

## THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SUNDERLAND

### NOTIFICATION OF STATUTORY PROPOSAL FOR THE DISCONTINUANCE (CLOSURE) OF HETTON LE HOLE NURSERY SCHOOL

#### **Local Authority Proposal and Contact Details**

Notice is hereby given in accordance with Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, that it is the intention of Sunderland City Council, Civic Centre, Burdon Road, Sunderland, SR2 7DN to:

- Discontinue the provision at Hetton le Hole Nursery School, Victoria Street, Hetton le Hole, Tyne and Wear, DH5 9DG with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021.

Hetton le Hole Nursery School (the Nursery) is a maintained nursery school maintained by Sunderland City Council. In addition to its statutory nursery provision for 2 to 5-year olds, Hetton le Hole Nursery delivers a separately registered childcare provision. At its last full Ofsted inspection (March 2015) the Nursery was awarded an overall grade of Good. At the independently registered childcare provision's last full Ofsted inspection (February 2015) that provision was awarded an overall grade of Outstanding.

It is proposed that both the nursery and childcare provision are discontinued under this proposal.

#### **Reason for the Closure of Hetton le Hole Nursery School**

In recent years the Nursery has become financially vulnerable. The Nursery has a deficit budget that has increased each year over the previous five years and is projected to continue to increase in future years. It is currently projected that the Nursery's financial deficit will amount to between £163k and £172k by the close of the 2020/21 financial year. The deficit is projected to continue to increase to up to £200k by the close of the 2022/23 financial year. The Nursery has also been subject to falling rolls in recent years which has impacted on the available funding at the setting. The table below includes future years' financial projections for the Nursery, established during October 2020. These projections do not include the further impact on the nursery's finances as a consequence of Covid restrictions that commenced in January 2021.

Hetton le Hole Nursery	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
In Year Deficit (£)	35,931	22,198	31,437	11,493	24,224
Cumulative Forecast Deficit (£)	118,338	140,536	171,973	183,466	207,690

Additional financial support mechanisms made available to the Council from central government to support the costs associated with maintained nursery schools have been fully utilised. This has resulted in the Nursery receiving between £70k - £80k of additional funding in each of the previous three years. However, despite additional financial support the Nursery has continued to increase its deficit budget.

It has also been identified that the allocation methodology used to provide the additional financial support to the Nursery has led to three occasions in the previous four financial years where at least one other maintained nursery school in the city has accrued an in year deficit budget, and subsequently, also being identified as financially vulnerable. On this basis it has been determined that the level of financial support required to sustain Hetton le Hole Nursery is not

enough to ensure the Nursery's viability and cannot be provided without further risk to the wider maintained nursery sector in the city.

Falling rolls and the statutory requirements relating to staffing ratio, combined with current funding rates and methodology have resulted in the Nursery being unable to implement a structure and delivery model that can operate within the financial model required of a maintained nursery school. On that basis it has been identified as unviable as a long-term provision.

To safeguard the wider sufficiency of nursery places in the Hetton Ward, for both current and future cohorts of children, the Council is proposing that Hetton le Hole Nursery and its separately registered childcare provision are discontinued from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021. Alternative places for 2, 3 and 4-year olds (including both 30 hours provision and disadvantaged 2-year-old places) will be offered at an alternative mainstream school setting (Hetton Primary School). There are also alternative surplus places at other settings within the ward and within a 2-mile travel area (offering Good and Outstanding maintained nursery places) for parents and carers who do not wish to take up a place at the proposed alternative provision.

### **Effect on other Schools, Academies and Educational Institutions in the Area**

The closure of the Nursery is anticipated to lead to a re-allocation of financial resource that will positively contribute towards the sustainability of the wider Sunderland Maintained Nursery sector.

All maintained nursery schools in the city currently receive additional financial support through the Maintained Nursery School Supplementary Funding Allocation (the Lump Sum). The Lump Sum is calculated using the number of 3- and 4-year olds attending the first 15 hours of statutory provision at each maintained nursery school in the city each year at January Census. While each nursery's contribution to the Lump Sum is different in the case of Sunderland the combined sums generated by all nursery schools in the city is pooled and re-distributed equally, as opposed to each setting receiving the proportion of the allocation that it generates. This has resulted in some nurseries receiving a lower allocation than they generate and others, such as Hetton le Hole Nursery, receiving a greater share of the allocation than they generate.

Based on the number of pupils attending the Nursery in 2018/19 and 2019/20, the Nursery generated £41,167 and £33,573 respectively towards the City's combined total funding. However, due to the allocation methodology employed in Sunderland the Nursery received £75,449 and £82,037 respectively. The required uplift for the Nursery resulted in at least one other setting reporting a deficit budget in a financial year on three occasions in the previous four financial years. On that basis the methodology required to maintain the Nursery's current level of in year deficit is directly impacting on the sustainability of other settings across the sector. It has been estimated that the cost of the Lump Sum uplift at Hetton le Hole Nursery in 2019/20 was the equivalent of approximately £7k per setting. Despite the provision of additional funding the nursery returned end of year deficits for each of these years.

Feedback from the consultation indicates there remains a local preference for maintained nursery settings over school nursery classes from a proportion of the local community. This indicates that demand for places at alternative local maintained nursery settings may increase as a result of this proposal. It is likely that the increased funding that any increased demand at those settings creates will further strengthen the sustainability of those alternative maintained nursery settings.

The Council has also proposed the creation within a maintained school setting of an equal number of 2, 3 and 4-year old places to those currently offered by Hetton le Hole Nursery. Should the proposal to discontinue Hetton le Hole Nursery proceed there will be a requirement for the Council and Hetton Primary School to accelerate the current proposal to develop a nursery setting within the school from September 2022 to September 2021.

### **Project Costs**

Financial requirements because of the proposal to close Hetton le Hole Nursery School to meet any staff redundancy requirements are to be funded via the Dedicated Schools Grant Redundancy Reserves.

Costs associated with the delivery of an alternative provision, should the decision be taken to close Hetton le Hole Nursery, are contained within the wider construction costs for the new Hetton Primary School.

### **Pupil Numbers and Admissions**

In the period since September 2016 the number of pupils on roll at Hetton le Hole Nursery has declined. The Council has used census data to identify funded numbers of children on roll in both maintained nursery schools and in nursery classes in a school setting within a two-mile radius in the period 2016/17 to 2020/21. The settings evaluated were Hetton le Hole Nursery, Hetton Lyons Nursery, Houghton Nursery, Easington Lane Primary School and Eppleton Primary School. Due to Covid restrictions school census data was not collected in Summer 2020 so alternative available Census data has been used.

Census data identifies the number of children in a funded placement at a setting and is collected in the Autumn, Spring and Summer Terms.

Between Autumn 2016 and Autumn 2020 there was a reduction of 15% in the total number of funded places across all the settings identified above. This equated to a decline of 44 pupils across the five settings. However, the reduction in the roll at Hetton le Hole Nursery was greater than the overall pupil decline. At Autumn 2020 census there were 58% less children on roll at the Nursery than at the same point in 2016. This was inconsistent with other settings in the area where the largest reduction at any single setting, aside from Hetton le Hole Nursery, was a 4% decline in the number on roll.

It is noted that the reduction in pupils on roll outlined above occurred in a period of falling rolls across the area. However, the Nursery has also demonstrated falling demand in periods of pupil growth. Between Autumn 2016 and Autumn 2018 there was an increase of 8% (from 302 pupils to 327 pupils) in the number of pupils attending a nursery provision at one of the settings identified above. However, despite the increase in available pupils the cohort at Hetton le Hole Nursery fell by 43% over that period.

Over the census period Autumn 2016 to Autumn 2020 there was also an increase in parental preference demonstrated towards attendance at a nursery class in a school over attendance at a maintained nursery with the proportion of the total cohort in school nursery classes increasing from 20% to 24% over this period.

Hetton le Hole Nursery demonstrates similar pupil recruitment trends at other census period points. The most recent Summer Census collection (May 2019) identifies a 2% decline in overall participation across all the five schools and nurseries assessed in this document from the

Summer 2017 Census. However, Hetton le Hole Nursery demonstrated a 26% decline in numbers on roll over the same period. Other settings (such as Easington Lane Primary School and Houghton Nursery School) demonstrated growth in recruitment over the same period while Hetton Lyons Nursery maintained 96% of the 2017 roll at that census point.

The table below identifies the numbers on roll at the Nursery at each of the three census points in the years 2016/17 to 2020/21. Census was not reported in Summer 2020 and has not yet been collected for Spring or Summer 2021,

<b>Hetton Le Hole Nursery</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
Autumn Census	86	52	49	45	36
Spring Census	95	59	63	55	Not Available
Summer Census	100	66	74	Not Available	Not Available

It is noted that while there has been a decline in overall numbers and the proportion of overall take up at the setting there is a strong track record in recruitment of younger year groups with the Nursery achieving 97% of the number of two- year olds on roll in the summer 2019 Census (the most recent summer census collection) as the number reported in Summer 2017. This indicates an ongoing demand for 2-year-old places in the ward that should be provided if the proposals are to proceed. However, this recruitment is not later reflected in recruitment of the older class group at the setting.

### **Displaced Pupils**

The Council currently has a proposal under consideration to lower the age of admission at Hetton Primary School. Should the proposal to discontinue Hetton le Hole Nursery proceed it is considered that the new school provision will have the capacity to offer the number of 2,3 and 4-year-old places currently offered by the Nursery. Parents currently attending Hetton le Hole Nursery will be prioritised for admission at that setting should proposals proceed. However, there remain vacancies at other good and outstanding provisions within the Hetton and Houghton wards for parents who may seek an alternative place to Hetton Primary School.

There are currently considered enough places for 0-2-year olds at alternative settings and childminders to accommodate local demand for places.

## **Impact on the Community**

The Nursery is considered locally as a community asset. 35% of those responding to the Council's pre-publication consultation identified as residents. This was a greater proportion than the 31% who identified as parents of children attending the Nursery.

The closure of the Nursery would result in the removal of a Good nursery provision and Outstanding childcare provision from the local area. However, it is noted that there would be sufficient alternative local nursery places at good schools with nursery provisions or maintained nursery settings, as well as an Outstanding nursery provision within two miles of Hetton le Hole Nursery, to enable residents from within the community to access suitable alternative early years provision.

The Nursery building is in the ownership of Sunderland Council. There is currently no projected use for the building should this proposal be implemented. However, there remain opportunities to seek an alternative educational use for the building post September 2021.

## **Maintained Nursery Schools**

This proposal is for the discontinuation of an existing maintained nursery provision. The Statutory Guidance 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools' (November 2019) identified the presumption against closure of a maintained nursery school. The Guidance states that this does not mean that a nursery will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and should demonstrate that:

- plans to develop alternative early years provision clearly demonstrate that it will be at least equal in quality and quantity to the provision provided by the nursery school with no loss of expertise and specialism; and
- replacement provision is more accessible and more convenient for local parents.

Due consideration has been applied to those circumstances within this proposal.

The Council has proposed that should the Nursery be closed an alternative provision representing an equal number of places for 2,3 and 4-year-olds will be made available at Hetton Primary School. At present, as with Hetton le Hole Nursery's nursery provision, Hetton Primary School has a Good Ofsted rating, although the nursery's Outstanding grade for its separately registered childcare provision is noted.

The alternative provision is proposed to provide 39 full time places for 3 and 4-year old children and a further 16 places for 2-year olds. It is proposed that any vacancies for staff places at the provision to be established at the school are filled from staff currently employed at Hetton le Hole Nursery. This will ensure both continuity for children at the setting and ensure that expertise and specialism is retained in the local early years sector.

There are also surplus places at a number of alternative settings in the Hetton Ward, including Hetton Lyons Nursery School.

Including the proposed new provision at Hetton Primary School, of those families attending Hetton le Hole Nursery at the last full year Census point (May 2019) 73% live closer to at least one other setting rated as good with a nursery provision than they do to Hetton le Hole Nursery School with 47% living closer to 3 or more good settings than Hetton le Hole Nursery School. Of those 51% live closer to the proposed alternative provision at Hetton Primary School.

Alternative provisions identified as within a shorter walking distance for those living closer to 3 or more alternative settings but on roll at Hetton le Hole Nursery School include

Setting	Proximity to Hetton le Hole Nursery (calculated by shortest walking route)	Ofsted Inspection Outcome (as of 21 <sup>st</sup> February 2021)	Date Inspected
Hetton le Hole Nursery	NA	Good	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2015
Hetton Primary School	0.6 miles	Good	27 <sup>th</sup> January 2015
Hetton Lyons Nursery School	0.6 miles	Good	23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2013
Easington Lane Primary School	1.5 miles	Good	25 <sup>th</sup> February 2014
Eppleton Primary School	0.8 miles	Good	6 <sup>th</sup> November 2019
Hetton House Day Nursery (Private Sector Nursery Provision)	0.2 miles	NA	NA

In addition to the alternative academies, maintained schools and private nursery providers in the local area there is one additional maintained nursery schools within 2 miles of Hetton le Hole Nursery School. It is;

- Houghton Community Nursery School – 1.8 miles

Houghton Community Nursery School was judged as Outstanding in its most recent Ofsted inspections for both its nursery provision and separately registered childcare provision.

### **Rural Primary Schools**

Hetton le Hole Nursery School does not fall within the categorisation of a rural primary as set out in Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Furthermore, the school is not listed on the DfE's List of Designated Rural Primary Schools 2018.

### **Balance of Denominational Provision**

There would be no impact on the balance of denominational provision as the Nursery does not have a religious character.

### **Special Educational Needs Provision (SEND)**

Hetton le Hole Nursery School is not designated as a specific provider of Special Educational Needs Provision. This proposal will not result in the discontinuation of a SEND specific provision in Sunderland.

### **Travel**

The Council has considered the impact of travel within this proposal. It is considered that there is suitable alternative provision to that currently offered at Hetton le Hole Nursery for those parents currently on roll. Data indicates that 73% of parents on roll at the Nursery at the last full census point live closer to an alternative Good nursery provision than Hetton le Hole Nursery while 47% of those on roll live closer to at least three alternative good early years providers.

## Consultation

An informal (pre-publication) consultation upon the proposals took place during the following dates:

- 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – 14<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Consultees recommended in the relevant statutory guidance were consulted via a Consultation Document that was made widely available on the Council's website and the website of Hetton le Hole Nursery School. Consultees were asked:

***Sunderland Council considers that the proposal to close Hetton Le Hole Nursery and to create an equal amount of 2, 3 and 4-year-old nursery places within a local primary school setting from September 2021 would result in a viable and sustainable way to safeguard the long-term availability of nursery places for parents in the Hetton Ward.***

### ***Do you agree with the proposal?***

Consultees included parents, staff, the local ward councillors and staff representatives (unions) as well as those who had expressed an interest in consultations relating to developments in Hetton, Houghton and Copt Hill wards.

The consultation received 541 responses. Of these;

- 92% disagreed with the Council's proposal

Those disagreeing with the proposal highlighted the benefits that the Nursery offers to the local community including through its location, the quality of provision offered, the range of provision offered (such as 30-hour provision, two-year-old provision and wraparound care). The quality of the staff currently employed at the nursery was a feature of many responses. Continuity of transition for young people currently attending the nursery was also noted in responses.

The Council has sought to address issues raised in responses to the consultation. As such the alternative provision at Hetton Primary School;

- Will offer a 30-hour provision to parents who require this provision across all the 2,3 and 4-year old age ranges. This will apply to government funded or privately funded places.
- Staff vacancies at the alternative setting will be recruited from the existing Hetton le Hole staffing base to ensure children have access to staff they are familiar with and the expertise of those staff can be retained as much as is possible within any agreed delivery structure.

Further consideration will also be given to areas such as holiday provision and flexible opening and closing times. However, this provision is also available locally at other maintained nursery schools that currently have surplus places and therefore it is currently not proposed to be incorporated into the alternative provision at Hetton Primary School at this time.

It is also noted that several responses noted the Nursery's Outstanding Ofsted rating. While the

feedback provided in the Nursery's most recent Ofsted short visit is recognised, at the Nursery's last full inspection (31<sup>st</sup> March, 2015) it was issued an overall grade of Good with the Leadership and Management and the Behaviour and Safety of Pupils at the nursery graded as Outstanding within that overall grade.

The separately registered childcare provision is subject to independent inspection and that was rated as Outstanding at the Nursery's last full inspection (23<sup>rd</sup> February 2015).

There is currently only one maintained nursery school in the Coalfields area (Houghton Community Nursery School) that has overall Outstanding Ofsted ratings for both its nursery provision and its separately registered childcare provision.

The Council is mindful of the comments raised to date and the public support for Hetton le Hole Nursery and its staff. However, at this point no alternative option has been identified that would increase the viability, and therefore long-term sustainability, of the Nursery. Comments received to date, as well as any future comments from the remaining consultation period and the subsequent statutory notice period, will be submitted to the Council's School Organisation Committee of Cabinet (SOCOC) for its consideration when making any final decision on the future of the provision.

### **Submission of Objections and Comments on Proposal**

A copy of this proposal can be viewed on the Sunderland City Council website at

<https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/13038/School-organisation-consultations>

It can also be requested via:

E-mail: [alan.rowan@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:alan.rowan@sunderland.gov.uk)

Telephone: 0191 5611372

Post: Retained Education Functions Lead, Civic Centre, Burdon Road, Sunderland, SR2 7DN.

Within four weeks of the Publication Date below, any person may object to or make comments on the proposals by sending their written representations:

*By e-mail to :-*

[schoolorganisation@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:schoolorganisation@sunderland.gov.uk)

*Or by post to :-*

*Alan Rowan*

*Retained Education Functions Lead*

*Civic Centre*

*Burdon Road*

*Sunderland*

*SR2 7DN*

Signed : Patrick Melia,

Chief Executive,

Sunderland City Council.

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