

Please reply to:

Early Years and Childcare Advisory Service

Tor Hill House 2nd Floor North
c/o Town Hall, Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR

My ref:

Your ref:

Telephone: 01803 208328

Fax: 01803 208226

E-mail: earlyyears@torbay.gov.uk

Website: www.torbay.gov.uk

Date: 13th November 2012

Dear

Consultation on the future of Chestnut Nursery

I am writing to inform you that Torbay Council is beginning a consultation process over the future of Chestnut Nursery. Attached to this letter is a copy of the consultation document that explains the background and the options available.

This consultation has come about as a result of a decline in the uptake of places at the nursery and the increasing financial pressures being placed upon the council budget.

I would like to reassure you that no decisions have been taken and the decision makers have an open mind about whether any changes will be made. They wish to consider the options after hearing the views of those who might be affected.

The council is consulting on the following options

- No closure of Chestnut Nursery
- Closure of Chestnut Nursery
- Options that emerge as a result of consultation

After reading the consultation document we would encourage you to share your thoughts. One way to make your views heard is to attend an open meeting on the 21st November 2012 from 6pm onwards at Chestnut Children's Centre. The meeting will provide you with an opportunity to ask questions and express your views. These will be noted and fed back to the decision makers in the Council.

Alternatively you may wish to respond using the form attached to the consultation document. In addition to completing a response form, or instead of completing a response form, you can send your views by letter or email to the following address.

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I am looking forward to hearing your views on the options set out in the consultation document.

Schools and services for children and young people ● social care and housing ● recycling, waste disposal and clean streets ● community safety ● roads and transportation ● town planning ● tourism, harbours and economic regeneration ● consumer protection and licensing ● leisure, museums, libraries and arts

If you require this in a different format or language, please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'R Williams', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Richard Williams
Director of Children's Services

The future of Chestnut Nursery

A Consultation on Possible Changes

The demand for nursery places at Chestnut Nursery has been falling in the past few years. There are now over 170 vacant sessions at Chestnut Nursery per week.

We are concerned that there are no longer enough children to keep the nursery open and we are consulting over whether to close the provision.

Our priority is to ensure that children get the best possible start in life and one way to do this is to create strong early years providers that are not faced with the worries that are associated with falling numbers and the financial pressures this creates.

This paper sets out the background and explains the options for change.

The consultation involves the parents and staff and also seeks the views of other interested parties including other Early Years Providers in Brixham, Brixham Town Council and Brixham Schools.

No decisions have been made and we are holding this consultation to gather your views.

Background Information

Why is the demand for places falling?

The fall in the demand for places is caused by a decline in the birth rate. For several years when children have left the nursery provision they have been replaced by smaller groups of children.

In many places the demand for early years provision has risen due to the birth rate in the UK rising, but this has not been the case in Brixham, although the 2008- 2009 figure of 172 is unusually high. This figure is being regarded as a “blip” in an otherwise steady trend.

The table below shows how the birth rate for Brixham has changed.

School Year	Brixham
1997 – 98	165
1998 – 99	155
1999- 00	192
2000 – 01	163
2001 – 02	139
2002 – 03	141
2003 – 04	148
2004 – 05	141
2005 – 06	110
2006 – 07	147
2007 – 08	118
2008 – 09	172
2009 – 10	129
2010 – 11	157

We do not think that the position in Brixham will change very quickly, As you may know, the Council is worried about the strength of the local economy and is trying to revive it. We consider that most of the growth of population will be in Torquay and Paignton.

Following the closure of Chestnut Primary School there has been a reduction of children attending the nursery. Many parents select an early years provision on a school site. Since the closure of the school there have been less enquires for nursery placements.

What is the impact on Chestnut Nursery of empty vacancies?

As the number of children registered decline the nursery receives less money. Funding for placements is based on parental fees and head count of children for free entitlement hours. A fall in the number of children does not lead to a reduction of costs.

In 2011 Torbay Council invested an additional £80,000 in Chestnut Nursery to maintain the provision. In the current financial climate The Council will have great difficulty in continuing to support such an overspend. If it is not possible to invest additional funding the Nursery would not manage with lower levels of funding, this would affect the quality of education and care offered to children.

Wasn't there a process completed to outsource Chestnut Nursery?

Yes, Torbay Council have completed two procurement processes to offer Chestnut Nursery to an independent private provider. On both occasions there has been little interest expressed in the Nursery and no providers were able to be selected to outsource the Nursery.

Unfortunately, we think that a third procurement process would not result in a different outcome due to the falling numbers and increased costs associated with Chestnut Nursery.

What options are being considered?

Option One: No Change/ Status Quo

Under this option, we would make no changes and Chestnut Nursery would remain open to see if the Nursery can continue to operate as a small nursery and to see if the demand for places increase. Fees will however have to be reviewed to help to redress the overspend.

Some arguments in favour of Option One

- Parents in Brixham will still be able to choose between 5 Early Years providers and a number of childminders
- There will still be a nursery provision in higher Brixham
- Children will not need to change childcare provider
- It reduces the risk that future growth will leave us with too few places

Some arguments against Option One

- Chestnut may become so small that it has to close suddenly without plans in place for the children who need to move childcare providers
- The nursery would find it less easy to cope with events such as staff changes, sickness and price increases
- Budgets to sustain the provision might be reduced impacting on the quality of the service that is offered
- There would still be in addition of 170 empty vacancies at the nursery per week, with so many empty places the nursery would continue to face an uncertain future
- Parents would experience increased nursery fees

Option Two: Close Chestnut Nursery

Under this option, there is a carefully planned closure of the provision at the end of February 2013, so that children have a supported transfer to an alternative early years provision for March 2013.

Some arguments in favour of Option Two

- It is a decisive way forward and ends uncertainty for Chestnut Nursery
- There are places at alternative Early Years provisions for Chestnut Nursery children
- It reduces empty places making alternative providers more sustainable

Torbay council no longer have an £80,000 overspend to maintain the nursery.

Some arguments against Option Two

- It is disruptive to the children at Chestnut Nursery
- It means that there would be no early years provision in higher Brixham
- Other early years providers may need to reorganise to accommodate children from Chestnut Nursery
- It may remove too many nursery places and leave too little room for future growth

Option Three:

Option Three is “any other option that may emerge during consultation”. We are consulting with an open mind and, whilst we think the first two options are the main ones, there might be an option that no-one has thought about until it is suggested during consultation.

Has anyone else been involved in developing these options?

We have been working closely with Brixham Town Council to identify the best way forward.

Why are changes at other provisions not being considered?

For different reasons, we do not think it would be a good idea to make changes to other early year providers in Brixham.

In the case of schools with nursery classes, parents choose to send children to early years provisions on school sites. Although there is no direct correspondence between school admission and nursery placements many parents like to support children to socialise with a potential group of children entering their local primary school.

Some provisions within Brixham are private businesses. These are not under the control of the Council. The Council would have no legal powers to close the provisions.

The Nest Nursery at Brixham CE has a high level of occupancy with less vacancies.

What will happen to staff affected?

If a decision is taken to close Chestnut Nursery under Option two, then their jobs will be at risk and we will work with staff to see if we can find an alternative suitable job for them.

We are holding separate consultations with staff, if Chestnut is closed, we have to hold formal negotiations with staff and Trade Unions.

Under option one where no change is made, jobs at Chestnut may still be at risk from any further fall in demand.

If Chestnut Nursery Closes?

If a decision is taken to close the nursery we can begin working with parents, children and other providers to ensure that this is done smoothly. We would provide support for parents through the Family Information Service to seek an alternative childcare provider.

Once a place has been established, we would help the providers to arrange induction events for children to make new friends and for practitioners to learn about their new children. We would offer children a unique package of support to help support them both emotionally and academically during this transition period.

When will a decision be made?

The consultation will last from 15 November 2012 to 26 November 2012. Then a report will be written for the Mayor who will also see the comments that have been made during the consultation. The Mayor will see all letters, e-mails, notes of what is said at the public meeting and a summary of questionnaire responses.

The mayor is expected to make a decision on the 6th December 2012.

If the Mayor decides to make a change involving the closure of Chestnut Nursery, the council will publish the decision.

Parents and staff would be informed of the decision. Parents would receive a minimum of 12 weeks notice to find alternative childcare provision.

How to make your views heard?

Attached to this document is a response form. We do have to ask for your name since everyone and anyone is entitled to return one form only.

We are also holding an open meeting as follows:

Chestnut Nursery Community Room 21st November 2012 at 6pm

The meeting will begin with a very short presentation to set the scene, but then the floor will be open for people to ask questions and make their views known. These will be noted down for the decision makers to see.

In addition to completing a response form, or instead of completing a response form, you can also send your views by letter or e-mail to the following addresses.

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If you would like additional copies of this document and response form please telephone 01803 208743.

The Future of Chestnut Nursery Consultation Response Form

Please indicate whether you are:-

A parent, carer or relative of a current child at Chestnut _____

A member of staff _____

An alternative provider of Early years childcare in Brixham _____

Other (please specify) _____

Please indicate which option you prefer:

Option 1: No change _____

Option 2: Closure of Chestnut Nursery _____

Another Option: Please give details below

Please use this space to give reasons for your preference if you wish (continue overleaf/separate sheet if necessary)

Name:

Signature:

Please return by Monday 26th November 2012 to:

*Early Years and Childcare Advisory Service, Tor Hill House 2nd Floor North, c/o Town Hall
Castle Circus, Torquay, TQ1 3DR*