

**SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE OF CABINET
– 10th NOVEMBER 2022**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report: Proposal to Lower the Age Range at Thorney Close Primary School

Author(s): Director of Children’s Services

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to seek a decision on the Council’s proposal to lower the age of admission at Thorney Close Primary School to facilitate the admission of two-year olds

Description of Decision: School Organisation Committee of Cabinet is asked to:

Note the responses to the statutory and pre-publication consultations and consider the statutory proposal which is to:

Lower the age range of Thorney Close Primary School, Torquay Road Sunderland, SR3 4BB from 3 – 11 years of age to 2 – 11 years of age with effect from 1st January 2023

Under the provisions of the relevant Regulations, the Authority may approve published proposals with or without modification or may reject them.

The Committee is requested to approve the proposal as detailed above.

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? Yes

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Reason for the Decision

- Thorney Close Primary School currently offers statutory early years provision for children from the age of three. The school’s current offer focuses on the delivery of the statutory 15-hour entitlement. Lowering the age of admission at the school would allow the extension of this provision to include 2-year-old children and would enable the delivery of the free early years entitlement available to disadvantaged families.
- Lowering of the age of admission would ensure the ongoing sustainability of early years provision for 2-year-olds in the area. It would also enable parents with both two-year-old children and older children who may already attend the school to drop their children at one single setting instead of multiple settings across the area, therefore making 2-year-old provision more convenient and accessible to an increased range of families.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

- Retain the current range at Thorney Close Primary School

Impacts analysed.

Equality Privacy Sustainability Crime and Disorder

Is the Decision consistent with the Council's co-operative values? Yes

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? Yes

Is it included in the 28-day Notice of Decisions? Yes

REPORT TITLE - PROPOSAL TO LOWER THE AGE RANGE AT THORNEY CLOSE PRIMARY SCHOOL**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES****1. Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to seek a decision on the Council's proposal to lower the age of admission at Thorney Close Primary School to facilitate the admission of two-year olds

2. Description of Decision**2.1 School Organisation Committee of Cabinet is asked to:**

Note the responses to the statutory and pre-publication consultations and consider the statutory proposal which is to:

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Under the provisions of the relevant Regulations, the Authority may approve published proposals with or without modification or may reject them.

The Committee is requested to approve the proposal as detailed above.

3. Current Position

3.1 Thorney Close Primary School is a maintained primary school maintained by Sunderland City Council.

3.2 Thorney Close Primary School is to relocate to a new school building and school site in 2025. The current school accommodates 280 primary aged children and 40 FTE nursery aged children.

3.3 The school currently offers a morning only nursery class for 3- and 4-year-olds. It does not currently offer either funded or paid for provision for 2-year-olds.

3.4 2-year-old provision is currently locally available at the Thorney Close Early Education Centre. However, that provision will close in January 2023 resulting in a reduction in local nursery places.

4.0 Proposal

4.1 It is proposed that the age of admission at the school is lowered to enable the delivery of an early years provision to 2-year-olds. This could include a combination of funded delivery, via the 2-year-old disadvantaged offer, or paid placements.

4.2 The current school building has surplus class bases. It is projected that utilising this surplus space would allow the delivery of up to 16 FTE 2-year-old places without the need for significant modification.

- 4.3 Expansion of the current school offer would enable parents whose preference is for their children to transition through primary school at a single setting, from nursery to year 6, to do so from an earlier age. It would also allow parents with children across multiple age ranges to access an educational setting with only one drop off with, for example, 2-year-olds and 7-year-old siblings accessing provision at a single site.
- 4.4 Thorney Close Primary School is a specialist setting for primary aged children with hearing impairments. While it is not proposed that the early years provision becomes a specialist hearing impairment nursery this would mean that children as young as two would have the opportunity to access a setting and staff with a greater specialism in this area should that be required.
- 4.5 The Council has also considered the long-term viability of neighbouring early years settings within this proposal. Given the concerns around the sustainability of other early years provision in the area it is considered that the inclusion of a two-year-old provision within the school offer would provide greater long-term safeguarding around 2-year-old provision in the area.
- 4.6 Subject to approval of the proposal, it is proposed that the provision commences in January 2023.

5.0 Numbers on Roll and Impact of Planned Housing

- 5.1 At the Summer 2022 Census point there were 27 funded nursery children on roll at Thorney Close Primary School. There were 243 children on roll in years Reception – Year 6.
- 5.2 This proposal would result in a minimum of an additional 16 FTE nursery places (or 32 places at 15 hours per place) being offered at the school from January. Should current nursery numbers remain as they were in Summer 2022 this would result in a potential nursery cohort of 59 children
- 5.3 This capacity would mitigate any potential local loss in provision while also ensuring that current early year's requirements from current developments in the area could be met.

6.0 Consultation

- 6.1 In July 2022 Cabinet approved a proposal to commence the School Organisation processes required to lower the age range at Thorney Close Primary School.
- 6.2 A pre-publication consultation was carried out between 18th July 2022 and 18th September 2022. The pre-publication consultation contained the Council's proposal to lower the age range at Thorney Close Primary School.
- 6.3 Consultation was carried out with the following groups
- Parents of pupils
 - Current staff
 - Trade Union Representatives
 - The wider local community

In total the Council received one response to the pre-publication consultation. The response supported the Council's proposal. The response is included at Appendix 1.

6.4 The Council published notification of the statutory proposals for the proposal to lower the age range at Thorney Close Primary School on 28th September 2022. The statutory notice period ended 25th October 2022. The statutory notice was published in the following places:

- Sunderland City Council's website
- Thorney Close Primary School's website
- The Sunderland Echo

6.5 In addition to the publication of notices the following groups were consulted with as part of this process:

- Parents of pupils attending the school
- Current staff

6.6 The Council received one response to the notice that supported the Council's proposals. The statutory notice and the full proposal document are attached at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 and the responses are attached as Appendix 4.

6.7 There were no objections to the proposals.

7.0 Next Steps

7.1 Subject to the proposal's approval, the Council will commission capital works at the school to facilitate a January 2023 implementation.

8. Reasons for the Decision

8.1 Thorney Close Primary School currently offers statutory early years provision for children from the age of three. The school's current offer focuses on the delivery of the statutory 15-hour entitlement. Lowering the age of admission at the school would allow the extension of this provision to include 2-year-old children and would enable the delivery of the free early years entitlement available to disadvantaged families.

8.2 Lowering of the age of admission would ensure the ongoing sustainability of early years provision for 2-year-olds in the area. It would also enable parents with both two-year-old children and older children who may already attend the school to drop their children at one single setting instead of multiple settings across the area, therefore making 2-year-old provision more convenient and accessible to an increased range of families.

9. Alternative Options

Retain the current age of admission at Thorney Close Primary School

9.1 This would not enable parents of both 2-year-old and school age children to have the opportunity to access provision from a single setting. Additionally, the opportunity to provide sustainable nursery places within the new build (planned for 2025) to ensure that early years provision can be safeguarded in the Sandhill Ward in future years would be lost.

10. Impact Analysis

Sustainability – This proposal will ensure that appropriate, high quality early years provision will be retained in the Sandhill ward.

Equalities Analysis – The proposal is not projected to disadvantage any individual, social group or organisation. The Equalities Assessment is attached as Appendix 5.

11. Other Relevant Considerations / Consultations

11.1 Co-operative values – At Annual Council in May 2015, it was resolved that the following statement be included in the Constitution to reflect the values of the “Co-operative Council”.

“Sunderland City Council is a co-operative council and in being so will act ethically in all its actions while adhering to and actively promoting its co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. These values will underpin its decision making and actions.”

11.2 Financial implications

As 2-year-old pupils will be funded either via census or paid placements there are no revenue implications for the Council associated with this proposal.

The capital investment requirement is estimated to be £0.050m and would be funded from school capital grants the within the current approved Capital Programme.

11.3 Legal Implications

Throughout the process, from informal consultation to the publication of the statutory proposals, the Council has complied with the requirements of the applicable legislation (the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013) and has also adhered to the Department for Education’s 2018 Statutory Guidance ‘Making Significant Changes (‘Prescribed Alterations’) to Maintained Schools’.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Pre-Publication Consultation Outcomes

Appendix 2 – Statutory Notice

Appendix 3 – Full Proposal Document

Appendix 4 – Responses to Statutory Notice

Appendix 5 – Equalities Assessment

13. Background Papers

Report to Cabinet - Lowering the Age of Admission at Thorney Close Primary School
– 14th July 2022