

# Playgroup to close after funding mix up

By Stuart Sommerville, LDR

**A popular West Lothian playgroup will close at Christmas after missing out on funding to provide pre-school care.**

The Daisy Drop In playgroup has served the impoverished Craigshill area in Livingston for around 15 years.

Staff did not apply to join the new funding framework being developed to provide care as part of the Scottish Government's roll-out of 1140 hours per year for all 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

And the loss of funding means they have taken the difficult decision to close in December.

In a motion raised at a meeting of West Lothian Council, local SNP member Councillor Veronica Smith said: "It is with sadness that the committee announced that due to the lack of support from West Lothian Council the Daisy Drop In playgroup will be closing permanently on Friday, 23 December 2022.

"The committee of the playgroup were unaware of the new procurement procedures that were being implemented for suppliers for eligible 2-year olds or the information session for prospective suppliers that was held in January 2022. As a result, they did not apply to be a supplier. When they found out in June that they were no longer a supplier they met with

the Council to resolve the situation.”

The playgroup based in the community wing of Letham Primary School provides a safe and secure environment for 2-5 year olds.

Playgroup co-ordinator Elaine Provan told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “We only found out about this process by accident in June. We contacted WLC and were told we had been informed of the process but hadn’t applied, therefore we were no longer able to take funded children.

She protested: “We were never contacted about this and had several meetings with council staff, but the decision wouldn’t be changed and we were told we could apply again next year.”

She added: “Unfortunately, we weren’t in a position financially to keep the playgroup running without funded places and the Committee took the decision to close the playgroup on 23 December in order to minimise the financial loss. ”

A composite motion agreed between Councillor Smith and Education Executive Councillor, Labour’s Andrew McGuire agreed: “Council understands that Daisy Drop In did not apply to tender and therefore have not been awarded any spaces in this year. Daisy Drop In informed the council that they did not receive the correspondence that was sent by West Lothian Council.”

It added: “Council instructs officers to continue to engage with Daisy Drop In and to provide bespoke advice and support about other models of provision which may allow the group to tender for ELC provision in future years and to discuss with them the requirements for partnership under the national care standards.”

And in a nod to a breakdown in communication between the playgroup and education officers, the new motion agreed:

“Council also instructs officers to ensure in future years an effective communication strategy with all eligible ELC providers is made through both appropriate means to ensure maximum communication of the tender process is had with eligible groups.”

Responding on behalf of the playgroup Elaine said: “I am not sure what the agreement was for future consideration of the playgroup to receive information on funding – the only thing I can think of is that we were told we could apply for funded places again next year but weren’t guaranteed to receive it. We have since learned that the local primary schools are getting funded places within their nurseries.”

The composite motion confirmed that “Council notes that this year there are adequate places for eligible 2 year olds at Letham primary school nursery.”

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