

NEWS RELEASE



October 24, 2006

TURNING OF THE SOD MARKS TURNING POINT FOR CHILD CARE, SAYS MAYOR

Photo op: Turning of the Sod, new Elwood Family and Children's Hub with Deputy Premier, John Thwaites, 9am, Thursday October 26. Elwood Primary School, Poet's Grove.

This Thursday's turning of the sod at the Elwood Family and Children's Hub by Deputy Premier, John Thwaites, marks a turning point in the council's quest to create more child care places, says Port Phillip mayor Janet Bolitho.

"The Elwood Family and Children's Hub is the centrepiece of the council's investment in childcare in the City of Port Phillip. Eighteen months' hard work by this council and this community is finally coming to fruition," she said.

Cr Bolitho said that this week's full council meeting (October 23) had strengthened its commitment to child care by adopting a revised capital works program. "Instead of committing \$5.4 million over five years, the council is spending \$6,576,000 over three years – that's an increase of \$1,141,000. Over that period, there will 163 new places and 101 places saved due to closures and regulation changes. This council is delivering on the pledge it made on child care earlier this year," she said.

"The Elwood hub has been reconfigured to meet the range of different needs of Elwood families and will offer 60 long-day care places plus 30 sessional kindergarten places. The funding boost means that all council and community centres will be refurbished to comply with the new State Government space requirements. Forty places at council and community centres would have otherwise been lost had we not found the money. At the same time, a number of existing council and community centres will also gain extra places.

"It's been a long haul. Over the past year or so, one private centre folded and a kindergarten closed. A community-run centre is about to. Some private centres looked like goers and then disappeared off the scene. It looked like a sessional kindergarten could be built at St Columba's but that site proved unsuitable. Every day as we've attempted to meet the soaring demand for child care within the City of Port Phillip, it's been a case of swings and roundabouts but our commitment to meeting child care needs remains unwavering."

Cr Bolitho said that the new Elwood centre not only saves the 35 places that would have been lost due to the imminent closure of the Scott Street Children's Centre but adds new much needed long-day care places.

"The 26 sessional kindergarten places lost to Elwood by the closure of St Bede's Kindergarten will be retained, and another four created. Twenty of these kindergarten places shifted to West St Kilda Children's Centre in January. Once they shift back, another 20 additional long day care places."

The council is putting \$2 million toward the hub which also received \$500,000 from the Department of Human Services in funding.

A grant of \$237,750 from the Department of Education will assist Elwood Primary in fencing, landscaping, removing the road surface, and building new parking bays, toilets and all weather playing surface on what is currently Shelley Street. The Scott Street Children's Centre is donating \$100,000 towards the playground and environmental initiatives such as water saving devices.

Cr Bolitho said that work on the Coventry, Clark Street and Ada Mary À Beckett Children's Centre was almost ready to start.

"Funds have been allocated and plans approved. Refurbishing centres to meet the space regulations will cost a bit more than expected but in case of the Clark Street and St Kilda Children's Centres we've also decided to bring some building works forward rather than stage them over several years as it's more cost efficient," she said.

"Altogether, the number of new places in council and community-run centres will increase by a net 93, over and above the 61 positions lost. With the opening of Treehouse Children's Centre on Brighton Road early next year, the number private child care places will rise by a 105 in total, again over and above the 35 places which went with the closure of Care for Kids in East St Kilda."

A planning permit was approved two months ago for a 90-place ABC Learning Centre in Salmon Street, Port Melbourne but construction has yet to start. There are two other planning applications in the pipeline – for a 90 place private child care centre in Bay Street, Port Melbourne and a 160-place private centre in Ingles Street, Port Melbourne. The council has a feasibility study under way for the former Albert Park Infants School which may result in a 90-100 place centre. Three other centres involving the creation of 230-240 new places are also under discussion.

The council has deferred work on the \$900,000 Graham Street drain project to help fund the increased child care capital works budget.

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