

Draft Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) 2009-19

26 March 2009

Submission: PIONEER EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

Christchurch City Council has recommended that the operation of Pioneer Early Learning Centre be outsourced.

I am writing in support of maintaining the status quo, for the following reasons:

1. **Pioneer Early Learning Centre currently offers casual vacancies for users of the Pioneer leisure facilities. This Centre and the Council-owned QEII Pre-School are the only centres in Christchurch that provide casual and flexible care facilities.**

Casual care is one of the operating conditions set down by the Council for each centre. Pioneer Early Learning Centre plays an important role for parents of pre-schoolers, giving them short-term childcare options so they can access the adjacent leisure facilities. Further, as the Council has approved the extension of the Pioneer leisure facilities, demand for casual hours at Pioneer Early Learning Centre is sure to increase.

2. **The Council's revised Early Childhood Strategy (dated January 2001) is a current document that needs to be adhered to.**

This document includes, among others, the following objective (see page 8): *"To facilitate the provision of quality, accessible and affordable childcare services at Pioneer and QEII leisure facilities and within the inner city (for use by Council staff and other community users)."*

Outsourcing the Centre is inconsistent both with this objective and the broader Early Childhood Strategy. The Strategy cannot be changed without a proper consultation process, which must be undertaken prior to any decision regarding ownership or operation of the Council's early childhood centres.

3. **The Council's Early Childhood Strategy (January 2001) aims to assist disadvantaged community members. If Pioneer Early Learning Centre's operational format were to change, its fees would be likely to increase, working against this strategy.**

The Council's Early Childhood Education Policy states (see page 6, Early Childhood Strategy, January 2001): *"The desired key outcomes of the policy include ... improving the position of the least advantaged."* Pioneer Early Learning Centre's fees are very favourable relative to many other Centres. With their 20-free-hours scheme, no strings attached—something very few Centres are actually doing—their service is extremely affordable, supporting parents on low incomes as per Council's Strategy. If the Centre were outsourced, these fees would be likely to increase.

4. **The "Statement of Proposal for the future of the Council's involvement in three early learning centres" is a summary document for public consultation. But it contains misleading statements. Specifically:**

a) *"Changes in Ministry of Education standards ... means that it is no longer possible to offer casual access."* **This statement is false.** The Ministry of Education does not regulate on availability to casual access. Casual access is one of the operating conditions established by the Council for the Centre.

b) *"Only 18% of people enrolling children ... use the recreational facilities ..."* **This statement misrepresents the situation.** Pioneer Early Learning Centre is required by Council to operate with only 18-23% casual access.

c) *"New regulations announced in July 2008 introduce new standards, but without increased funding to assist with the cost of compliance."* **This statement is misleading.** With the change in Government, these new standards are now on hold pending review. Also, in the case of Pioneer Early Learning Centre, the new standards are already met so there would be no additional cost of

