

Your Questions Answered

About Council's Early Learning Centres final decision

Written Public Questions — Ordinary Council Meeting 19 December 2023

Responses are provided to questions that have not previously been answered.

My four-year old child's mental health and wellbeing is being compromised with Glen Eira's preliminary decision. She knows her kindergarten and baby sister's early learning centre may close, and she keeps asking me and my husband where she will go to kindergarten next year, as she has one year left. Is Council aware of the impact this process is having on children and that waiting until 12 December 2023 for a final decision is impacting our children's mental wellbeing? Furthermore, providing a 6-month extension will have the same negative impact on our pre-schoolers' mental health, stability and wellbeing as they will be uprooted a mere 6 months before starting prep. This does not appear well thought out by Council. Please think of the children.

This question was responded to after being submitted to the 28 November OCM. The answer was also provided in the [Your Questions Answered publication distributed to families on 30 November 2023](#).

Are Council officers and Councillors aware of the monumental distress parents and families are currently in? We do not know whether to place our children on waitlists at other centres or to wait and hope that you keep the centres open. Placing our children on waitlists incurs a fee which Council has said they will not reimburse, leaving families financially disadvantaged. We have looked for places for our 4 years old and there are no quality places (either kindergarten or LDC) close to our home. We have liaised with the Family Liaison Officer and have not had any success. Leaving the final decision until 12 December 2023 gives families only DAYS to find alternative care. This is not enough time. The stress of this decision is piling up, day after day, and the counselling offered by Council is inadequate. What should we do?

Council made a decision on 12 December 2023 to close the Early Learning Centres on 28 March 2024. This is a final decision, and we are now in the process of implementation. This date was extended from the date outlined in the preliminary decision of 21 December 2023 in response to feedback from families that more time is needed to find alternative childcare, and feedback from staff about more time to find an alternative role.

Our Family Support Officers are available to support individual families find an alternative centre and can be contacted via earlylearning@gleneira.vic.gov.au Council will continue to provide early childhood services from all three centres up to the closure date of 28 March 2024 as long as there are children enrolled in those centres.

Only 3 proposals were offered by Council to Councillors regarding the ELCs. These were remain status quo / close all centres within months / build a large expensive multi-centre Hub.

Imagine going to your mechanic with car problems, and the response being “You have 10 weeks to decide: status quo, crush the car, or buy a Lamborghini.”

What business would ever get away with offering only 3 extreme and leading options!

Can Council explain in detail why only these 3 options were offered (i.e. why was there not an option to explore improved ways of running and funding)? Can Council explain how they deem this as responsible governance?

A range of scenarios were investigated as part of the Childcare Strategic Service Review. Based on the results of these investigations, three options were presented to Council for consideration. Options that were not viable were not presented to Council.

We appreciate that you were seeking a different outcome however Council has now made a final decision to withdraw from providing an early education service from 28 March 2024.

The Victorian Minister for Children wrote to the Council offering to work with them to find a solution, and urged the centres remain open for 2024 to enable this work to occur.

Why did Council ignore this request and offer from the Minister for Children? How does Council deem this responsible governance?

Following its preliminary decision on 3 October 2023, Council did not receive any tangible offers of funding from other levels of government to help fund its childcare service. Council therefore made the decision on 12 December 2023 to close the Early Learning Centres on 28 March 2024.

Can Council admit that they did not extend the closing timeline from December 2023 to March 2024 to help families or staff. No families or staff wanted a pithy 3 month extension.

We learned Council extended the timeline because otherwise, they were in breach of the Department of Education’s requirements around closure policy. Why was the extension only 3 months, when no parents or staff asked for this limited timeframe as a review of the Council's community surveys and the parent-run survey would show?

Council made a decision on 12 December 2023 to close the Early Learning Centres on 28 March 2024 following feedback from families who said they needed more time to find alternate care that best suits their needs, and from staff who said they needed more time to find a new role through redeployment to another role within Council or through career support.

Council has not breached any Commonwealth Government or Victorian Government requirements.

I have heard that if there are not enough children enrolled at the ELCs between January and March 2023, that Council may close the centres earlier, thereby displacing children who have not been able to secure childcare elsewhere. Can Council confirm if this is correct? Can Council promise that all centres will remain open until 31 March 2023?

Council resolved to close the centres at the end of Term 1 2024, which is 28 March, not 31 March. Therefore, the ELCs will continue to operate until 28 March 2024.

Council will not close the centres before 28 March 2024 if there are still children enrolled and attending the services.

Council claimed they had to undertake a GIA after community consultation.

During the consultation process, there were no questions included in the parent survey, listening posts, and no active information seeking on gender impact. We were not asked about the impact on us as women specifically.

Can Council please clearly explain the actual active measures they took to understand the impact on mothers and educators for the GIA report?

Council undertook a Gender Impact Assessment to inform the final decision of Council.

The Gender Impact Assessment considered the extent to which the potential exit from the Early Learning Centre service would impact the accessibility of childcare in the local area and local jobs in the provision of childcare services.

The Gender Impact Assessment utilised available census data, enrolment information, sector data relating to childcare service provision, forecast data relating to population profile and local childcare workforce data. Impacts on women and educators were assessed from the data that was available through the consultation report and community and economic trends.

Council completed a Gender Impact Assessment after it announced its preliminary decision to close its early learning centres, at the behest of the community.

The GIA highlighted the suburb of Carnegie as a situation that Council should continue to monitor. The statistics quoted in the assessment state that Carnegie has a ratio of only 0.47 childcare vacancies per child. Significantly less than Murrumbeena and Caulfield which are closer to 1.5.

The assessment infers that Carnegie parents can be sent to Caulfield East for a vacancy. However, the assessment concedes that Council is making assumptions about families' requirements. Council does not know if families are able to travel across multiple suburbs or if proximity to a child's future primary school is important.

Whilst a GIA was completed post-haste, it feels like it was not adequately considered in the final decision. Given the analysis provided, an obvious solution could have seen Council keep Carnegie ELC operational until future childcare places become available in time. Why was this option not considered?

In response to the question about Carnegie, it is correct that Council cannot know the individual circumstances of each family and the childcare opportunities that will meet the needs of the children and parents/carers in each case. The overall data indicates that there are sufficient childcare places to offer services for each family and the Gender Impact Assessment suggests that Council may undertake some further research on local journey profile and families' related journey preferences for childcare locations.

Council's decision to close all three Early Learning Centres was based on a range of factors including the availability of childcare places spread across the municipality and the significant ongoing financial loss for Council if staying in direct service provision.

The Councillors and CEO have been around long enough to have known that an improved Early Learning Centre Strategy was required. In 2011 Elsternwick ELC was closed. Councillors' statements and Council meeting notes flagged that there was a "need for a long-term childcare strategy" in Glen Eira. Fast forward to the Council meeting on December 12 2023 and one Councillor conceded that ELCs have been absent from Council's Capital works planning. Given one of Council's key rationales for closing the centres was outdated facilities, can Council provide evidence to suggest that it hasn't willingly allowed its ELC facilities to fall into a state of neglect?

Council's ELC facilities are part of a large portfolio of buildings and facilities maintained on behalf of the Glen Eira community. The maintenance and renewal of these buildings form part of Council's capital works program outlined in its annual and long-term forecast budgets. This has included annual investment in building maintenance for the ELCs. The facilities are not in a state of neglect. They are no longer fit for purpose for Council-operated childcare services at a scale that can be financially viable.

Why did Council Officers use the lowest IAP2 levels of community engagement in such a large and impactful decision?

This does not align with the IAP2 recommendations or community engagement shown by other councils.

Council's community engagement following its preliminary decision was conducted in line with a 'Consult' level of the IAP2 Spectrum, which aligns with Council's *Community Engagement Policy* and *Community Engagement Strategy 2022—2026*.

The engagement was more extensive than required for a proposed closure of a service under the policy or strategy. The extensive feedback received through the engagement process was considered by Councillors as part of their decision making.

As a ratepayer, I have heard that the closure of the ELCs will cost the community over \$1.5million in redundancy payouts and entitlements. Is this figure correct or can you confirm the actual figure? Why couldn't this money have been invested to keep the centres open for another 12 months while seeking alternative ways to keep centres running?

No final calculations have been made until decisions of potential staff redeployment have been confirmed. Council will support staff to be either redeployed into another role within Council or with career support.

The Childcare Strategic Service Review investigated ways to keep the centres operating in a financially sustainable way. These options were outlined in the [Childcare Discussion Paper](#) and reports to Council on 3 October 2023 and 12 December 2023.

What is Council's immediate intention with the three childcare centre assets following closure on 28 March 2024? Please outline what will take place between March and December (2024).

Council has not made a decision about the future of the Early Learning Centre sites or facilities. As outlined in the 12 December 2023 Special Council Meeting report, Council will consider the future use of the ELC sites or facilities in accordance with Council's Property Strategy. This may include re-purposing, leasing or disposal. An assessment against Council's Property Strategy will be undertaken separately to this process and reported to Council in 2024.

Given the devastation caused by closure of Council ELCs, is Council willing to apply for state government funding and overturn the decision?

No. Council made a decision on 12 December 2023 to close the Early Learning Centres on 28 March 2024. Therefore it will not seek funding for a service it has already decided to close. Council's efforts have now turned to supporting staff and parents with the transition.

The decision to close the ELCs has negatively impacted your community's faith in CEO, Council and Councillors who were elected to represent the community and who are mandated to act in the community's best interests. Our community does not believe a properly-informed, honest, transparent, legitimate, and fair processes was undertaken by Council. What will you do to address this?

While Council accepts that this may be your view, we collectively represent over 150,000 residents of Glen Eira with a diversity of views and perspectives.

Council's community engagement practices in relation to the preliminary decision on its ELCs have complied with the Local Government Act, the *Community Engagement Policy* and *Community Engagement Strategy 2022—2026*.

One of the ways Council measures community satisfactions is through the Community Satisfaction Survey which is conducted annually to help Council understand how the community views its services, processes and practices. The results of this survey are published on Council's website each year. Council will continue to monitor its performance in line with these results.

Why have all Glen Eira City Council staff (even those unrelated to ELCs such as EAs, MCH nurses etc) been told repeatedly they are not allowed to engage or communicate with anyone about the ELC closure decision? They are all very disappointed with the decision.

Council continued to communicate with all staff, and in particular the early learning centre staff, throughout the consultation process. Staff have not been given a direction to not engage or communicate with anyone about the decision.

That being said, the specific role of supporting families with the transition process and in identifying alternative placements is being undertaken by our Family Support Officers. Our Family Support Officers can be contacted via earlylearning@gleneira.vic.gov.au

Please give the exact date that the Department of Education was emailed of intention to close the 3 City of Glen Eira ELCs. When the intention for closure was submitted, was this done as a temporary or permanent closure (given permanent closures must be advised 42 days before intention to close)?

Council informed all partners and regulatory authorities of Council's preliminary decision made on 3 October 2023. They have also all been informed of Council's final decision made on 12 December 2023.

All communication after the preliminary decision on 3 October 2023 clearly outlined that a final decision would be made on 12 December 2023 after consulting with staff, families and the community.

If cost was a factor, why didn't you engage in a meaningful way with state and federal Governments following their offers to discuss funding?

Cost was only one factor influencing the Council's decision. Council regularly and meaningfully engages with all state and federal elected representatives. Since late 2022, Council has raised the long-term financial sustainability of its services. Despite this, following its preliminary decision to close its early learning centres on 3 October 2023, Council did not receive any tangible offers of funding toward its childcare service from other levels of government.

An email from Rebecca McKenzie on the 23rd of November, 20 days before the vote, stated; "I have also asked Mark to undertake a modelling and cost analysis that examines the potential viability of using the additional room at Murrumbeena to make the centre more viable as you have proposed. Mark is in the process of completing this work and will provide myself and Councillors with a further update on the outcomes of that piece of work over the next week." As this is not confidential information in any way and is in line with all other metrics shared as part of the process, in the interest of demonstrating informed and transparent decision making by council and councillors, please share the results of this modelling and confirm what date this was provided to the councillors prior to the vote on the 12th.

High level modelling was completed and indicated the use of this additional room does not improve the service's viability. The feasibility of using this room was discussed with Councillors who toured the Early Learning Centres on 4 December 2023.

In Council Officers' Special Meeting 12/3/23, the survey conducted by ELC families was discussed. However, the information regarding timelines was omitted. Specifically: parents were surveyed on the appropriate time needed to find equivalent care and transition their children in case of closure. The top three responses were 12 months (42%), 18 months (24%), and 6 months (16%). The decision to close in March does not align with the community's preferences at all, and school term dates concluding in March are irrelevant to the childcare sector. Can Council please provide specific evidence that indicates a three-month extension to the closure time was requested by the community?

The decision to keep the centres open for longer responds to feedback from families who said they needed more time to find alternate care that best suits their needs, and from staff who said they needed more time to find a new role through redeployment to another role within Council or through career support.

The Council has not made any application for building upgrades and similar grants since 2014. Our ELC services have not had any applications rejected in the past, nor do they have any current applications under consideration. In the last few years Glen Eira City Council have received funding for IT and equipment grants, but never requested funding for ELCs which include Kinder's). Multiple levels of Government have reached out and demonstrated a willingness to work with Council to not close ELC. However, it would be irresponsible for state/federal to simply hand over money that isn't in line with grant funding and procedure and without adequate time. How does Council see this as responsible governance and how does Council justify closing our ELCs when no applications for funding were ever made?

Council regularly and meaningfully engages with its state and federal elected representatives. Since late 2022, Council has raised the long-term financial sustainability of its services. Despite this, following its preliminary decision to close its early learning centres on 3 October 2023, Council did not receive any tangible offers of funding toward its childcare service from other levels of government.

Why didn't council consider staff feedback on "rethinking budgets, team leader reductions, fee increase, employee wages centre operation costs etc"?

Council considered all feedback received from staff before making its final decision on 12 December 2023.

Can council please outline what the future plans for the three ELCs (or their land) will be? Can Council please explain what avenues will be available for community to be consulted and informed about any decisions made.

Council has not made a decision about the future of the Early Learning Centre sites or facilities. As outlined in the 12 December 2023 Special Council Meeting report, Council may consider the future use of the ELC sites or facilities in accordance with Council's Property Strategy. This may include re-purposing, leasing or disposal. An assessment against Council's Property Strategy will be undertaken separately to this process and reported to Council.

My question is in relation to your closing the ELCs.

Why did you only allow 3 months for consultation when you've known about the situation with the ELCs for years?

Council's community engagement following its preliminary decision was conducted in line with a 'Consult' level of the IAP2 Spectrum, which aligns with Council's *Community Engagement Policy* and *Community Engagement Strategy 2022—2026*. The engagement was more extensive than required for a proposed closure of a service under the policy or strategy, in line with Council's commitment to genuine engagement.

Council received 255 responses during its consultation period, including feedback from the majority of families who use the service. This would indicate that the timeframe was sufficient.

2021/22 council budget boasts a subsidy of \$394k (reduction of \$44k from 20/21 budget) and \$454k in 2022/23. Why was CNP only included in budgets this FY?

No changes have been made to the methodology of Council calculating the subsidy.

CNP continues to be used by Council Officers to instil fear and influence decision making. The reality is, there is no solid proof that Council is required to apply CNP to ELCs (especially as Council have said, when it is only 2% of the market). It was refreshing to hear one councillor questioning the significance of the notional rent, which makes up 44% of the total projected annual loss and a miniscule number within the council P&L. Other Councils that run similar ELCs have not been impacted by CNP. Port Phillip City Council have their full CNP review process online which shows how CNP is not an issue for their ELCs. Why didn't Glen Eira Council conduct or disclose an official review into CNP application to ELCS, either prior to the preliminary decision or at any time during the consultation process when it was continually flagged by the community?

As previously answered in [Your Questions Answered – 28 November 2023](#), Council has determined that its Early Learning Centres constitute a 'significant business activity' under Competitive Neutrality Policy, and Council must therefore comply with the Policy. This has been only one element of Council's decision-making process.

According to media coverage on the closure of the centres that I've seen, the parents say there were over 9000 signatures of support in keeping Glen Eira's ELCs open. My signature was one of them. Why was such a strong community outcry ignored?

Council's decision was made after considering the community feedback, and reflecting on ever-increasing operating costs, fewer families using the centres, the strong supply of local childcare places and feedback received during the consultation process.

In making the decision, Council recognised this decision may disappoint some parts of the community but it was made to help ensure it can meet current and future service demands across the municipality.

I note that you're investigating a not-for-profit option for childcare in Glen Eira. Why is this being considered so late in the piece and why didn't you inform the parents about this during consultation?

Council made a decision on 12 December 2023 to close the Early Learning Centres on 28 March 2024 and is currently supporting families and staff to manage the transition. Council is not investigating a not-for profit option for childcare.

I have a 1-year-old and all the quality, culturally inclusive childcare in Caulfield South have an extreme long waiting list. Why didn't the Council consider the smaller suburbs within Glen Eira? I can't send my child to Jewish childcare as we have Chinese background.

The Childcare Strategic Service review investigated childcare supply and demand in all suburbs within the Glen Eira municipality.

I am not a parent to young children, but I believe that ELCs are important to our community. Why did you decide to close the centres before doing a proper assessment of what services the community want their taxes to go towards?

Council regularly engages with the community to inform its service decisions. Recently Council consulted with the community through its *Our Priorities, Our Future* program about the services and infrastructure they consider priorities for our community. The survey asked the community to rate the top 3 most important services. Of 17 service categories, 'Youth and family services, early education' was rated ninth most important by more than 1,755 respondents (more than one per cent of Glen Eira's population). 21 per cent of respondents said these services were in their top five priority services (or more than one in five).

When Council made a decision on 12 December 2023 to close the Early Learning Centres on 28 March 2024, it considered the increasing operating costs, fewer families using the centres, the strong supply of local childcare places as well as feedback received during the consultation process. Council recognises this decision may disappoint some parts of the community but it was made to help ensure it can meet current and future service demands across the municipality.

Why have breaches, in regards to Children's rights, been brushed under the carpet. There are breaches in: - Victoria's Child Safe Standards 2016 - Local Government Act 2020 - Glen Eira City Council's Community Engagement Policy 2021 - Glen Eira City Council's Community Wellbeing Plan 2021–2025 Why was the topic of Children's Voices again ignored and not mentioned or included in Council Officers' latest report?

Council refutes the assertion that it has breached any legislative, regulatory or policy provisions it is required to comply with.

Questions about Council's compliance with legislation, strategies and plans listed in this question have previously been answered.

If constraints around the buildings were a factor, why haven't Glen Eira Council submitted any applications for building upgrades since 2014?

Council regularly and meaningfully engages with all of its state and federal elected representatives. Since late 2022, Council has raised the long-term financial sustainability of its services. Following its preliminary decision to close its early learning centres on 3 October 2023, Council did not receive any tangible offers of funding toward its childcare service.

When the Department of Education were emailed of the intention to close the ELCs, who were the two authorised persons and any witnesses who signed this form and what date it was signed by them? What was the specific reason stated on the form as to why the centres were to close and what further information was provided on the form?

Council informed all partners and regulatory authorities of Council's preliminary decision made on 3 October 2023. They have also all been informed of Council's final decision made on 12 December 2023.

All communication after the preliminary decision on 3 October 2023 clearly outlined Council's preliminary decision and that a final decision would be made on 12 December 2023 after consulting with staff, families and the community.

There are viable and realistic methods and models to reduce ELC running costs, and ways to increase capacity and fees. Some modelling was even undertaken by parents. Why were these not included in the public reports created by City of Glen Eira Council?

All feedback received during the consultation and engagement process was provided to Councillors for consideration prior to Council making a final decision on 12 December 2023, including suggestions for alternative approaches to modelling.

Some modelling undertaken by external parties during the consultation period is not applicable to a Council-operated service. Council is governed by the provisions of its Enterprise Bargaining Agreement for staff payments, and other regulations that may not apply to a privately run business.

Genuine community engagement leads to outcomes that benefit the community and are accepted by the community due to feeling listened to. It has been clear that there was no genuine attempt at community engagement regarding the childcare closures. All feedback provided by families has been wholly ignored. You seem to be dismissing your own community engagement framework. How can you claim you have listened to your community when the vast information provided has not been taken into account?

Council's community engagement following its preliminary decision was conducted in line with a 'Consult' level of the IAP2 Spectrum, which aligns with Council's *Community Engagement Policy* and *Community Engagement Strategy 2022—2026*. The engagement was more extensive than required for a proposed closure of a service under the policy or strategy, in line with Council's commitment to genuine engagement.

Council received 255 responses during its consultation period, including the majority of families who use the service. Council had access to all community feedback received during the consultation to consider as part of its decision making process.

The City of Glen Eira community has never been properly asked what services they would like Council to run. Also, the recent Our Priorities, Our Future survey was meant to help inform the decision on the Council-run ELCs, yet this survey only closed late November and the data on this has not been released. How does Council justify making a decision on ELCs given this?

Council regularly engages with the community to inform its service decisions. Recently Council consulted with the community through its *Our Priorities, Our Future* program about the services and infrastructure they consider priorities for our community. The survey asked the community to rate the top 3 most important services. Of 17 service categories, 'Youth and family services, early education' was rated ninth most important by more than 1,755 respondents (more than one per cent of Glen Eira's population). 21 per cent of respondents said these services were in their top five priority services (or more than one in five).

Councillors were briefed on the results of the *Our Priorities, Our Future* When Council made a decision on 12 December 2023 to close the Early Learning Centres on 28 March 2024, it considered the increasing operating costs, fewer families using the centres, the strong supply of local childcare places as well as feedback received during the consultation process.

On 12 December 2023, Council decided to continue to operate its three early learning centres until the end of term 1, 2024, before closing on 28 March 2024.

Council regularly engages with the community to inform its service decisions. Recently Council consulted with the community through its *Our Priorities, Our Future* program about the services and infrastructure they consider priorities for our community. The survey asked the community

to rate the top 3 most important services. Of 17 service categories, 'Youth and family services, early education' was rated ninth most important by more than 1,755 respondents (more than one per cent of Glen Eira's population). 21 per cent of respondents said these services were in their top five priority services (or more than one in five).

Councillors were briefed on the preliminary results of the Our Priorities, Our Future results prior to making its decision on 12 December 2023 to close the Early Learning Centres on 28 March 2024.

This information is publicly available as part of the agenda for 19 December Ordinary Council Meeting.

Council claimed in a letter to the staff union that a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) could only be undertaken after community consultation, which was not true. Why won't Council be transparent that a GIA should have been undertaken before the preliminary decision, but did not, and that it was an oversight?

A Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) which importantly incorporated community feedback received during the consultation period was undertaken and provided to Council for consideration, prior to a final decision.

There are viable and realistic methods and models to reduce ELC running costs, and ways to increase capacity and fees. Some modelling was even undertaken by parents. Why were these not included in the public reports created by City of Glen Eira Council?

All feedback received during the consultation and engagement process was provided to Councillors for consideration prior to Council making a final decision on 12 December 2023, including suggestions for alternative approaches to modelling.

Some modelling undertaken by external parties during the consultation period is not applicable to a Council-operated service. Council is governed by the provisions of its Enterprise Bargaining Agreement for staff payments, and other regulations that may not apply to a privately run business.

It is my understanding that the Department of Education must be advised advised of permanent closures 42 days before intention to close. Can Council provide the exact date that the Department of Education were informed via email of the intention to permanently close the centres? Was the extension to the closure timeline due the fact you became aware of the Department of Education's closure policy?

The Commonwealth Government were advised on 13 December 2023 of Council's final decision to close the Early Learning Centres. The extension of closure timeline had no relationship to the Commonwealth Government's notice period.

After the last council meeting (where the three-month extension was ratified) Staff have been informed that they will lose their redundancy entitlements if they leave prior to the official close-date early next year. As Council would be aware, most childcare employment opportunities are secured at the start of the calendar year, so by holding their redundancy entitlements, Council is making it incredibly difficult for the staff to secure new employment. Whilst this might be technically 'legal', surely Council realises this is completely devoid of morality!

Keeping the centres open for longer responds to feedback from families who said they needed more time to find alternate care that best suits their needs, and staff who needed more time to find a new role through redeployment to another role within Council or through career support.

Council's approach to redundancy is consistent with relevant industrial practice, Council's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and relevant taxation laws.

It would be irresponsible for Council to make staff redundant too early when a commitment has been made to families to provide a service until 28 March 2024.

Can you please explicitly confirm within the countless feedback received that a three-month extension (until 03/2024) was resoundingly proposed by the community? Please pinpoint the verbatim/data.

Keeping the centres open for longer responds to feedback from families who said they needed more time to find alternate care that best suits their needs, and from staff who said they needed more time to find a new role through redeployment to another role within Council or through career support.

More information is available in the publicly available community engagement summary report, published as part of the agenda for the 12 December Special Council Meeting.

Why have the ELC staff been told they cannot take annual or sick leave before the end March closure of ELCs and if they find employment elsewhere they will miss their redundancy? This is so wrong, they have been repeatedly mistreated, this affects their job security and wellbeing. Council needs to be aware of the real fallout this 'extension' of a measly 3 months has created.

Early Learning Centre staff have not been told that they cannot take annual leave or sick leave. Keeping the centres open for longer responds to feedback from families who said they needed more time to find alternate care that best suits their needs, and staff who needed more time to find a new role through redeployment to another role within Council or through career support.

It would be irresponsible for Council to make staff redundant too early when a commitment has been made to families to provide a service until 28 March 2024.

Council's approach to redundancy is consistent with relevant industrial practice, Council's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and relevant taxation laws.

Parents have been grappling with significant distress since the announcement of the preliminary decision, and their emotional strain heightened following the final decision. The visible manifestation of this distress, such as tears shed at Council meetings during question sessions and in their communications with Councillors, is concerning. The families were crystal clear that an extension less than 6 months would not alleviate this distress. While the Council in their communication constantly says " they acknowledge this is a challenging time for many parents" I seek specific answers to the following questions: What qualified mental health support Council has provided to parents since October? Additionally, what childhood development guidance or information has been offered to assist parents in transitioning their children? Lastly, could you provide details on what mental health support Council currently has available for families? Your website has no information.

Professional counselling support has been available for families and their children since the announcement on 4 October 2023 of the preliminary decision, and contact details have been included in all communications sent to families since. This information has also been shared verbally with families.

Families can contact Converge International on 1300 687 327 for free and confidential counselling support.

Council state on their website ""Your feedback is important to us, and we want you to know how it informs our decisions.""

On the website, Council has examples where community input of much smaller quantities is used for inform decision making. For example, Council decisions about the Murrumbeena Park and Community Hub was informed by 48 surveys, 12 emails and 40-50 attendees at a drop-in session (July–August 2019).

How does Council justify the decision to ignore 9000 signatures, hundreds of survey responses, and hundreds of emails and phone calls regarding shutting down the childcare centres in the area?

Council's decision was made after considering the community feedback, and reflecting on ever-increasing operating costs, fewer families using the centres, the strong supply of local childcare places and feedback received during the consultation process.

In making the decision, Council recognised this decision may disappoint some parts of the community but it was made to help ensure it can meet current and future service demands across the municipality.