

Parents furious over holiday hub u-turn

Furious parents are demanding answers after being told a vital holiday hub service was closing – only to learn that its future is still in the balance.

Parents were told in a letter from city staff on 7 March that councillors had decided the city would no longer run the Braidburn holiday hub – but the city has now admitted that councillors never made such a decision.

After backlash from councillors, the future of the Braidburn holiday hub will now be decided at a committee meeting on Tuesday, where councillors will choose whether to have the city keep running it, and for how long.

Officers are recommending councillors agree that the city should stop running the holiday hub site after Easter, and seek a private contractor to run it.

If a suitable provider cannot be found, students would be placed in other holiday hubs sites, which could constrain further the limited number of weeks available to each pupil.

At present, each family is guaranteed three weeks of care, down from 10 when the scheme started.

Denise McGee-Dewar, a parent of a pupil who uses Braidburn and a representative of advocacy group REPAIR, said: “We were shocked [by the letter], and also, we were wondering if anyone knew about this. You know, we must have missed this.

“This was saying that this is happening, but it had never been mentioned up to this point. And when everybody else had said, no, we’re not aware of this, we knew it was another bolt out of the blue.

“When we got in touch with the councillors, they weren’t aware of it either. So it’s really disappointing, and caused a lot of panic for parents in terms of what that would mean for their families.”

An emergency motion by SNP councillors to discuss the letter sent to parents and the possible closure of the holiday hub was not taken for debate at Thursday’s full council meeting.

Officers say that having the city run the holiday hub site is unsustainable due to its use of staff from the Seaview children’s respite service, and warn that if the city continues to run the Braidburn holiday hub that the Seaview scheme may need to close over the summer.

SNP councillor Euan Hyslop, who sits on the Education, Children and Families Committee, said: “What this shows is that there is no leadership from the convener for the committee, or from the administration on this issue at all, and that’s been a recurring theme.

“Over the last number of months, they’ve been allowing officers to lead on this, even now when it’s become recognised as a particularly important issue among the public, they’re still not treating the issue, and the parents, with the respect that they deserve.

“They’re not recognising the fact that, because it’s an issue of real public concern, that it should be handled by councillors.”

Cllr Hyslop added that this situation would have a substantial impact on the other holiday hubs in the city.

In the city budget agreed last month, £100,000 was added to the budget for the holiday hubs service, but this was not to increase the level of provision.

Rather, it was to hire two new managers to help run the scheme. McGee-Dewar said that she and other parents of pupils who use the holiday hubs wanted these new managers hired quickly.

Labour councillor Joan Griffiths, Education, Children and Families Convener said: "Our priority for the upcoming summer holidays was to allocate Holiday Hub places and to confirm and communicate this to families as soon as we could.

"We know how much families need and value this vital support so updating them and offering peace of mind has been our key focus."

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter