

# CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL

## Draft LTCCP 2009-19

### - Received via Web

Submissions close on 16 April 2009

**I wish to talk to the main points in my written submission at the hearings to be held between Monday 11 May 2009 and Monday 18 May 2009.**

**Are you completing this submission:**

For yourself

**If you are representing, how many people do you represent?**

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**Date:**

9 April 2009

**Your Submission:**

Submission: QEII EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

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

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

1. QEII Early Learning Centre currently offers casual vacancies for users of the QEII 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. QEII 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.

2. The Councils 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 QEII 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 Councils early childhood centres.

3. The Councils Early Childhood Strategy (January 2001) aims to assist disadvantaged community members. If QEII Early Learning Centres operational format were to change, its fees would be likely to increase, working against this strategy. The Councils 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. QEII Early Learning Centres 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 Councils Strategy. If the Centre were outsourced, these fees would be likely to increase.

4. The Statement of Proposal for the future of the Councils 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. QEII 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 QEII Early Learning Centre, the new standards are already met so there would be no additional cost of compliance. Further, even if additional funding was required in the future, this statement ignores the ability of fee increases to meet any such funding needs.

5. The Christchurch City Councils long-term strategic direction has a strong community focus, as outlined in its Long-Term Community Council Plan (LTCCP). Retaining QEII Early Learning Centre in its existing operational structure helps fulfil the Councils objectives. QEII Early Learning Centre, in its current form, directly helps fulfil two Community Outcomes:

a) A city for recreation, fun and creativity, the Centre, by providing casual access, enables stay-at-home parents to use QEII leisure facilities when they otherwise would not be able to; and

b) A city of lifelong learning, the Centre provides quality early childhood education services.

Further, in its current Early Childhood Education Strategy (January 2001), the Council states: Many of the benefits of quality childcare/early childhood education services accrue to the community or larger society; they are, in part at least, collective benefits. I agree. The Council, through its involvement with QEII Early Learning Centre, is fostering several other Community Outcomes specified in the LTCCP: a safe city, a city of inclusive and diverse communities, a city of people who value and protect the natural environment, a prosperous city, and a healthy city.

6. QEII Early Learning Centre is rates neutral. In other words, the Centre imposes no financial burden on the Council or ratepayers. QEII Early Learning Centre helps the Council achieve its Community Outcomes, which are the issues voiced by the people of Christchurch as being important to them. Further, it does so without any financial contribution from ratepayers. It is therefore not in the Councils long-term interests to remove such an innovation; rather, it should be celebrated and strengthened.

Additional Comments (in black ink):

	<p>From a personal perspective I have also found the QEII Pre-school staff to be professional in all areas, to listen to parents ideas and advice, seek to achieve and maintain very high standards and above all ensure the safe and quality care of our children. Furthermore, their customer satisfaction rate is high; their ERO reports are excellent and if you outsource the facility these standards may not necessarily be maintained. I believe as rate-payers we have the right to have a say in what is the council's "core business". I think the care of our children, and ultimately our future is one of the most important areas a council could be involved in. I believe it is just as important as recreational facilities. I think I am qualified to speak in this area as I am a Physical Education teacher at a secondary school, and former teaching fellow from the School of Physical Education, University of Otago.</p>
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