

THE CIVIC PARTNERSHIP

Glen Eira City Council

Communication Plan

15 September 2023

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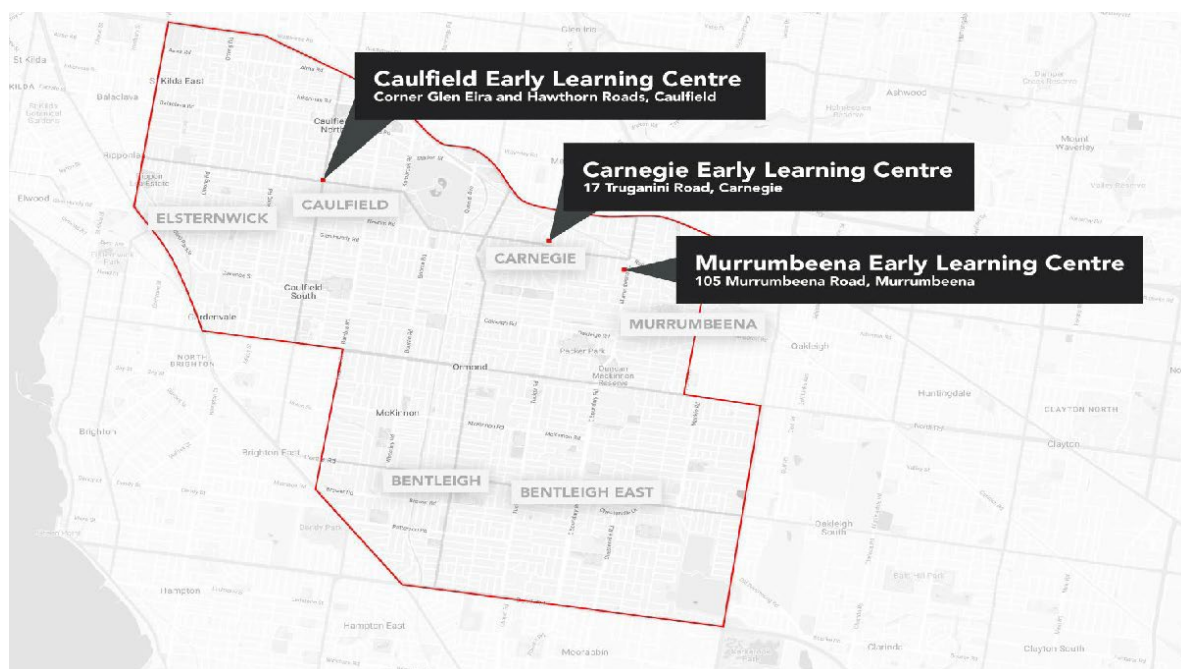
BACKGROUND

Glen Eira City Council owns and operates three early learning centres in Caulfield, Carnegie and Murrumbeena. The centres provide places for up to 115 children each day. This represents just 2% of the childcare places available in the municipality. A total of 162 children from 148 families attend the service.

The Glen Eira municipality has a significant childcare market, providing the community with choice, competition and capacity. The number of childcare places in Glen Eira has doubled since 2010. There are now 58 childcare centres in Glen Eira providing a total of 5,731 places. Nine childcare centres, currently in the planning phase, will have the capacity to provide a further 919 places.

However, the buildings that house Council's childcare services are almost 50 years old, no longer fit for purpose and do not meet contemporary standards when compared with other centres operating in the municipality. The three centres are forecast to operate at an annual loss of at least \$570,000 for the next five years. Expenditure has exceeded income across the three centres for almost a decade.

Council will make a preliminary decision about the future of its three centres in October, with a final decision by the end of the year. Council recognises that a preliminary decision to close would leave many families and staff experiencing a range of emotions. Understanding the concerns, and determining how to respond to them, is an important part of this plan that aims to support those most affected by a preliminary decision to close the centres, families and staff, and the wider community.



STRATEGIC APPROACH

The task

To develop and deliver a communications plan that:

- raises awareness of a preliminary decision among those most impacted by a closure
- ensures support and relevant messages reach those most impacted
- proposes consistent messages and materials for use with a wide range of audiences
- aligns with other relevant Council projects' timelines and messages
- appropriately trains spokespeople to discuss the matter with the community or media
- identifies risks and proposes mitigations.

Communications principles

All communications should use easy to **clear** language, be short and to the point. A set of **consistent** messages should be used at all times and with all audiences.

A coordinated approach should ensure messages **complement** rather than compete with other messages being communicated by Council at the same time.

Families and staff may be shocked, concerned, angry and confused by a preliminary decision to close the centres, ensuring they are treated with **compassion** is vital. Listen and **cooperate** to ensure the information and support families and staff need and want is provided.

There is also a need to raise awareness of Council's decision-making **process** and the opportunities for families, staff and other stakeholders to **participate** in consultation activities, and for Council representatives to be visible and **present** throughout.

Disclaimer

This communication plan has been developed to ensure measures are in place to deliver the necessary communications and consultation activities, if there is a preliminary decision to close the centres. It does not in any way pre-empt a decision.

It should be noted that this plan includes the immediate communications needs of staff but does not include the detailed industrial relations consultation processes.

Process

The table below maps the key stages in the decision-making process.



CORE PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Council has made a preliminary decision to close our three small early learning centres in Caulfield, Carnegie and Murrumbeena and will now consult directly impacted families, staff, and the community before making a final decision later this year.

The Glen Eira municipality has a significant childcare market, providing the community with choice, competition and capacity. We have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand.

Childcare places in the municipality have doubled since 2010 and grown by 44.51 per cent since 2019 while the number of children aged under four has dropped by almost 10 per cent since 2016.

Council's centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in Glen Eira. The nine centres now in the planning phase will have the capacity to offer 919 more places.

We recognise this will be a challenging time for staff and families and are here to support them. Just like we supported families when there was a growing need for childcare, but few services, and we stepped in opening our first centre in a converted house in the early 1990s.

In the decades since, a radical change in government funding and policy has led to a boom in the childcare market and slowed demand for Council's centres. It is challenging to operate our centres without the economies of scale only larger centres can achieve.

A service review found we provide quality care and have excellent educators, but our buildings are outdated and lack many of the basic amenities such as laundries and kitchens that families expect, and newer centres offer.

Operating at an average of 78 per cent capacity in 2022-23, enrolments at our centres are declining while costs are increasing – trends that show no sign of reversing. Amid increasing costs and economic uncertainty, it is getting harder for councils to run services. Fewer than half of Melbourne's councils operate childcare.

Our centres are expected to operate at a loss of at least \$570,000 each year. We need to make responsible choices and provide value to all the community. Our priority is to ensure families can access quality services in their local area.

We know this news may be unsettling, support staff will be at the centres to answer questions, provide information and guidance to all staff and families.

If Council decides to close the centres, the final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023. We will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or career support.

Council provides a range of services for children and families, one of the most important is our advocacy, seeking to secure programs, projects and funding from other levels of government to ensure our children and families thrive.

Key messages

Council has made a preliminary decision to close three small early learning centres in Caulfield, Carnegie and Murrumbeena.

We will now consult impacted families, staff and the community before making a final decision later this year. We recognise that for some this will be a challenging time and support is available.

The Glen Eira municipality has childcare choice, competition and capacity, which means we have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand. Childcare places in the municipality have doubled since 2010. Council's three small centres account for just 2 per cent of Glen Eira's 5,700 childcare places.

A service review found we provide quality care and have excellent educators, but our buildings lack many basic amenities that families expect, and newer centres offer.

Amid increasing costs and economic uncertainty, it is getting harder for councils to run services. We need to make responsible choices and provide value to the community.

The Glen Eira municipality has childcare choice, competition and capacity, which means current and projected demand for childcare can easily be met.

If Council decides to close the centres, their final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023. We will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff find a new role.

STAKEHOLDER MESSAGES

Stakeholder	Messages
Service users	<p>Council has made a preliminary decision to close our three small early learning centres and will now consult with those most impacted, families and staff, and the broader community.</p> <p>A service review found we provide quality care and have excellent educators, but our buildings lack the basic amenities and features families now expect.</p> <p>The Glen Eira municipality has childcare choice, competition and capacity, which means we have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand. Council's centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in the Glen Eira municipality.</p> <p>We know this news may be unsettling, and specialist staff will be at the centres to answer questions, provide information and guidance to impacted families and staff.</p> <p>If Council decides to close the centres, the final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023. We will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or through career support.</p>
Service staff and representative organisations	<p>Council has made a preliminary decision to close our three small early learning centres and will now consult with those most impacted, staff and families, and the broader community.</p> <p>A service review found we provide quality care and have excellent educators, but our buildings lack the basic amenities and features families now expect.</p> <p>The Glen Eira municipality has childcare choice, competition and capacity, which means we have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand. At the same time there is also significant demand for qualified, experienced childcare educators.</p>

	<p>We know this news may be unsettling, and specialist staff will be at the centres to answer questions, provide information and guidance to impacted staff and families.</p> <p>If Council decides to close the centres, the final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023. We will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or through career support.</p>
Parliamentarians, peak bodies, regulators and other stakeholders	<p>Council has made a preliminary decision to close our three small early learning centres and will consult with families and staff, with a final decision due by the end of the year.</p> <p>Childcare places have doubled since 2010 and grown by 44.51 per cent since 2019 and Council's centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in the municipality.</p> <p>A service review found we provide quality care and have excellent educators, but our buildings lack the basic amenities families expect.</p> <p>Amid increasing costs and economic uncertainty, it is getting harder for councils to run services. Our centres now operate at a loss of at least \$570,000 each year. We need to make responsible choices and provide value to all the community.</p> <p>The Glen Eira municipality has choice, competition and capacity, which means we have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand.</p> <p>If Council decides to close the centres, the final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023. We will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or through career support.</p>
Glen Eira staff	<p>Council has made a preliminary decision to close our three small early learning centres that account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in Glen Eira, and will now consult with staff and families with a final decision due by the end of the year.</p>

	<p>A review of our childcare centres found that we provide quality care and have excellent educators, but our buildings lack the basic the amenities families now expect, such as kitchens and laundries.</p> <p>Operating at 78 per cent capacity in 2022-23, the numbers at our centres keep going down while costs keep going up – trends that show no sign of reversing and we need to make responsible choices and provide value to all the community.</p> <p>If Council decides to close the centres, the final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023. We will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or through career support.</p> <p>We know this news may be unsettling, should you have any questions please contact your manager in the first instance.</p>
<p>Glen Eira community</p>	<p>When there was a growing need for childcare, but few services, Council opened its first centre in a converted house in the early 1990s. Since then, radical change in government funding and policy has led to a boom in not-for-profit and private childcare centres and slowed demand for Council's centres.</p> <p>Following a service review that found we provide quality care and have excellent educators, our buildings lack the basic amenities families expect, Council has made a preliminary decision to close our three small early learning centres and will now consult with those most impacted - families and staff and the broader community.</p> <p>Our centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in Glen Eira. We have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand.</p> <p>Amid increasing costs and economic uncertainty, it is getting harder for councils to run services. Our centres now operate at a loss of at least \$570,000 each year. We need to make responsible choices and provide value to all the community.</p> <p>If Council decides to close the centres, the final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023. We will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff</p>

	<p>find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or through career support.</p> <p>Go to Have Your Say webpage for more information.</p>
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Additional materials

Tailored messages and materials to respond to the specific information needs of the small but important stakeholder sets listed below are also being prepared:

- Enrolled kindergarten families at each centre
- Waitlisted families at each centre
- Casual staff
- Co-located maternal and child health staff
- Council staff who use the centres / salary sacrifice

All items will include details on how to access Council's Employee Assistance Program or other relevant support program.

STAKEHOLDER MAP

Stakeholder	Communications Channels
<p>Current childcare families</p> <p>Families who have registered their interest for a 2024 place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text message • Email / Kinderloop* • FAQs / fact sheet • GECC Childcare Discussion Paper • In days after a preliminary decision to close Council leaders present at centres to listen to families, provide information and answer questions • Ongoing access to counselling and Family Liaison Officer • Online and face-to-face meetings (one-on-one and small groups) to advise of preliminary decision, consultation program, counselling support and decision-making process • Family Listening Posts (consultation) – providing opportunities for families to make appointments across different days/timeslots (in-person or online) to provide feedback on preliminary decision, ask questions and receive support and guidance
<p>Educators and Early Learning Centre Team Leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text message • Email • Staff meeting (in person) advising of the preliminary decision, consultation program, EAP support and communications to families • Personalised letter • FAQs / fact sheet • GECC Childcare Discussion Paper • Information Sessions / Q&A • 1:1 opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback • Ongoing access to counselling service • Online and face-to-face meetings (one-on-one and small groups)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow up communication to report back, provide updated information and discuss next steps
Glen Eira Council staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special CEO Update outlining the preliminary decision (and forward process), staff consultation program, EAP support and where to go for further information GECC Childcare Discussion Paper FAQs Intranet (GECKO)
Unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email letter from Council outlining the preliminary decision, consultation program, decision-making process, EAP support. GECC Childcare Discussion Paper Face to face meetings with Unions to discuss preliminary decision and potential staff impacts FAQs / fact sheets
Glen Eira community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement on news section of Council website Have Your Say engagement survey on Council website GECC Childcare Discussion Paper
<p>State Parliament</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Ingrid Stitt Member for Bentleigh, Nick Staikos (ALP) Member for Oakleigh, Steve Dimopoulos (ALP) – Carnegie ELC, Murrumbeena ELC Member for Caulfield, David Southwick (LIB) – Caulfield ELC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email letter outlining the preliminary decision, consultation program, decision-making process, support available to those most impacted, staff and families, and broader community (reference specific centres relevant to each local MP) Offer one-on-one briefing with CEO & Director Community Wellbeing

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State Members for Southern Metropolitan Region: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Georgie Crozier - John Berger - David Davis - Katherine Copsey - Ryan Batchelor 	
<p>Federal Parliament</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Member for Higgins, Michelle Ananda – Rajah (ALP) – Murrumbena ELC, Carnegie ELC ▪ Member for Goldstein, Zoe Daniel (IND) ▪ Member for Hotham, Clare O'Neil (ALP) ▪ Member for Macnamara, Josh Burns (ALP) – Caulfield ELC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email letter outlining the preliminary decision, consultation program, decision-making process, support available to those most impacted, staff and families, and broader community • Reference specific centre relevant to MP's electorate • Offer one-on-one briefing
<p>Relevant state and federal government departments, agencies and regulators</p> <p>Relevant industry bodies</p> <p>Suppliers and contractors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email letter outlining the preliminary decision, consultation program, decision-making process, support available to those most impacted, staff and families, and broader community • Offer one-on-one briefing with Director Community Wellbeing or Manager Family, Youth and Children's Services
<p>Media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayoral Statement on announcement of preliminary decision added to news section of Council website

* Kinderloop is Council's early learning centre communication platform.

COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM TIMELINE

4 October 2023 - Preliminary Decision Announcement			
When	Who	What	Collateral
4.00pm	Unions	Phone call / email advising of the preliminary decision	Talking points
4.00pm	Childcare Staff	Text notification to remind staff of 6.30pm staff meeting (date for staff meeting will be pre-arranged)	Text copy
6.30pm	Childcare Staff	Staff meeting advising of the preliminary decision, consultation, EAP support and communication to families	Powerpoint presentation Fact sheet on decision making process and timelines FAQs EAP Contacts
7.00pm	Families	SMS alerting families to check Kinderloop for important message, immediately followed by email to families advising of the preliminary decision, consultation and listening posts, promote online info session	Text copy GECC Childcare Discussion Paper Fact sheet FAQs
8.00pm	Childcare Staff	Follow up email sent to all staff	Individual letters Fact sheet on decision making process and timeline FAQs GECC Childcare Discussion Paper

5 October 2023 - Preliminary Decision Announcement			
When	Audience	Activity	Collateral
From 7.00am	Families Staff	Council senior leaders present at each centre to listen, provide information and answer questions	Fact sheet FAQs
8.30am	State and Federal MPs	Notify State and Federal MPs of the preliminary decision and call from CEO	Email Talking points
9:00am	Family, Youth and Children's Services Staff People and Culture	Email advising of the preliminary decision, consultation, counselling and communication to families. Specific message about Maternal and Child Health at Caulfield and Murrumbeena not being impacted	Email
9.10am	All GECC Staff	Email outlining the preliminary decision, consultation, EAP support and advising of other information available	CEO email
9.20am	Stakeholders	Write to State / Federal Departments of Education, MAV, Glen Education, East Bentleigh Child Care Centre, Kindergarten Committees and Kindergarten Central Registration Network to advise of preliminary decision	Letter (tailored and emailed to each recipient)
9.30am	All	Statement on Council website Have Your Say (Council Website)	Statement Survey
9.40am	Families	Check email read receipts and call any families yet to open email	Talking points

8:00pm	Families	30-minute online information session (Zoom) to provide information to families and advise of Family Listening Posts	Talking points
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6 October 2023 - Preliminary Decision Announcement

When	Audience	Activity	Collateral
	Councillors	Provide an update on activity since preliminary announcement through Governance Digest	Email
10.00am	All licensed children's services in Glen Eira municipality	Outlining the preliminary decision, and consultation	Information bulletin

11 October 2023 - Preliminary Decision Announcement

When	Audience	Activity	Collateral
4.00 - 7.00pm	Families	Listening Post (by appointment, face-to-face / online opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and discuss next steps)	Talking points Fact sheet FAQs

12 October 2023 - Preliminary Decision Announcement

When	Audience	Activity	Collateral
9:30am- 11:00am	Family Youth and Children's Services Staff	Department Team Meeting	Powerpoint Presentation Fact sheet Talking points

13 October 2023 - Preliminary Decision Announcement			
When	Audience	Activity	Collateral
10.00am - 1.00pm	Families	Listening Post (by appointment, face-to-face / online opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and discuss next steps)	Talking points Fact sheet FAQs

16 October 2023 - Preliminary Decision Announcement			
When	Audience	Activity	Collateral
11.00am - 2.00pm	Families	Listening Post (by appointment, face-to-face / online opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and discuss next steps)	Talking points Fact sheet FAQs

From 11 October - Preliminary Decision Announcement			
When	Audience	Activity	Collateral
Weekly (scheduled and as required)	Staff Unions	Staff information sessions to be held with all directly affected staff to address emerging concerns or issues	Talking points FAQs (Updated each week)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Overarching

Q. What decision has Council made?

Council has made a preliminary decision to close its three small early learning centres in Caulfield, Carnegie and Murrumbeena. We will now consult those most impacted, families, staff and the community, with a final decision to be made later this year.

Q. Why was that decision made?

A service review found we provide quality care and have excellent educators, but our buildings lack the basic amenities families expect, and other centres offer.

Our centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in the municipality. That means there is choice and capacity, so we have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand.

Operating at 78 per cent capacity in 2022-23, numbers at our centres keep declining while costs keep rising – trends that show no sign of reversing. Amid soaring costs and economic uncertainty, and with the centres expected to operate at a loss of at least \$570,000 each year, we need to make responsible choices and provide value to all the community.

Q. What happens next?

Following the preliminary decision our focus now turns to consulting with those most impacted, staff and families, and the broader community, before a final decision is made later this year.

Q. If the final decision is to close the centres, when would they actually close?

If Council decides to close the centres, the final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023 and we will work with families to find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff find a new role.

Q. What will happen to the families that use the centres?

For now, nothing will change. With only a preliminary decision made and consultation now underway, the centres will continue to provide the same quality care they always have.

Our centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in the municipality. That means there is choice and capacity, so we have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand.

If a final decision to close is made, we will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs.

Q. What will happen to staff who work at the centres?

For now, nothing will change. With only a preliminary decision made, the centres will continue to provide the same quality care they always have.

If the final decision is to close the centres, staff will be supported to find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or through career support. Council will prioritise health and wellbeing and staff will be supported at this time and have access to EAP counselling services.

Q. Should the services close, how will Council support the families and staff?

Without pre-empting the decision, we recognise that a decision to close the centres would be unsettling for families and staff and a wide range of supports that respond to their specific needs would be provided.

Our centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in the municipality. That means there is choice and capacity, so we have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand. There is also demand for qualified and experienced childcare workers.

If a final decision to close is made, we will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs, and help staff find a new role through deployment to another Council role or by providing career support.

Q. What will happen to the buildings if the services close?

If a final decision to close is made and the buildings are deemed as surplus, they will form part of Council's property strategy that will determine their future uses.

Q. Can council guarantee families will find the care they want on the days they need?

If a final decision to close is made, we will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and preferences.

Our centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in the municipality. That means there is choice and capacity, so we have a high degree of confidence that the strong supply of childcare places will meet current and future demand.

Q. Council will be forcing families to pay more at a time when they can least afford it, will there be compensation?

While Council's centres are among the most affordable in the municipality, the continual decline in attendance, shows that families chose a childcare centre based on a range of factors such as amenities and facilities, with price being just one consideration.

Q. Is this decision about the services in particular or Council's financial position in general?

For all councils it's becoming tougher to operate the way we have in the past, and we all need to be responsible and plan now to ensure our long-term financial sustainability.

Q. Shouldn't consultation take place before a decision is made, not after?

The Local Government Act requires councils to consult with staff on any significant organisational change. As such Council is required to make a preliminary decision, consult, consider feedback and only then make a final decision.

Theme 1: Service provision

Q. Did the childcare service review recommend any other services close?

No.

Q. What other services does Council provide to support children and their families?

Council provides a range of services for children and families, from immunisations to Maternal and Child Health and playgrounds to family day care, however one of the most important is our advocacy, through which we seek to secure programs, projects and funding from other levels of government to ensure all children and families thrive.

Q. If there is a final decision to close, will East Bentleigh Community Childcare Centre that is owned but not operated by Council also close?

While located in a Council-owned building, it is leased by a not-for-profit organisation that operates the centre and as such is not affected by the preliminary or final decisions.

Theme 2: Consultation and process

Q. Will children have a say in this review and decision process?

If an individual family considers it appropriate to discuss the preliminary decision with their young children and wish to provide feedback it would of course be welcomed.

Q. How can I participate in the consultation process?

Families can make an appointment to attend a Listening Post, complete an online or paper-based survey or make a written submission. The best way for the community to provide feedback is through Council's *Have Your Say* webpage.

Theme 3: Impacted families

Q. Can Council guarantee that the preliminary decision will not affect service provision?

We recognise this will be a challenging time for staff and families and we are here to support them but for now, nothing will change. With only a preliminary decision made, the centres will continue to provide the same quality care they always have.

Q. Will Council find alternative affordable childcare for impacted families?

With only a preliminary decision made, the centres will continue to provide the same quality care they always have. If a final decision to close the centres is made, we will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs, and support staff.

Q. Does Council expect families to stick around after the preliminary decision?

With only a preliminary decision made, the centres will continue to provide the same quality care they always have. If a final decision to close the centres is made, we will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs, and support staff.

Q. What support is available to help me find another service for my child?

With only a preliminary decision made, the centres will continue to provide the same quality care they always have. If a final decision to close the centres is made, we will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs, and support staff.

Q. What if I can't find another suitable service before Council's childcare services close?

With only a preliminary decision made, the centres will continue to provide the same quality care they always have.

Childcare places in Glen Eira have doubled since 2010 and grown by 44.51 per cent since 2019. Council's centres account for just 2 per cent of the 5,700 childcare places in Glen Eira.

If Council decides to close the centres, the final day of operation would most likely be 21 December 2023. We will help families find alternative care that best suits their individual needs and help staff find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or through career support.

Theme 4: Impacted service staff

Q. How can staff participate in the consultation program?

Staff can provide feedback at one-on-one or small group meetings; and send feedback to a dedicated email address. All feedback received will be provided to Councillors prior to a final decision being made.

Q. How are the staff being supported following Council's decision to exit the service?

Staff will receive all relevant information materials before they choose to provide Council with feedback on the preliminary decision.

Staff will have a number of opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback before a final decision is made.

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If the final decision is to close the centres, staff will be supported to find a new role through redeployment to another Council role or through career support. Council will prioritise health and wellbeing and staff will be supported at this time and have access to EAP counselling services.