

Wentworth



Study



Wentworth
Shire Council

WENTWORTH CHILD CARE STUDY - 2017

Summary

During community consultation for the Sustainable Wentworth Strategy 2016, it was raised by numerous attendees at the 'drop in session' that there was a demand for a child care centre in Wentworth. This asserted demand was then supported by a community petition submitted to Council, seeking support and financial assistance with the development of a child care centre on Council managed land, adjacent to the existing Wentworth Pre-school.

The Sustainable Wentworth Strategy 2016 proposed that Wentworth Shire Council undertake a Child Care Study to determine the demand for this service in Wentworth and a suitable location for this facility, if required. Hence, this study has been conducted on the basis of that recommendation.

The study includes a review of the following:

- Relevant Australian Bureau of Statistics data for Wentworth
- Child care options in Australia
- Investigates existing facilities in Wentworth and the local government area
- The community petition submitted to Council
- Child care opportunities in Wentworth

The findings of the study show that there is a demand for child care services in Wentworth. The demand does not justify the development of a standalone centre, but the extension of the existing pre-school facility in Wentworth to provide child care services, similar to that undertaken in Balranald, New South Wales.

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Introduction

The need for child care in Wentworth was previously raised during community consultation for the preparation of the Wentworth Region Community Strategic Plan 2013-2023. The strategic plan addressed this demand through:

- *Vision 1 We want to be a vibrant, growing and thriving community*
- *Objective 2.0 Improve population growth and residential expansion*
- *Strategy 2.3 Promote and encourage the establishment of child-care facilities, long day care services and before and after school care*

The Wentworth Shire Economic Development Strategy 2011-2016 also prioritised projects involving aged and child care facilities. Under Section 1.4.2 Action 2 includes the following:

“To attract families to the area there is a need for additional child care to be available. This could be achieved via a mix of childcare facilities and home childcare operators. Council’s role is to identify any impediments to the expansion of childcare in the Shire and offer assistance to prospective operators”.

The strategy also detailed the steps to facilitate the above action by investigating the current supply and demand for child care, determining potential stakeholders and promoting opportunities to interested investors.

Community consultation for the Sustainable Wentworth Strategy August 2016 once again revealed a need for some form of child care service or facility in the town of Wentworth. The strategy therefore suggested further investigation into the demand for such a facility and the most appropriate and suitable location.

Recommendation 8 of the Sustainable Wentworth Strategy stated that:

“It is recommended that Wentworth Shire Council undertake a Child Care Study with the purposes of identifying the demand for a Child Care Centre in Wentworth and the most suitable location for the development of such a facility”.

In line with the above three strategies, this study reviews the following:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Data for Wentworth in 2006 and 2011
- Child care options in Australia
- Existing child care services in Wentworth LGA
- The Wentworth Community Petition
- Child Care opportunities in Wentworth

The study aims to identify if there is a need for child care services in Wentworth, and if so, determine the level of demand and provide suitable options to service that demand.

The study also briefly looks in to any potential social and economic benefit to the community if a child care service was established in Wentworth.

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Australian Bureau of Statistics

The following data has been sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Community Profile for Wentworth, for both 2006 and 2011.

The age cohorts selected relate to the average childbearing age range of women in Australia, being between 20 to 44 years of age (AIFS). The most common age of children that require some form of day care is between the ages of 0 to 12 years (AWCCI). The ABS data cohort fields are 0-4 years, 5-9 years and 10-14 years, therefore, the data presented in this report also includes children aged 13 and 14 years.

Wentworth children aged between 0 and 14 years

The number of children in the 0 to 14 year age cohort dropped from 205 to 183 between 2006 and 2011. The loss, 22 in total, occurred within the 10 to 14 year age cohort together with a slight increase in the number of children in the 0 to 4 and 5 to 9 year age cohorts.

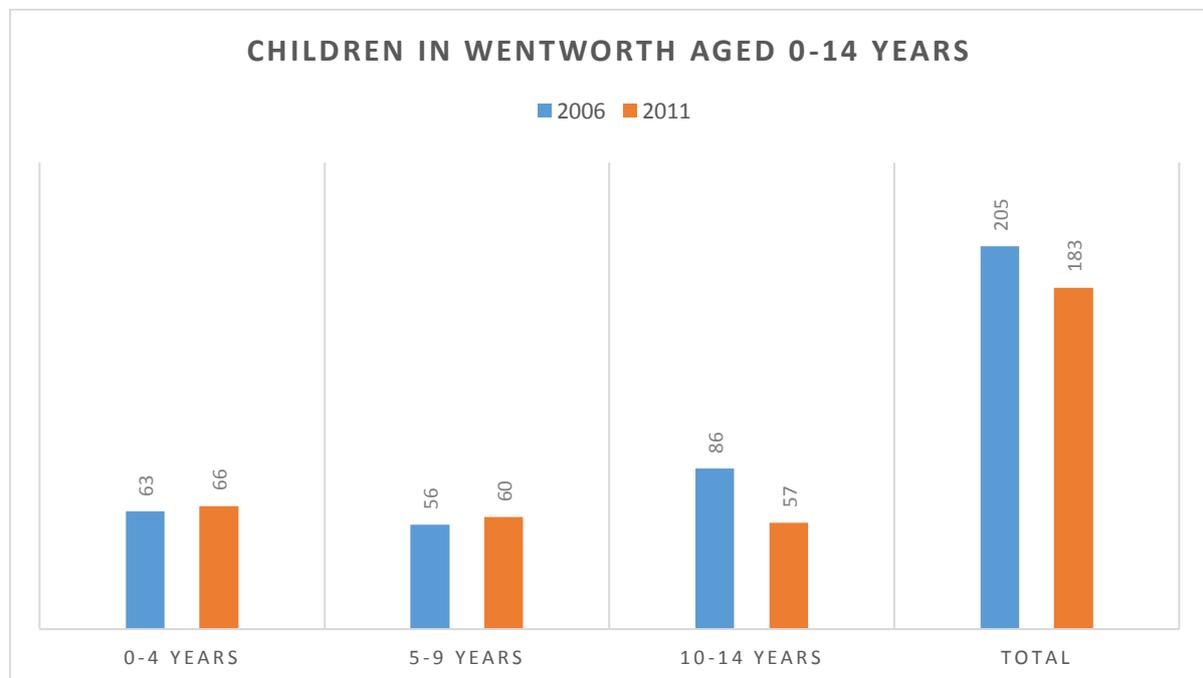


Figure 1 – Children in Wentworth Aged between 0–14 years

Assumption 1: Wentworth appears to be retaining population numbers of young children as they progress through the cohort age groups. For example in 2006 the 0-4 years of age cohort with 63 children moved into the 5-9 years cohort in 2011 with 60 children. Similarly, the 2006 5-9 years of age cohort had 56 children and they progressed into the 2011 10-14 years age cohort with 57 children.

The drop in overall numbers between 2006 and 2011 has occurred due to the 10-14 year age group progressing into an older cohort in 2011 with the following age cohort containing less children. In 2011 there were a total of 183 children in the study age cohort range.

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Assumption 2: There may also be a link between the decline in the 10-14 year age cohort and the trend for families to relocate to Mildura with young teenage children to access alternative education options and out of school sports and activities.

Unfortunately, a comparison cannot be made between the 2001 and 2006 census data as the demographic data in 2001 applies to the entire local government area and not specific towns or communities.

Wentworth women in the labour force between ages of 20 and 44 years

The total number of women in this age cohort declined between 2006 and 2011 from 158 in 2006 to 129 in 2011, a decline of 29 women, equating to 18%.

The number of women in the labour force (full and part time) between the ages of 20 and 44 years dropped from 88 in 2006 to 59 in 2011. A decline of 29, equating to 33%.

The overall decline is reflected through a 49% reduction in women working full time and a 13% reduction in the number of women in part time employment.

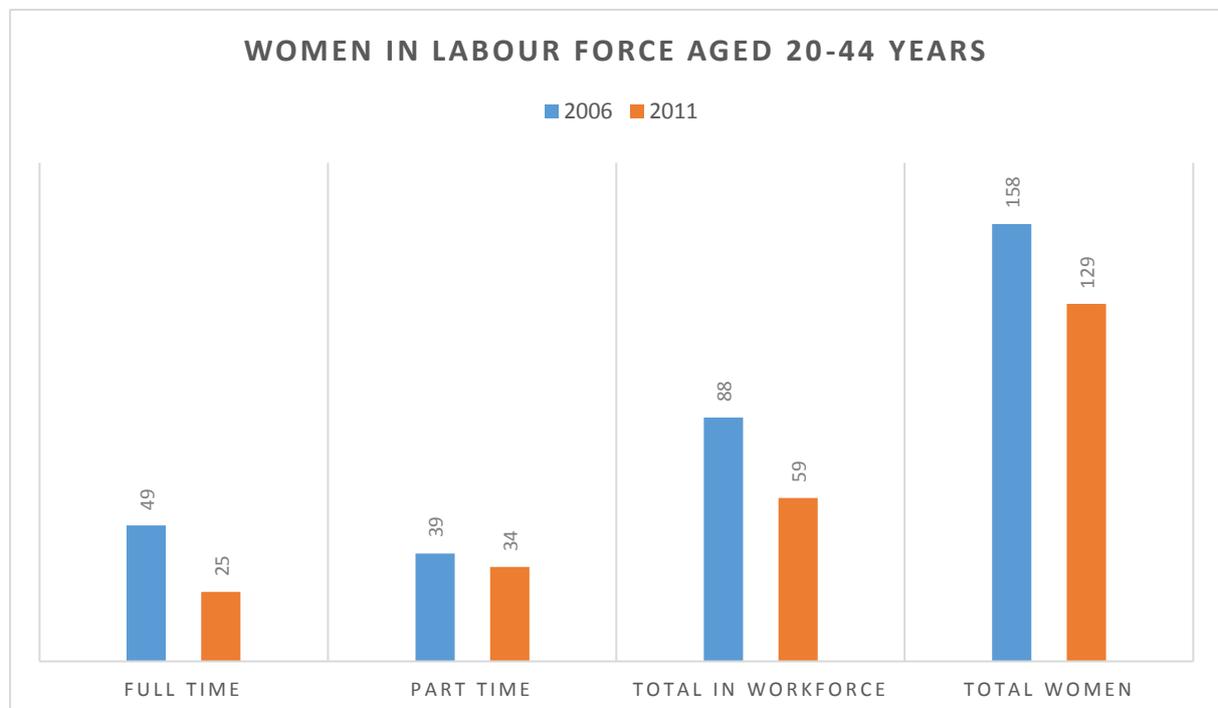


Figure 2 – Wentworth Women in Labour Force Aged between 20-44 years

The data shows that the reduction in the number of women aged between 20 and 44 years in the workforce is consistent with the decline in the total number of women in this age cohort.

Assumption 3: It is likely that there is a connection between the decline in the total number of women, both in the workforce and not, and the decline in the number of children due to families relocating for their children's education opportunities and out of school activities. It may also be likely that families relocate to improve employment opportunities or to gain access to child care services to assist with remaining in or re-entering the workforce.

Assumption 4: It is also likely that the 49% decline in the number of women working full time is as a result of withdrawing from the workforce to have a family and either taking up part time work or not

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re-entering the workforce. This assumption is supported by the fact that there has been decline and/or cessation of child care services in Wentworth between 2006 and 2011.

Family Composition with children under 15 years of age

Between 2006 and 2011 the number of families containing two parents with children under 15 years of age declined from 69 to 56. Meanwhile the number of single parent families with children under 15 years of age increased slightly from 41 to 44 during the same timeframe.

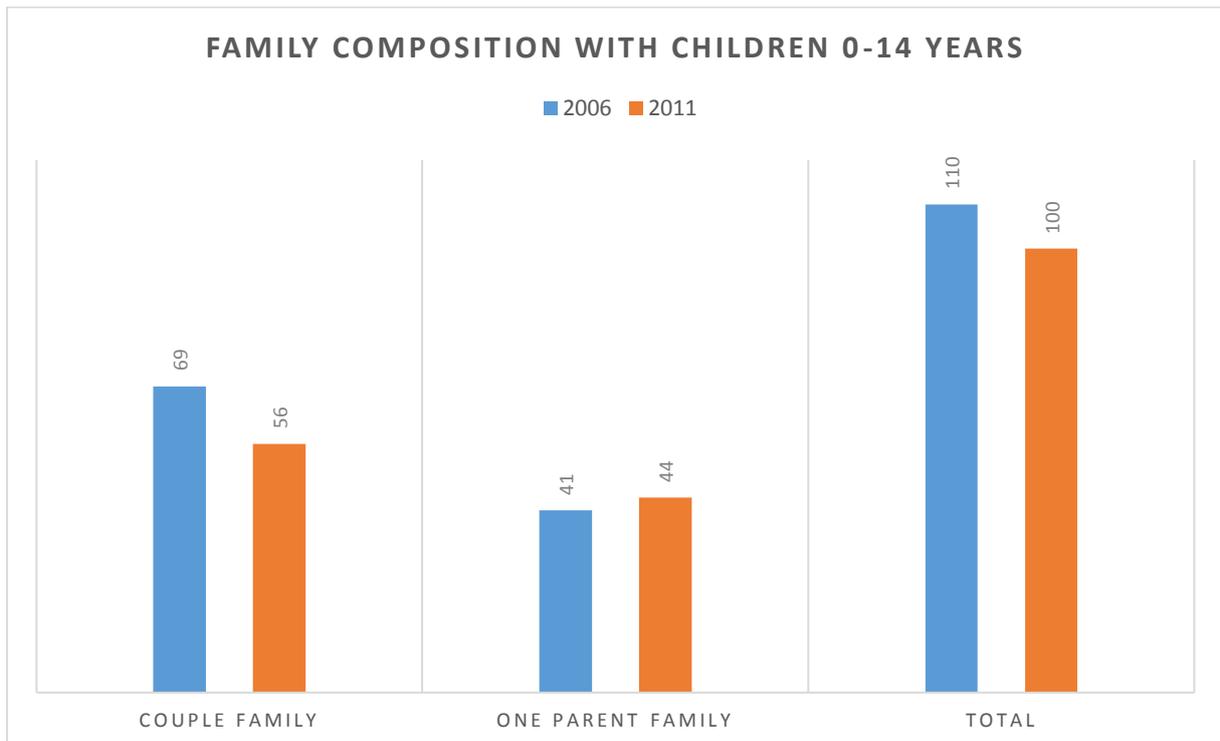


Figure 3 – Family Composition with Children Aged between 0-14 years

Assumption 5: The decline in couple families may well be linked to Assumptions 2 and 3 and the relocation of families with children in the 0-14 year age cohort. The small increase in the number of single parent families may be as a result of the need for these families to be located in areas where real estate prices are more affordable or perhaps where there is access to family support.

Unpaid Child Care

During the two weeks prior to the Census night in 2006, a total of 72 people spent time looking after children under 15 years of age, that were not their own and without pay. This number declined to 62 people in 2011.

Assumption 6: It is assumed that there is a nexus between the decline in the number of children under 15 years of age between 2006 and 2011 and the decline in the number people caring for unrelated children without pay.

Assumption 7: It is also assumed that there is a link between the 59 women in the workforce and the 62 people who cared for unrelated children during a two week period in Wentworth in 2011. If this assumption is correct, it indicates there is a demand for some form of child care service or facility in Wentworth.

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ABS Data Summary

At the time of the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, in Wentworth there were:

- 100 families with 183 children between the ages of 0 to 14 years of age, an average of 1.83 children per family
- Of those 183 children, there were 66 (36%) pre-school aged children and 117 (64%) school aged children
- Within those 100 families, 59 women between the age of 20 and 44 years participate in the labour force either in a full or part time capacity

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Child care Options

The options for child care in Australia include the following:

Long Day Care (LDC) – refers to centre-based care provided in a building or part of a building that has been created specifically for use as a child care centre.

These centres usually operate between 7.30 am and 6.00 pm and offer professional care for children aged between 0 and 6 years, with the children being grouped in rooms according to age and developmental stage.

This type of child care is available for all or part of the day, with some centres offering morning and afternoon sessions.

The majority of LDC centres include an early education component to their program so that children in attendance learn while they are cared for.

LDC centres can be run by private companies, local councils, community organisations, individuals and non-profit organisations.

Most LDC centres are approved child care services which means families may be eligible for the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate.

Family Day Care (FDC) – this service delivers flexible home-based education and care for children through FDC educators who are supported and administered by as FDC service operator. The FDC service operator is responsible for recruiting, training, supporting and monitoring the educators.

The number of children allowed to be cared for at any one time is limited to 4 preschool aged children and 2 school aged children. These numbers must also include any children belonging to the educator.

FDC can provide all day care, part-time, casual, overnight, before and after school and school holiday care.

FDC educators and service operators must meet the obligations and requirements set out under the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care and comply with the Early Childhood Services Education and the Care National Land and National Regulations.

Historically, this was a favourable and popular option, however, the red tape has become so onerous that this system is becoming obsolete.

The majority of FDC services are approved child care services which means families may be eligible for the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate.

In-Home Care (IHC) – this service is similar to FDC but the professional carer or educator provides care in the child's own home. It is not widely available or used and is an option where other forms of care are not suitable.

The service provides care for families with a child who is ill or has a disability, the child's parent/guardian has an illness or disability, or where the family is unable to access existing child care services in their area due to their rural or remote locality.

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Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) – this service provides care for primary school aged children before and after school hours, during school holidays and on pupil-free days.

These centres are usually located on primary school sites or in a child care centre.

The majority of OSHC centres are approved child care services which means families may be eligible for the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate.

Occasional Care (OC) – this service provides professional care for children on a casual basis. The service is suitable for families who do not require regular child care, for example for occasional medical and other appointments.

OC services are usually provided at child care centres, but available services are subject to vacancies.

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Existing Child Care Facilities in Wentworth LGA

At the time of preparing this report, there were no formal child care facilities or services available in Wentworth.

The Wentworth Pre-school currently runs classes for 3 year old children one full day per week and classes for 4 and 5 year old children three days per week.

There are currently two existing child care facilities and one family day care provider servicing the child care needs in the Wentworth local government area. Both child care centres are located in Buronga, New South Wales which is approximately 30 kilometres east of Wentworth. The FDC provider is located in Dareton, New South Wales which is approximately 9 kilometres east of Wentworth.

The Jack & Jill Midway Childcare Centre located on 46 Midway Drive, Buronga has the capacity to care for 54 children. The facility provides full day care for children between the ages of 1 week old to 6 years of age and 2 to 12 years of age for vacation care. The hours of operation are 7.30 am to 6.30 pm Monday to Friday and 7.30 am to 1.30 pm Saturday.

At present, the Jack & Jill Midway Childcare Centre only has vacancies on a Friday for children between the ages of 1 week to 3 years of age.

Two Rivers Early Learning Centre located at 1-5 Short Street, Buronga has the capacity to care for a maximum of 80 children. The facility provides care for children aged between 6 weeks and 5 years of age. The hours of operation are 7.00 am to 6.00 pm Monday to Friday.

The FDC service provider is limited to the maximum number of children, being 4 preschool aged and 2 primary school aged children, in accordance with the National Law and National Regulations.

Consultation with women in Wentworth with pre-school aged children revealed that the FDC service provider in Dareton has no vacancies available.

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Wentworth Community Petition

During community consultation for the Sustainable Wentworth Strategy, Wentworth Shire Council received a community petition seeking support and assistance for the establishment of a child care facility in Wentworth. The petition included 382 signatures, 18 expressions of interest and 6 letters of support for a facility in Wentworth.

The petition, the cover letter and letters of support, raised the following issues:

- Many people who work have to rely on family and friends for child care, this is an ongoing burden for both parents and carers
- A child care facility would provide economic benefits for the community through the building of a facility, the operation of the facility and increase in opportunities for parents to participate in the workforce
- The red tape is extremely onerous to encourage and establish new Family Day Care service providers
- The lack of child care services in Wentworth has prevented families from moving to Wentworth
- The lack of before and after school care has prevented families from enrolling in the local school
- The lack of child care services has prevented people from applying for jobs in and around Wentworth
- Wentworth needs a child care service to attract and encourage new families to the town
- Mothers are unable to work because of the lack of child care facilities which creates financial problems and burdens
- Wentworth Pre-School could consider replicating the child care service that Balranald has established, a combination of Pre-School and Child Care for 0 to 12 years of age (including after school care)

The petition included a request that the 'former tennis court' site, adjacent to the Wentworth Pre-school in Murray Street, be considered by Council to be made available to the pre-school for the purposes of developing a new facility that would include child care services.

The site is crown land of which Council is a Trustee and the approved use of the land is for public purposes. The Sustainable Wentworth Strategy made a recommendation for the proposed future use of this site as a car park for Murray House, particularly if Murray Street was to be redeveloped to extend the tree lined median strip.

The petition also requested that Council consider donating this land to the Wentworth Pre-School, to cover the costs associated with clearing the land and waive any development application fees applicable to extending the existing facility by developing the site.

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Consultation with members of the Wentworth Pre-school committee identified that the use of the former tennis court site for car parking would benefit the Pre-school and the proposed child care service they could provide. The primary benefit would be the ability to provide a safe drop off location for young children to the centre and short term off street parking.

Additional consultation on social media with affected families, particularly mothers, was conducted and revealed the following:

- Women in particular are prevented from returning to the workforce due to the lack of child care services in Wentworth
- Women are forced to apply for and accept employment in Mildura where they have access to child care services
- Some women find it too difficult to juggle working and family care, so they do not work at all
- Two participants cited that they would open their own business in Wentworth if they could have access to reliable and ongoing child care services
- Women who live and work in Wentworth have been known to drive to Dareton and Buronga to drop their children off at care on a daily basis, thereby making the round trip twice a day
- Families relocate to Mildura to access child care services so that both parents can participate in the workforce
- Families have chosen not to move to Wentworth due to the non-existence of child care services

There were several comments made by participants regarding the ongoing reliance on parents and friends for the provision of child care, which can cause a burden and strain to those close relationships.

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Child Care Opportunities in Wentworth

The majority of the township of Wentworth is currently zoned RU5 Village zone. In this zone home based child care is permitted without development consent and a child care centre is permitted with development consent.

Family Day Care (FDC)

An FDC provider can establish this service in their home, providing they comply with the relevant legislation, requirements and obligations under the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, the Early Childhood Services Education and Care National Law and Regulations.

Consultation has revealed that the requirements, equal to that which is required by a child care centre, have become too onerous, expensive and difficult to comply with for home based service providers.

Child Care Centre

The development of a standalone child care centre would facilitate the establishment of an extensive suite of child care services, including long day care, outside school hours care and occasional care.

However, the costs associated with investment in land, the development and operational costs of a standalone child care centre, may not be justified due to the level of anticipated demand. Particularly in view of the Bureau of Statistics data outlined previously in this study.

The community petition suggested that the Wentworth Pre-School develop a similar facility to that which has been established in Balranald. The Balranald Early Learning Centre (BELC) now provides structured and educational care for children between the ages of 8 weeks and 12 years of age. This includes full and half day care, occasional care and after school care.

A representative from Wentworth Shire Council recently met with the Director of the BELC and conducted a tour of their facility. The BELC redevelopment included extending the building to ensure that developmental age groups could be separated and that Educator to Child ratios in those age groups could meet the required standards. The facility has the capacity to care for up to 67 children.

The original BELC building and site is very similar in size and design to the existing Wentworth Pre-School site and building. Therefore, as suggested by the community petition, the committee of the Wentworth Pre-School could consider extending their building to offer child care services to the Wentworth community.

The Wentworth Primary School has investigated the demand for before and after school care through a survey of the school population. The result of that survey identified that 20 children would utilise this service should it be established.

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Community Benefit

The AWCCI Child Care Issues Paper details the national economic benefit of the provision of *'efficient, flexible and affordable'* child care. Those benefits can also be transferred down to a local community level.

The paper explains that while women are the prime child carers in Australian families, without available and reliable child care services, women are forced to withdraw from the labour force to care for their children.

The paper also identifies that by removing the barriers that restrict or prevent women from returning to the workforce following child birth, supports the preservation of individual human capital, increases business continuity and productivity and provides women with the opportunity to reinvest their income in regional and local communities.

Additionally, women are also a valuable employee resource for the future in rural areas that, like Wentworth, have a large proportion of the population above retirement age.

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Conclusion

The findings of this study conclude that there is a demand child care services in Wentworth.

The evidence supporting this conclusion includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ❖ The need for child care services in Wentworth has been raised previously through consultation for the Wentworth Region Community Strategic Plan 2013-2023, the Wentworth Shire Economic Development Strategy 2011-2016 and the Sustainable Wentworth Strategy 2016
- ❖ The decline in the number of women (within the study age cohort range) in the workforce. This may be due to difficulties of families having access to reliable child care services as outlined in the community petition received by Council and the social media consultation
- ❖ The number of people who spent time caring for children, not their own, under the age of 15 during the two week period prior to Census night in 2011. This is supported by the comments made in the community petition received by Council and the social media consultation
- ❖ The strength and passion displayed by the Wentworth community and participants of the petition to Council seeking support and /or assistance with developing a child care facility

The study also identifies that the Wentworth community would benefit both socially and economically from the establishment of some form of formal child care service for families.

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Recommendations

No.	Action Required	Timeframe
1.	That Council advise the Wentworth Pre-School that the development of an extension to the existing building for child care services is supported by Council.	Immediate
2.	That Council advise the Wentworth Pre-School that the development of an extension to the existing building will require both development and building consent.	Immediate
3.	That Council give consideration to waiver the fee for the development and building applications as requested by the community petition.	Immediate
4.	That Council advise the Wentworth Pre-School that an agreement is being prepared to allow for the extension of the existing building and use to facilitate child care services.	0-6 months
5.	That Council advise the Wentworth Pre-School and Murray House that an application is being prepared for the former tennis courts site to allow for the additional use of the site for car parking, to support the ongoing services these facilities provide to the Wentworth community.	0-6 months

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