

5 Private swimming pools in Western Australia

Where location was known, private swimming pools were the most common location of fatal and non-fatal drowning incidents during the six-year investigation period.¹⁴⁶ As discussed in Chapter 4, the Office found that, for 16 (47 per cent) of the 34 children who died by drowning, the fatal drowning incident occurred in a private swimming pool. Similarly, for 170 (66 per cent) of the 258 children who were admitted to a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident, the incident occurred in a swimming pool. Accordingly, the Ombudsman determined to examine private swimming pools in Western Australia in more detail.

5.1 Number of private swimming pools

The Office was unable to identify any source with recent information about the total number and location of private swimming pools in Western Australia, therefore, as part of the Investigation, the Office collected and analysed this information.

The Office surveyed local governments regarding the number of private swimming pools in their local government district as at 30 June 2015 (**the local government survey**). Of the 140 local governments that were surveyed,¹⁴⁷ 138 (99 per cent) local governments responded to the survey (**the 138 survey respondents**) and two (one per cent) local governments did not respond to the survey. The two local governments that did not respond were small local governments located outside the metropolitan regions of Western Australia.

Section 130 of the *Building Act 2011* requires local governments to keep building records associated with private swimming pools (such as applications for building permits and inspections) located in their local government district to enable monitoring of compliance with Part 8, Division 2 of the *Building Regulations 2012*. This requirement is discussed in more detail in Chapters 6 and 9.

Of the 138 survey respondents:

- one hundred and thirty five local governments provided information about the number of private swimming pools in their district; and
- three local governments responded that they did not know the number of private swimming pools in their district.

As at 30 June 2015, the 138 survey respondents reported that they had recorded a total of 144,899 private swimming pools. The number of private swimming pools recorded (**recorded private swimming pools**) by each local government is provided at Appendix 1.

¹⁴⁶ As identified at section 3.3.1, in this report, the term **private swimming pool** is used to refer to a private swimming pool and a private spa.

¹⁴⁷ At the time of the Investigation, there were 138 local governments in Western Australia and two local governments located in the Commonwealth territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands that were also included in the survey. The Shire of Narrogin and the Town of Narrogin have merged to form a new and expanded Shire of Narrogin which took effect as of 1 July 2016.

5.2 Geographical distribution of recorded private swimming pools

The Office analysed the information about recorded private swimming pools provided by local governments, by region, applying the categorisation of 'Metropolitan' and 'Other regions' defined in Schedules 3, 4 and 5 of the *Planning and Development Act 2005*. In this Chapter and throughout this report, those regions defined as 'Other regions' in Schedule 4 of the *Planning and Development Act 2005* are also referred to as **non-metropolitan regions** and include the Gascoyne Region, Goldfields-Esperance Region, Great Southern Region, Kimberley Region, Mid-West Region, Peel Region, Pilbara Region, South West Region and Wheatbelt Region. The Office has separately identified Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands (and in this report, these islands are referred to as **the Christmas/Cocos (Keeling) Islands**).

The Office found that, of the 144,899 private swimming pools recorded by the 138 survey respondents:

- 119,633 private swimming pools (83 per cent) were recorded by the 30 metropolitan local governments; and
- 25,266 private swimming pools (17 per cent) were recorded by the 108 non-metropolitan local governments.

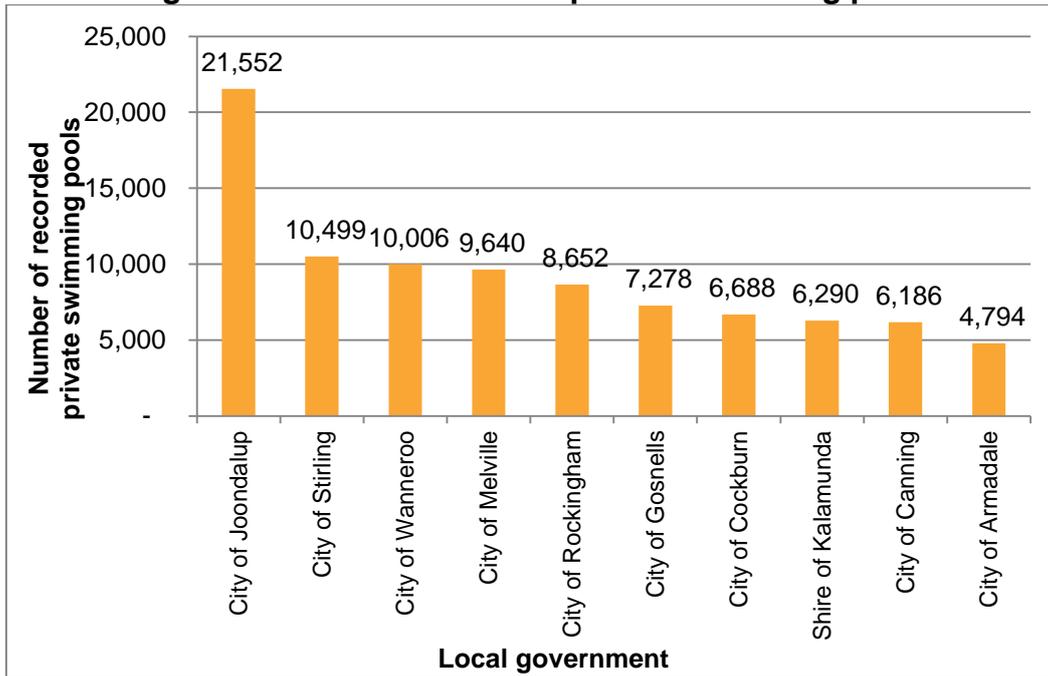
Further details are provided in Figure 32 and Figure 33.

For comparison, in Western Australia, as at 30 June 2015, 75 per cent of the population lived in metropolitan local government districts and 25 per cent lived in non-metropolitan local government districts.¹⁴⁸

Figure 32 shows the 10 metropolitan local governments that reported the highest numbers of recorded private swimming pools. Of particular note, the City of Joondalup recorded twice as many private swimming pools as the local government district with the second highest number of recorded private swimming pools (City of Stirling).

¹⁴⁸ Derived by the Office from the Western Australian Local Government Association, *The Western Australian Local Government Directory 2016*, Western Australian Local Government Association, West Leederville, 2016.

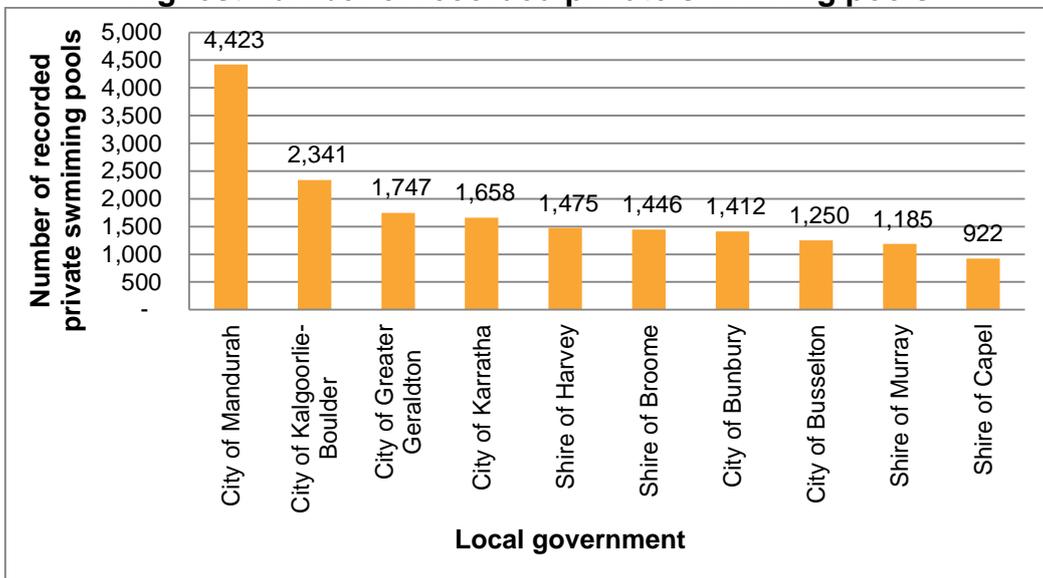
Figure 32: Metropolitan local governments that reported the highest number of recorded private swimming pools



Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

Figure 33 shows the 10 non-metropolitan local governments that reported the highest number of recorded private swimming pools.

Figure 33: Non-metropolitan local governments that reported the highest number of recorded private swimming pools

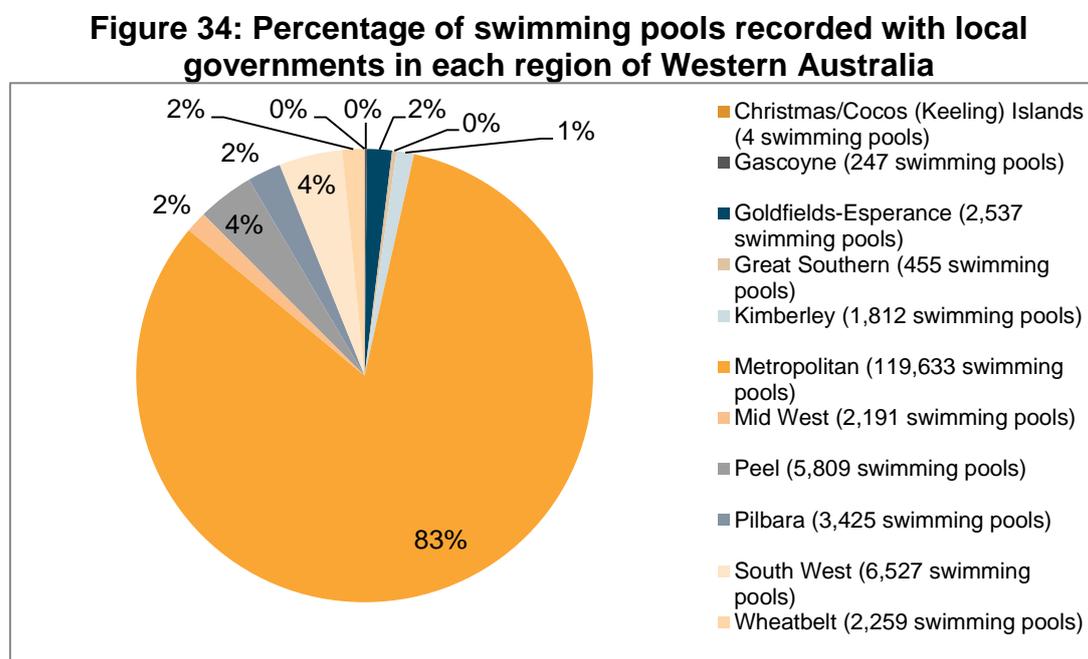


Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

Of the 108 non-metropolitan local governments, 35 reported having fewer than 10 recorded private swimming pools, with 11 of these local governments reporting that they had no recorded private swimming pools within their district.

5.3 Density of recorded private swimming pools

The Office analysed the percentage and number of private swimming pools by region. The Office's findings are shown in Figure 34 below.



Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

The Office found that the number of people per recorded private swimming pool in each region ranged from:

- one private swimming pool per 16.1 people in the metropolitan region; to
- one private swimming pool per 132.2 people in the Great Southern region; to
- one private swimming pool per 518.0 people in the Christmas/Cocos (Keeling) Islands (Figure 35).

The number of dwellings per recorded private swimming pool in each region also ranged from:

- one private swimming pool per 6.0 dwellings in the Pilbara region; to
- one private swimming pool per 62.1 dwellings in the Great Southern region; to
- one private swimming pool per 221.5 dwellings in the Christmas/Cocos (Keeling) Islands (Figure 35).

Figure 35: Number of people, dwellings and area, per recorded private swimming pool, by region

Regions	Number of people per recorded private swimming pool	Number of dwellings per recorded private swimming pool	Area (square kilometre) per recorded private swimming pool
Christmas/Cocos (Keeling) Islands	518.0	221.5	37.3
Gascoyne	43.4	17.4	529.8
Goldfields-Esperance	24.1	10.1	307.0
Great Southern	132.2	62.1	89.9
Kimberley	19.8	9.5	242.1
Metropolitan	16.1	6.2	<0.01
Mid-West	26.6	11.3	218.7
Peel	18.2	8.3	0.8
Pilbara	19.9	6.0	147.3
South West	26.0	11.4	3.7
Wheatbelt	33.0	17.6	149.6

Source: Ombudsman Western Australia and Western Australian Local Government Association¹⁴⁹

5.4 Fatal and non-fatal drowning incidents in each local government district

The Office analysed deaths by drowning, admission to a hospital, and attendance at an emergency department at a hospital using the number of recorded private swimming pools located in each local government district and the population of children residing in each local government district.

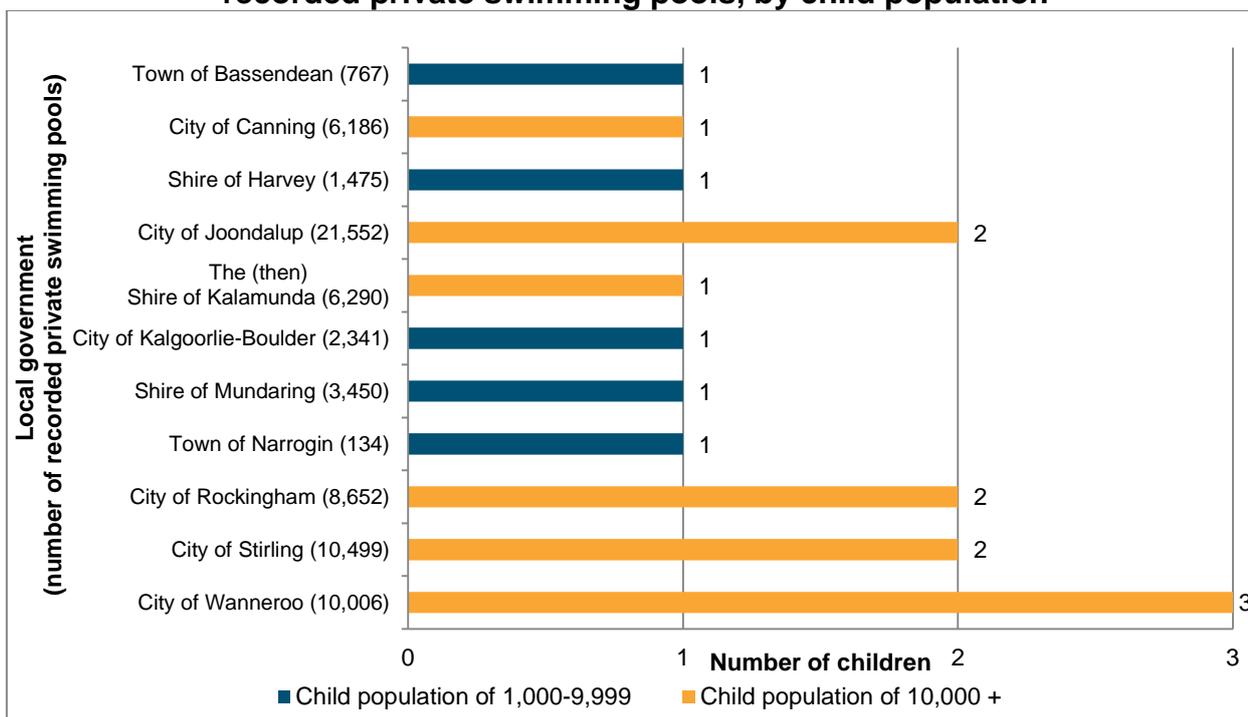
In considering the analysis set out below, it is important to note that the results are descriptive in nature only; the Office has not made any finding that any of the local government districts named could have prevented any of the recorded drowning incidents and there is no implication to be drawn from the presentation of descriptive analysis below that they could have done so.

5.4.1 Number of children who died by drowning in a private swimming pool, by number of recorded private swimming pools and child population in each local government district

The Office found that 16 of the 34 children who died by drowning did so following an incident in a private swimming pool. The Office analysed the number of children who died by drowning following an incident in a private swimming pool by the local government district of the child's residence and the local government district of the location of the fatal drowning incident. This analysis also considered the number of recorded private swimming pools located in each local government district and the population of children residing in each local government district. The Office's findings are set out in Figure 36.

¹⁴⁹ Western Australian Local Government Association, *The Western Australian Local Government Directory 2016*, Western Australian Local Government Association, West Leederville, 2016.

Figure 36: Number of children who died by drowning in a private swimming pool, by local government of the location of the fatal drowning incident and number of recorded private swimming pools, by child population



Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

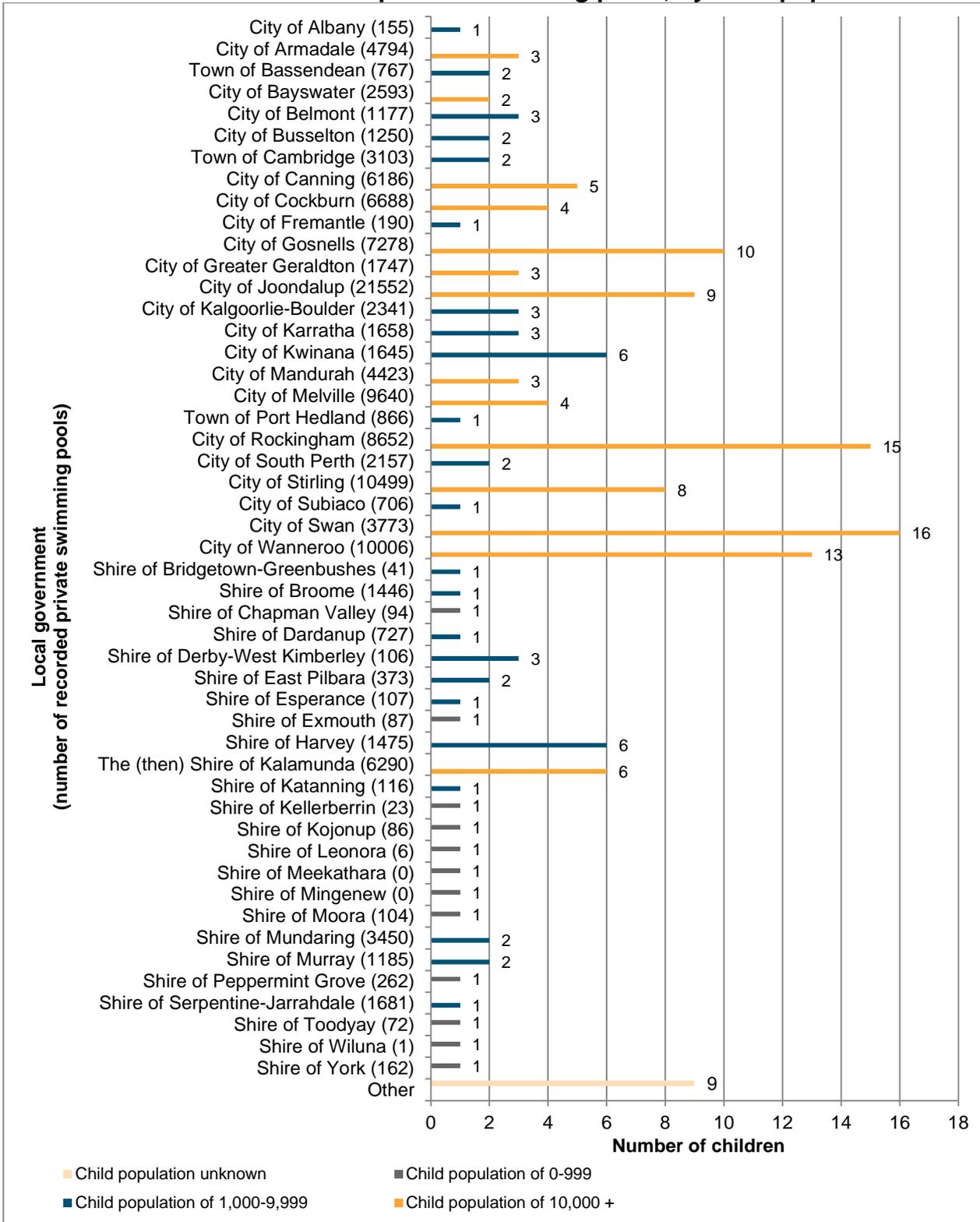
5.4.2 Number of children who were admitted to a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident in a swimming pool, by number of recorded private swimming pools and child population in each local government district

The Office found that, of the 258 children who were admitted to a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident, 170 (66 per cent) were admitted following an incident in a swimming pool.¹⁵⁰

The Office analysed the number of children who were admitted to a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident in a swimming pool by the local government district of the child's residence (for these children, information regarding the location of the non-fatal drowning incident was unavailable). This analysis also considered the number of recorded private swimming pools located in each local government district and the population of children residing in each local government district. The Office's findings are set out in Figure 37.

¹⁵⁰ WA Health did not routinely record if a swimming pool was a private or public swimming pool.

Figure 37: Number of children admitted to a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident in a swimming pool, by local government of child’s residence and number of recorded private swimming pools, by child population



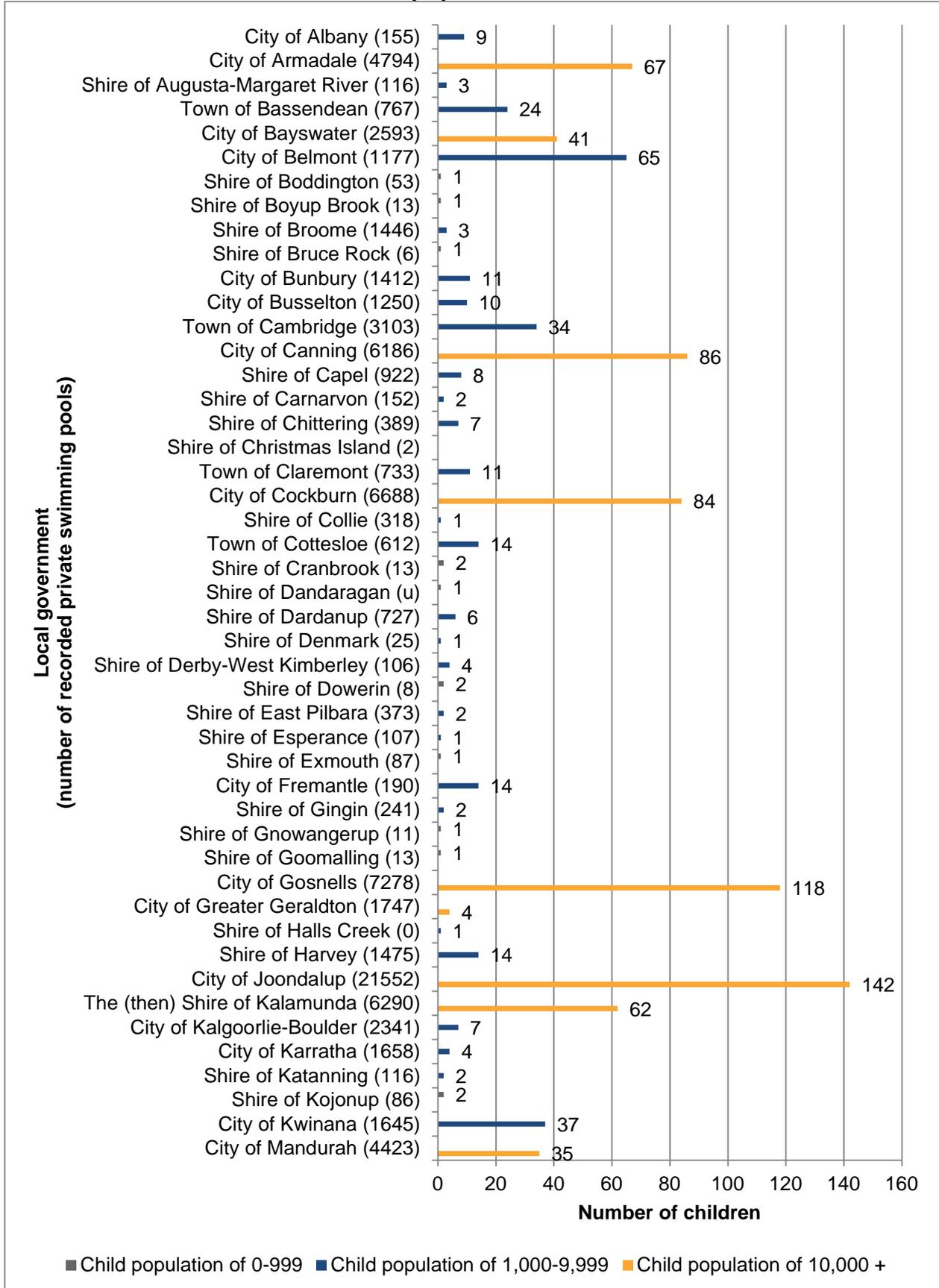
Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

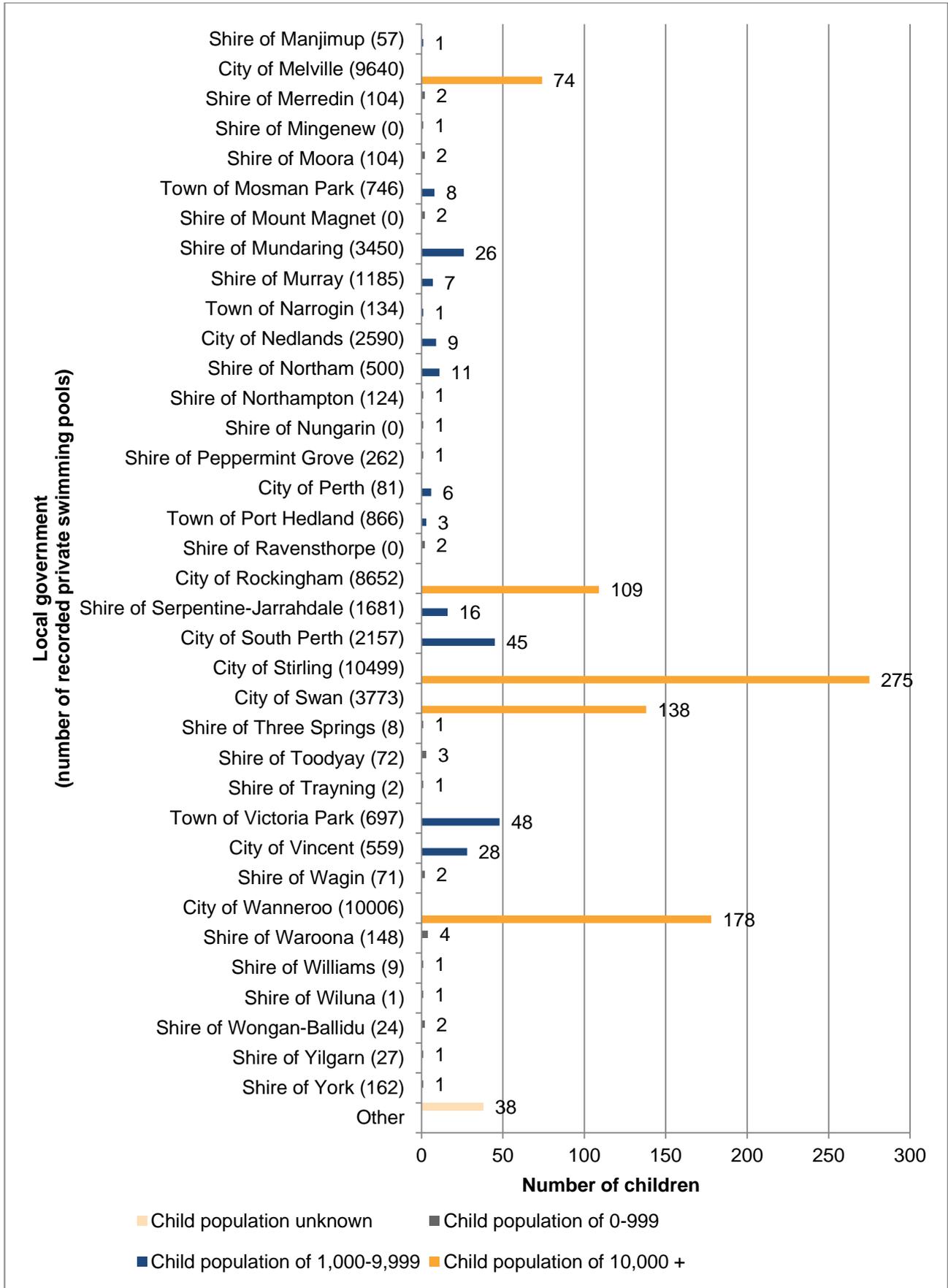
Note: ‘Other’ includes nine children who did not reside in Western Australia or for whom the local government district of the child’s residence could not be determined.

5.4.3 Number of children who attended an emergency department at a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident in all locations, by local government of the child's residence

The Office found that 2,310 children attended an emergency department at a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident in all locations. For these children, information regarding the location of the non-fatal drowning incident was unavailable. However, for completeness, the Office analysed the number of children who attended an emergency department at a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident in all locations by the local government district of the child's residence. This analysis also considered the number of recorded private swimming pools located in each local government district and the population of children residing in each local government district. The Office's findings are set out in Figure 38.

Figure 38: Number of children who attended an emergency department at a hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident in all locations, by local government of child's residence and number of recorded private swimming pools, by child population





Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

Note: 'Other' includes 38 children who did not reside in Western Australia or the local government district of the child's residence could not be determined.