

Open Letter

Holiday Hubs for Children Affected by Disability - An open letter to Edinburgh Council

Convenor and Elected Members of the Education, Children and Families Committee,
Officers and Senior Managers of The City of Edinburgh Council responsible for Holiday Hubs,
The City of Edinburgh Council
Edinburgh

3 Oct 2025

Dear Convenor, Elected Members and Officers.

Re An open letter regarding Holiday Hubs.

As a group of parents, we have long campaigned for the rights of our disabled children. We had hoped to see progress in inclusion and opportunities in Edinburgh for this group of vulnerable and often marginalised children. Yet over a year since deputising on the future of Holiday Hubs, we are writing to you again to highlight grave concerns about how the service continues to be eroded and mismanaged to the detriment of the children and families who use it.

Holiday Hubs are a unique provision that allow disabled children, some of whom have life limiting conditions and need specialist medical intervention and all of whom are excluded from many of the opportunities available to their peers, to attend holiday childcare in an inclusive environment and enjoy activities that are suited to their needs. There are no alternative forms of holiday childcare for these children.

Over the years, the service has been slowly eroded, with 6 weeks of 5-days-per-week provision over the school holidays being reduced initially to a 4-day-week, and then from 6 weeks to 4 weeks per year. Last year this was reduced again to just 3 weeks. We were reassured at the time by senior officers that this was temporary, due to the loss of a provider, and would not happen again. Despite this, families recently received the news, at an “exceptional meeting” of the Holiday Hub Steering group called with just 30 hours’ notice, that they would again be allocated only 3 weeks across all the school holidays for the 2025-26 school year. We had to agree to this because the alternative was zero weeks for 120 families whose disabled children met Tier 1 criteria. This allocation equates to just 12 days of childcare, from 9am - 3pm, across the 13 weeks of school holidays. Moreover, some of the most complex needs families received no provision last school year due to being allocated unsuitable providers that were outwith their staffing capabilities. This is completely unacceptable.

Furthermore, with less than 4 weeks until the first holiday period in October, parents had not yet received their allocation for the year, making planning work and other family commitments very difficult for families. Many were left feeling anxious about the uncertainty and upset about the expected reduction in their allocation.

We would like to raise some points of particular concern for further discussion:

- The fundamental aim of Holiday Hubs is, and has always been, providing holiday care for disabled children “who are unable to access any other mainstream provision.” Yet, this aim has disappeared from the application form this year. Additionally, the service has been renamed “Holiday hubs for children with ASN” rather than the previous title of “Holiday hubs for children with disabilities.” “Additional support needs” (ASN) is a wide umbrella term that encompasses many groups of vulnerable children. Whilst we acknowledge that each of these diverse groups requires support, most of them can access other holiday provisions. However, our children cannot: Holiday Hubs provide a specialist service to meet their needs that is not available elsewhere. Therefore, we are concerned that the core purpose of the Hubs has been altered, with the very users for whom the service was designed being written out.

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- It has been repeatedly claimed that parents approved the new criteria, but this is a mischaracterisation of the facts. While parents were indeed part of the steering group which produced the revised criteria for this year, and suggested some of the Tier 1 criteria, many concerns were in fact raised by parents about the introduction of poverty-based Tier 2 criteria. We were told that these Tier 2 criteria were mandatory in order to align with current CEC policy, although they had not previously been included. Moreover, the Scottish government policy 'The Promise' was overlooked by officers when considering Tier 2 criteria; leading to the omission of care experienced children from the prioritised groups.
- The early steering group meetings were not minuted, which has led to misrepresentation of the discussions and a failure to capture the suggestions made. The recently appointed Holiday Hub Officer and the Head of Education for Inclusion are now leading these meetings, but they do not appear to have been well-informed about the proceedings of previous meetings, and it seems that their hands are tied by decisions made before they were part of the group.

This situation is extremely disheartening and upsetting. Despite complicated and stressful lives as parent carers of disabled children, many of us have given up countless hours of our unpaid time to collaborate with the Council in the Holiday Hubs steering group, ostensibly to improve the service. While we are relieved the service has been retained, we are left tired, upset, and angry to be in the same position we were last year, with reductions and uncertainty around allocations. We have lost faith and trust in the management of Holiday Hubs.

Issues were highlighted by parents in deputations and correspondence prior to the Education, Children and Families Committee passing a paper in June 2025. There are too many to mention here, but the more recent problems are outlined in the attached [document](#).

If this were an assessment, it would be failed. If this was a performance review, you would be fired or sent for retraining. However, this is not a review or a test; this is children's lives, and some families' only form of support over the holidays and nothing is being done to fix the problem or to hold those at the top to account. These are real people's emotions that you are playing with, people who have a hard enough life as it is, people who have to fight for every scrap of support they can.

We do not claim to have all the answers, but what we do know is that this has been managed poorly from the outset, whether inadvertently or deliberately, it is clear that much more work needs to be done. None of us thought things could get any worse after last year, but we did dream that things would get better...

*"I sometimes lose myself in me
I lose track of time
And I can't see the woods for the trees
You set them alight, burn the bridges as you've gone
I'm too weak to fight you
I've got my personal hell to deal with
Then you say
Walk my path
Wear my shoes
Talk like that
I'll be an angel
then things can only get better"*

Peter Cunah and Jamie Petrie with Brian Cox

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Yours faithfully,

The following undersigned Parents and Carers of Children who use, have used, are going to use or are entitled to use The City of Edinburgh Council Holiday Hubs:-

(on mobile devices - please click the pencil icon first to edit and then add your name - thank you)

(anything you type will appear in a different colour and the cursor will have "commenting" or "your suggesting" assigned to it - this is to protect the document from accidental deletion)

(any problems or if you need us to add your name please email repair.edinburgh@gmail.com)

1. Gary Staerck - Parent of 3 Disabled Children, REPAIR Steering Group, and Holiday Hub Steering Group member
2. Carolyn Samson, Parent of Disabled Child, REPAIR Steering Group, Holiday Hub Steering Group member, & ASN Rep. for Wardie Primary School.
3. Denise McGee-Dewar, Parent of a disabled child and REPAIR Steering group member.
4. Emma Parker, parent of a disabled child, REPAIR Steering Group member and Holiday Hub Steering Group member
5. Clare McCabe, parent of a disabled child and Holiday Hub Steering Group member
6. Patricia Staerck, Parent of 3 Disabled Kids
7. Rachael Boswell, parent of a Disabled Child, REPAIR Steering Group member and Holiday Hub Steering group member.
8. Liam Sinclair - Parent of a disabled child and REPAIR Steering Group
9. Gillian Coulter - Parent of disabled child and REPAIR steering group member
10. Daisy Dinwoodie- parent of a disabled child
11. Lisa Evans - parent of a disabled child
12. Ann Winter- parent of disabled child
13. Carmine Mackenzie - parent of 2 disabled children
14. Gillian G - parent of disabled child.
15. Juliana Capes - Parent of 2 disabled children and Holiday Hub users
16. Amanda Collins - parent of a disabled child.
17. Lindsey Higgins - Parent of a disabled child.
18. Emma J - Parent of a disabled child and Holiday Hub user.
19. Lesley Gould - parent of a disabled child and REPAIR Steering Group member
20. Carol Pake - parent of a disabled child and holiday hub user for many years
21. Ruth Queally - parent of a disabled child and ASN rep at Davidson's Mains Primary School
22. Jennifer Verhaeren - parent of a disabled child
23. Anna Savage
24. Marion MacKenzie- parent who relied on holiday club when her daughter was at school.
25. Rob Martindill - parent of a disabled child and holiday hub user
26. Sean Savage
27. Dionne McMillan
28. John Cracknell - parent of a disabled child who uses Holiday Hub
29. Sheila Talbot
30. Helen Martindill - parent of a disabled child and holiday hub user
31. Lindsay Slater - parent of a disabled child who uses Holiday Hub
32. Colette Dufficy

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33. Ali Morris, parent of two Care Experienced children who accessed the holiday hubs for the first time last year having never been able to access any mainstream holiday provision, and who no longer meet the criteria for access to the holiday hubs.
34. Hannah Rajgopaul - Mother of a disabled child and Holiday Hub user