific children's services regulatory requirements, broader legislative requirements such as Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S), privacy and confidentiality; and other directives from the council such as thorough and accurate record keeping. Failure to do so is regarded as a breach or non-compliance and can have serious legal implications. More importantly, as educators, we are all ethically bound to uphold our 'duty of care' responsibilities to the children and families we serve.

As the Manager Children's Services I have the responsibility of ensuring that all council services maintain licensing standards and other legislative requirements on behalf of the council and the GM. Depending on the particular breaches, there can be financial penalties to an individual staff member and/or to the council (licensee). In the case of a serious incident, such as injury or death, all layers of staff and management would be investigated to determine whether responsibilities had been properly undertaken.

What are the key benefits of children's services coming under a local council?

Working for a local council as an early childhood educator has many benefits. Most of all you can count on a reasonable level of support from management in terms of budget and funding contribution as well as professional development. Children's Services are run as a community service largely but not solely to the residents who live and/or work within the LGA. All of the centres can access internal support services available through the council including: information technology (IT) resources, building maintenance, record keeping systems, libraries, and the council bus to transport children and families on excursions or various outings such as museums or animal parks, depending on the children's interests. The council also has advisory committees concerned with Aboriginal affairs and multicultural community matters. Children's Services can tap into resources and events organised by these committees and in that way promote early childhood matters from a broader community perspective. It also provides children's services staff a network of support from peers across services such as collaboration on policy development, shared resources and visits to other services. For instance, we established a focus support group to work on the *Early Years Learning Framework* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). Staff from each centre meet once a month at the council to discuss implementation of the EYLF, with guidance and leadership from one of the directors or coordinators.