

**Submission in response to the  
Christchurch City Council Draft (LTCCP) 2009-19**

**Changes and Proposals - Early Learning Centres**

**Submission**

The LTCCP proposals include:

- to sell or close Tuam St. Early Learning Centre and
- to outsource or close QE11 and Pioneer Early Learning Centres and
- to change Council policy on the provision of Child care services

However it appears that Council policy has been changed without public consultation as quoted under "options" from the "Statement of proposal for the future of the council's involvement in three early learning centres":

"The Early Learning Centres are not seen as core Council business".

This bold statement is presented as fact but Council policy, which states no such thing, is reproduced here:

POLICY STATEMENT	
<p><b>The Christchurch City Council is committed to proactively promoting equitable access for all children and their families/whanau to quality early childhood education in Christchurch. Priority will be given to the least advantaged and those with special needs or abilities.</b></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved services for children and their families/whanau through increased opportunities and choices for children and their families/whanau</li> <li>• Accessible early childhood education including cost, location and flexible hours.</li> <li>• Enhanced child well-being and development</li> <li>• High level participation in efficient/effective early childhood education</li> <li>• Improving the position of the least advantaged and those with special needs or abilities</li> <li>• Meeting our communities' varying needs</li> <li>• Safe, healthy and supportive environments</li> <li>• Services that provide for cultural diversity</li> <li>• Partnerships with our community, funders and providers of early childhood education</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Scope</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children aged 0-6 years</li> <li>• Parents and caregivers</li> <li>• People groups including ethnic and special interest groups</li> <li>• Metropolitan Christchurch</li> <li>• Local communities</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Roles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Co-ordination/facilitation</li> <li>• Financial assistance for not for profit Early Childhood Education Centres</li> <li>• Information and advice co-ordination</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>• Partnerships/Provider</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Promoting awareness</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Seeking community views</li> </ul>

If the above policy is going to be changed the Council needs to be up front about what policy is going to replace it. Surreptitious reference in the LTCCP draft is not good enough and breaches the requirements of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) for consultation with the community. The LGA requires:

The purpose of local government is---

- (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and

(b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities, **in the present and for the future.**

#### 14 Principles relating to local authorities

(1) In performing its role, a local authority must act in accordance with the following principles:

(a) a local authority should---

**(i) conduct its business in an open, transparent, and democratically accountable manner; and**

**(ii) give effect to its identified priorities and desired outcomes in an efficient and effective manner:**

(b) a local authority should make itself aware of, and should have regard to, the views of all of its communities; and

(c) when making a decision, a local authority should take account of---

(i) the diversity of the community, and the community's interests, within its district or region; and

(ii) the interests of future as well as current communities; and

(iii) the likely impact of any decision on each aspect of well-being referred to in section 10:

(d) a local authority should provide opportunities for Maori to contribute to its decision-making processes:

(e) a local authority should collaborate and co-operate with other local authorities and bodies as it considers appropriate to promote or achieve its priorities and desired outcomes, and make efficient use of resources; and

(f) a local authority should undertake any commercial transactions in accordance with sound business practices; and

(g) a local authority should ensure prudent stewardship and the efficient and effective use of its resources in the interests of its district or region; and

(h) in taking a sustainable development approach, a local authority should take into account---

(i) the social, economic, and cultural well-being of people and communities; and

(ii) the need to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment; and

**(iii) the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.**

(2) If any of these principles, or any aspects of well-being referred to in section 10, are in conflict in any particular case, the local authority should resolve the conflict in accordance with the principle in subsection (1)(a)(i).

(1) Consultation that a local authority undertakes in relation to any decision or other matter must be undertaken, subject to subsections (3) to (5), in accordance with the following principles:

**(a) that persons who will or may be affected by, or have an interest in, the decision or matter should be provided by the local authority with reasonable access to relevant information in a manner and format that is appropriate to the preferences and needs of those persons:**

In terms of process, including transparency and acting in a democratic manner it appears that the Council in preparing the information for the LTCCP draft report has been sloppy, and less than open. For example in terms of the policy statement the Council strategy for Early Learning Centres is reproduced here:

“The Council has long recognised the educational, social, preventative and supportive role of quality early childhood education.”

### **Looking at the bigger picture**

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. If self-reliant families, a healthy, proficient citizenry and cohesive, strong communities are desirable features of a society, and high quality child care contributes to their formation and maintenance, then the larger society gains. Provision of these services is in the public interest, it is appropriate to treat public expenditures for childcare as a public investment, not merely as a public cost, and to create public policy to do it effectively<sup>1</sup>.

A review of literature identified that if a system of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is well designed, it has the capacity to meet a range of needs simultaneously. High quality childcare /early childhood education has social value as:

- a strategy to enhance all children's healthy development, safety and wellbeing;
- a support to families regardless of their labour force status;
- part of a comprehensive approach to alleviating poverty; and
- a key tool for developing women's equality, participation, and transferable skills.

It is important to note, however, that the goals identified cannot be met unless the child care provided is high quality enough to foster healthy child development.<sup>2</sup>

The research shows that if an early childhood education service is high quality, it provides intellectual and social enhancement that persists into school, establishing a foundation for later success. These findings pertain regardless of social class.

Disadvantaged children, who are less likely to succeed in schooling, and more likely to become involved in delinquent activities later on, benefit from ECE programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Friendly (2000)

<sup>2</sup> Friendly (2000) Piatkowski (1998)

Healthy development in the early years serves as a solid foundation for life-long good health and as the underpinning not only for later school success, but for formation of a competent, civil citizenry.

ECE supports parents both as workers and in their parenting roles, so children can benefit from reduction of poverty, reduced family stress, and competent parenting. Healthy social development of individuals and communities fosters prevention of crime, and inclusive ECE strengthen appreciation for diversity and promote equity among classes, levels of ability, racial and ethnic groups, and generations, strengthening social solidarity.

Access to reliable childcare allows parents, especially mothers, to participate in the paid labour force, training or education. Without the availability of affordable, reliable childcare, women (both single parents and those in two-parent families) may be compelled to remain out of the labour force, to work at poorly-paid part-time employment, or not to take advancement; some are forced into dependence on social assistance and poverty. If childcare is accessible, low income parents on social assistance can become self reliant by participating in employment, training and education, and contribute to the economic life of the community.

Reliable, quality childcare also helps to enhance the work effectiveness of workers who are parents across the economic spectrum by diminishing tensions between work and family responsibilities.

### **In Summary**

The Christchurch City Council proposes in effect to exit the provision of child care and early learning on the basis that:

1. no other council provides such services
2. Ministry of Education standards mean it is no longer possible to offer casual access because children have to be enrolled, and
3. because the Ministry offered no additional funding.

None of these reasons stand up to scrutiny. Other councils do provide access to child care facilities either directly or indirectly, in fact some councils provide paid support for staff to use child care facilities. Children can be enrolled on a casual basis and the Ministry of Education has reviewed and increased funding over the past 7 years. As quoted from the Council 2007/08 Annual Report on Early Learning Centres:

“Early learning centres had a lower net cost in 2007/08 following higher revenue received from the Ministry of Education and lower net operational costs.”

The proposal of the council is written in a sloppy and less than accurate manner to support a predetermined outcome.

This predetermined outcome if accepted will be to the long term detriment of the wider community.

The Council should reject this proposal and instead seek to have a comprehensive and detailed study of the needs of the community for quality child care and early learning services across the whole city.

As is required by the Local Government Act, the Council needs to make an assessment of community needs in conjunction with other service providers, social agencies, Commissioner for Children, Ministry of Education and experts in the field.

Christchurch is in the grip of an anti-child, anti-youth culture which needs to be challenged, if we do not support and care for the education and development of our children we will be faced with a rapidly ageing population of residents while the young leave for overseas, join gangs or end up in the ever growing number of prisons<sup>3</sup>.

More than any other issues at stake in this LTCCP, the proposals around child care and early education are about our future and our wellbeing, about economic and social wellbeing, about growth and development. The LTCCP proposals are short sighted and narrowly focused. Our children and our future deserve a better assessment.

### **Decision requested**

That the Council:

Reject the "Statement of proposal for the future of the council's involvement in three early learning centres" contained in the draft LTCCP 2009-19, and instead seek to have a comprehensive and detailed study of the needs of the community for quality child care and early learning services across the whole city.

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<sup>3</sup> "New Zealand's incarceration rate of 197 per 100,000 people was almost twice that of most western European countries. France's rate was 90 per 100,000 and Britain's 140 per 100,000" – "High prison rate astonishes expert" (15 June 2008) Stuff Website: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/489595>

