

Phasing out funded commuter nursery places is “only option”

Phasing-out funded childcare places in private Edinburgh nurseries for people living in neighbouring local authorities “may be harsh” but is the only option under “dramatic” cuts, the council’s education convener has said.

Education Convener Cllr Joan Griffiths said a £6million cut to the city’s early years budget meant the council had to prioritise funding places for local children and “bringing services in-house and developing our own early years centres to longer, flexible days”.

She also hit out at “misinformation that we’re stopping children who are already in early years centres,” adding: “That’s not the case.”

The council says limiting early learning and childcare cross boundary places to just its own nurseries will save £1.2m.

The change – taking effect from August – will only impact new placements, with existing funded children continuing to be supported.

A officer report explained: “Existing funded children who are not Edinburgh residents will continue to be funded. If they

have a younger sibling who attends the setting and will be eligible for funding during session 2024-25, we will also fund this child to prevent the need for the parent to use more than one ELC setting.

“Parents who are not Edinburgh residents and require full day all year-round provision to work in the city will be able to access this in one of our full year 8am – 6pm local authority settings.”

However parents set to be impacted have criticised the move. Mum Fiona Donnachie, who lives in West Lothian and travels into Edinburgh for work, said if the cut goes ahead “I would need to consider my working hours”.

She said due to “huge” waiting lists for private and independent nurseries in West Lothian getting a local funded place for her son Flynn would be unlikely and council-run centres would be unlikely to provide the hours needed.

Flora Ranachan, who lives “just on the other side of the boundary”, is also set to be impacted when her 15 month old daughter turns three next year.

She said waiting lists in West Lothian are “horrendous,” adding: “They’re often into 2025 so god knows how you’re supposed to obtain a space. The only one we could get was in Edinburgh.

She added forgoing the funding and keeping her daughter where she is would cost around £8,000 a year whilst moving to a council nursery would add 30 miles to her commute every week.

Ms Donnachie said the council was “not thinking about children or working families,” but rather just “numbers on a piece of paper”. She added: “It feels quite brutal to me. It’s the wee kids being affected.”

Speaking this week, Cllr Griffiths said: “It really is

important we take account of our budget; our budget has been cut dramatically on early years.

“And I’m quite sure the citizens of Edinburgh would question us if we are paying their funding covering the costs of non-residents children.

“I know that may seem harsh, but if we had the funding we wouldn’t be having this discussion now, but we don’t – and therefore we have to be mindful we have places for our own children.

“Also bringing services in-house and developing our own early years centres to longer, flexible days is what our residents have been asking for so we’re also meeting their needs

“I know there’s been a lot of chat around it and a lot of concern but I think some of it is about misinformation that we’re stopping children who are already in early years centres and that’s not the case.”

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



City Chambers High Street Edinburgh