

Council to close two nurseries in Edinburgh

✘ The City of Edinburgh Council have voted by 40 votes to 18 this morning to close High School Yards Nursery School and Princess Elizabeth Nursery School.

This followed an emotional debate on the issue and a deputation which tried to persuade the council to do otherwise. Yet again the administration has chosen not to alter its path following a passionate plea from those most interested in the decision. Councillor Alison Johnstone said:-
“Today I hope to see that the comments from parents and experts have been listened to. We should be proud of High School Yards and holding it up as exemplary.”

A 62 page report was produced on the proposal to close High School Yards by the Director of Families and Children, Marilyne McLaren, which concludes that the nursery should be closed on several grounds:-

- Substantial overcapacity exists in nursery places within the city centre locality. There is enough space in other establishments to accommodate the children who currently attend High School Yards Nursery School and space to accommodate a further 50 FTE places should these be required in the future
- The closure of High School Yards would still leave parents with the choice of being able to access nursery school provision or nursery class provision within a half mile radius in the city centre area.
- Children will continue to receive an appropriate educational experience should the decision be taken to close High School Yards Nursery School.

- Nursery schools are more expensive to run than nursery classes. Figures from 09/10 show the average cost of £6,468 per child in High School Yards that as one of the highest cost nursery schools, as opposed to £4,484 in Royal Mile Nursery Class and £5,230 in St. Leonard's Nursery School.
- Implementation of the proposal would generate £106,323 of annual net recurring revenue savings and release a building for sale that is valued at £100,000.
- The release of the capital receipt from the sale of High School Yards will allow investment in the early years estate, including for improvements at Royal Mile Primary Nursery Class, as advised within the HMIE report.

A further report was produced on the closure of Princess Elizabeth Nursery School which made the following recommendations:-

- Within the Prestonfeld area there are enough spaces to accommodate the children who currently attend Princess Elizabeth Nursery School as well as space to accommodate a further 10 FTE places should these be required in the future. There is also additional space within Prestonfield Primary School to develop additional early years provision should this be required.
- Children will continue to receive an appropriate educational experience should the decision be taken to close Princess Elizabeth Nursery School.
- Nursery Schools are more expensive to run than nursery classes. Figures from 09/10 show the average cost of £6,301 per child in Princess Elizabeth as opposed to £4,765 in Prestonfield Nursery Class. It is possible to decrease the average cost in Cameron House of £6,367 by moving places from Princess Elizabeth. Princess Elizabeth has the floor space to be registered to take up to 24 FTE while Cameron House is registered to take

up to 26 FTE places.

- The closure of Princess Elizabeth would still give parents the choice of nursery school or nursery class provision within a 500 metre area in the community.
- Implementation of the proposal would generate £92,511 of annual net recurring revenue savings and release a building for sale that is conservatively valued at £150,000.
- The release of the capital receipt from the sale of Princess Elizabeth will allow investment in the early years estate, including making improvements at Prestonfield Primary Nursery Class provision.

Jacque Swartz led the deputation from High School Yards Parents & Workers Association, alleging that the administration were planning to close the nursery school on financial grounds rather than educational ones. Swartz said:- "This is a successful nursery. We are full to capacity just now. We have 26 children and this is an important resource which would be lost. There will be no savings made. They are simply reallocating costs." Councillor Burgess asked:- "How much will we be saving?"

Councillor Andrew Burns asked the deputation whether they knew that the first decision to talk about closing the school had been made in February 2010. Swartz replied:- "No we weren't informed about that. This is typical of the lack of professionalism which has been displayed throughout the process."

The debate became quite heated, particularly when Councillor Eric Milligan spoke to the Labour amendment, demanding that the administration look at the matter in the light of the council's history. He said that he himself had benefitted from a full-time nursery education, and that Edinburgh should be proud of the educational facilities provided and not contemplating closing these facilities. Milligan said:- "In years past our council had established a network of nurseries

to a level that others could only dream about. The reason for closure now is financial, purely financial dna only financial.”

Councillor McLaren accused him of living in the last century, and said:-“The money released will allow us to provide a good resource at Royal Mile.”

Councillor Edie stated:-“Finance underpins everything we do. We are not a profit making organisation. It is regrettable to close these two schools but there are other facilities.” It is envisaged that the pupils will find alternative places at nearby nurseries, such as Royal Mile and St Leonard’s.