

Community faces loss of council nurseries ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The proposed closure of the nurseries at Honor Oak Early Childhood Centre, Ladywell Early Childhood Centre and Rushy Green Children's Centre in August would save Lewisham council around £2.18 million a year. In total the nurseries provide 150 places and employ 78 staff.

The council's plans follow the closure of the nursery at Amersham Early Childhood Centre last year.

According to the council, there are more than 100 alternative childcare providers in Lewisham offering 'high quality services', and that their withdrawal of childcare provision will help to 'stimulate the market.'

In 2011 the local authority decided to withdraw as a provider of childcare, and as part of this agreed that the nursery at Amersham Early Childhood Centre would close and the three remaining nurseries would be put out to tender.

A tender was issued for the nursery at Rushy Green Children's Centre in July, rated outstanding by Ofsted, however no suitable providers were found. As a result of this, the council reviewed its strategy to find alternative providers to run the nurseries.

Councillors are expected to discuss the future of the nurseries in May.

A spokesperson for the Lewisham council, said, 'It is important that there is a sufficient number of childcare places in a variety of settings across Lewisham that meet the needs of children and parents.

'There are already over 100 early years settings within the private and voluntary sector that offer high-quality, diverse services and good value.

'While the council will continue to be responsible for ensuring there are enough childcare places to meet demand, it took the decision last year to withdraw from being a direct childcare provider, in line with many other local authorities.

'We are now consulting with parents and staff about the future of the three remaining early years centres in Lewisham. We have already met with staff and meetings with parents have been arranged.'

A group of parents are fighting to save the nurseries and have launched a campaign and online petition, which has over 200 signatures.

As part of their campaign they are looking at ways they can work with the council to find a viable alternative to closure.

A comment on the petition from a parent whose three-year-old daughter attends Honor Oak Early Childhood Centre (HOECC), said, 'My daughter has attended HOECC since she was nine months old.

'The centre and staff have helped make her into the confident, sociable little girl that she is today and to close this nursery and stop other children from benefitting from the great work they do would be completely pointless. There aren't enough affordable childcare places as it is. To close these nurseries would see 150 children needing new places.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

Region: Europe ^[2]

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