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New child care

Moves to counter subsidies

by JEFF JONES

CHILDREN's services in Maroondah may evolve into multi-purpose centres offering such things as a pre-school, maternal and child health service and long-day care under the one roof.

The redevelopment was suggested as a means of overcoming the Federal Government cutting operational subsidies to long-day care centres and in response to an expected government-funded review.

The cuts and review have also led to an expected delay in awarding the Maroondah Council contract for children's services.

The council's team leader of children's services, Jane Judd, said tenders for children's services recently closed and only one submission was received, from council's in-house team.

"The recommendation (to delay awarding the tender) is expected because of the removal of the (operational) subsidies," Ms Judd said.

"The Commonwealth Government has also offered money for community-based centres to seek professional advice through consultants about the future redevelopment of the service.

"So it may be unwise to award a contract when perhaps a redevelopment of the service is possible with the support of the Commonwealth."

Ms Judd said the government had earmarked \$8 million for consultancies and there were 1200 community-based centres in Australia.

She said she would seek a meeting with all Maroondah community-based child-care centres within the next fortnight to discuss the matter.

"Council will also be putting a submission to the Commonwealth for \$15,000 funding for the consultancy."

Ms Judd said the future of the centres was unclear and depended on the consultant.

She said the Croydon Community Child Care Centre lost \$35,000 in funding while Knaith Rd and North Ringwood Child Care centres each lost \$38,000.

"They are all 35-place centres and that is no longer regarded as the optimal size in economic terms," Ms Judd said.

"If we had a 60-place centre it would have more options available to it to save money."

Ms Judd hoped the consultant, if appointed, would look at merging the centres as a possible redevelopment option.

She said the plan could include a pre-school, a maternal and child health service and long-day care with some occasional care all under the one roof.

"I will be approaching the community-based co-ordinators and ask them to seek one consultancy for the Maroondah municipality," she said.

"The other option is that they could each get a consultant and they could each get the same advice — that they're not viable and too small — then we risk not having a contingency plan.

"This is an opportunity for us to develop strategic partnerships with each other and look at possibility of new innovations.

"If we go it alone we won't have the options.

"We don't want to pre-empt what they recommend, but I do think we need to act sooner than later."