

Holyrood backs nine nursery closures in West Lothian

The closure of nine nurseries in West Lothian has been backed by the Scottish Government.

Despite noting that there were “concerns about errors and inaccuracies” in the council’s consultation over the plans, it will not contest the decision to shutter the nurseries in June.

Ministers had eight weeks to consider the decisions made by the Education Executive in March and in letters issued this week confirmed they will not use their “call-in” powers to stop the closures.

The nurseries set to close are: Deans North Nursery School, Livingston; Fauldhouse Nursery Class; Ladywell Nursery School, Livingston; Linlithgow Bridge Nursery Class; St Anthony’s Nursery Class, Armadale; St Joseph’s Nursery Class, Whitburn.

Bathgate West Nursery School and Our Lady’s Nursery Class, Stoneyburn are both currently inactive and will also close.

The SNP’s Pauline Orr wrote on her social media page: “I am terribly saddened that following an appeal, the decision has been made to close Linlithgow Bridge Primary School Nursery.

“This is not the news that the parent Council and so many people in our community had hoped for.

“The Parent Council worked incredibly hard to fight for the nursery to remain open and I commend each and every one of them for their commitment to making their views heard.”

Councillor Orr praised parent Neil Brady-Campbell who addressed the Education Executive.

She said: "I am very proud of Neil who led a tireless effort to take a very detailed appeal to Scottish Government. Not only that, he supported other parent councils in the constituency with theirs.

"This is not a good decision, and it will be remembered by the community for a very long time to come."

Mr Brady-Campbell, stressing that he was speaking solely for himself, told Local Democracy Reporting Service: "I am greatly disappointed with the decision to not call-in West Lothian Council's decision, which will close numerous thriving nurseries across Linlithgow, Whitburn, Armadale and Livingston.

"Parent groups across West Lothian have spent the last eight months campaigning for our voice to be heard.

"Today is an example of how the consultation process, and the use of it by West Lothian Council, has failed children, parents and the wider community.

"The claim by the council that this is an example of them forward planning is worrying for the future of education settings in the area, given the lack of care and attention to detail that we have experienced in this process.

" I witnessed the community of Linlithgow come out to fill the school hall to clearly show the community's rejection of the proposal. The community then turned its attention to providing responses to the formal consultation, with 140 people responding which stretched over 100 pages of feedback and rejection. We drew cross party support for our case.

"Unfortunately, the Labour Party, who run West Lothian Council, progressed with a decision that has no educational

benefit, is a poor long-term decision for children education in the area and works against reducing car congestion and pollution in our town.

“I would just like to say sorry to parents and teaching staff affected, that we couldn’t save some of our most valuable centres for educational development. I and many others greatly value the work that the staff have put in since this flawed proposal was set in motion. I hope they can enjoy the final months they have in the nurseries and with the children.”

In a letter to Dr Elaine Cook, the deputy chief executive for Education at West Lothian, Orlando Mason, the Deputy Director, Workforce, Infrastructure and Digital Learning Directorate said: “Ministers consider that West Lothian Council has fulfilled its obligations... and do not intend to issue a call-in notice for this proposal.

“West Lothian Council may now implement its decision to close Linlithgow Bridge Nursery School in line with the timescales set out in its proposal paper.”

Referring to criticism on the way the consultation was carried out at Linlithgow Bridge, and other nurseries, Mr Mason said: “ I note concerns expressed during the consultation and in representations about errors and inaccuracies in some of the published documents, which, while not amounting to a significant failure to comply with the 2010 Act, may have inhibited engagement.”

The SNP opposition group on the council had opposed all closures and was contacted for a statement.

West Lothian Council declined to comment but stressed that the nurseries could re-open in future if there is greater demand in specific communities.

Writing on the council’s website Andrew McGuire the executive councillor for Education said: “We recognise that many of the

parents who have contacted us would have liked their children to attend the nurseries that, locally, feed into the schools their children would later attend.

“West Lothian Council understands that desire from parents, and officers have made this point consistently to the Scottish Government and included it in our response to their consultation as far back as 2016.

The council has capacity for 6,814 nursery children but has over 2,000 more places available than is required to meet demand, which is nearly 30% more than is needed.

The decline in council run nurseries is a direct result of changes to Scottish Government national policy made in 2019 – where the Government introduced ‘funding follows the child’. This means that parental choices have changed with many parents now choosing to use their funded nursery provision at private nursery providers and childminders in West Lothian. This has significantly reduced the demand for council run nurseries.

When the national policy was introduced, there were seven private partner providers in West Lothian for 4,290 eligible children, and 88% of those came to council settings. There are now 32 private partner providers in the county for 4,084 eligible children, and 78% of those come to council settings.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter