

**CHILDREN'S AND COMMUNITY SERVICES PORTFOLIO
HOLDER**

26 June 2012



Report of: Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee

Subject: CALL-IN OF DECISION: PROPOSED SCHOOL
ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2013-14

1. TYPE OF DECISION / APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 This is a non-key decision.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To inform the Portfolio Holder of the outcome of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee's consideration of the 'Call-In' in relation to the Children's Services Portfolio decision taken on the 27 March 2012.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 At the meeting of the Children's Services Portfolio, held on 27 March 2012, a report was considered in relation to the admissions policy for community and voluntary controlled primary schools in Hartlepool for the school year 2013/14 and the co-ordinated admissions procedures to primary and secondary schools for 2013/14. The formal deadline for submission of admission arrangements to the Secretary of State being the 15 April 2012.

3.2 The decision made by the Children's Portfolio Holder being that

'the proposed oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary aided primary schools which proposes to promote the sibling criteria above school admission zone criteria set out in paragraph 4.1.1 of the report (at Appendix 1A attached to this report) be approved.'

3.3 Following the decision of the Children's Services Portfolio Holder, a Call-In Notice was issued by 3 Members of the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee on the 5 April 2012. This notice was accepted by the Deputy Monitoring Officer on the 5 April 2012.

- 3.4 The Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, at its meeting on the 13 April 2012 accepted the Call-In and commenced consideration of the issues / concerns raised. The basis of the Call-in being that the decision contravened the principles of decision making in relation to proportionality and reasonableness. The view of the signatories to the notice being that they 'do not believe it to be proportionate or reasonable to put children with siblings already in a school ahead of the majority of children who live within the schools admissions zone'.
- 3.6 During the course of discussions, Members were informed that the Portfolio Holder and Department had received a number of emails from parents with positive comments on the decision taken and that the Portfolio Holder was not aware of any adverse comments being received. Members were, however, concerned that:
- A potential situation could arise where children living within an admission zone would be unable to attend their local community school, as places within that school had been taken by siblings of children already attending the school who live outside the admission zone;
 - Children who may live opposite a school could be unable to attend the school due to children who live outside the admission zone taking places at that school. This could result in two families travelling outside their admission zone to enable their children to attend school; and
 - The full consequences of this decision had not been made clear at the governors' meetings, and parents of children hoping for their child to attend the school within their admission zone would be disappointed with the decision once the full implications of the decision were known.
- 3.7 Attention was drawn to the importance of local community schools being accessible to the families living within that local community and the Committee decided that the matter should be referred to Full Council, to enable a town-wide elected Member debate to be undertaken.

Outcome of Discussions at Council / Separate Informal Meeting with Head Teachers and Governors

- 3.8 Council on the 14 June 2012 met to consider the Scrutiny referral, with a separate informal meeting held immediately prior to facilitate a full discussion with representatives from Schools (Head Teachers and School Governors). A copy of the report considered by Council on the 14 July is attached at **Appendix A**.
- 3.9 During the course of discussions at both the informal and formal Council meeting, views were expressed in relation to the appropriateness and implications of prioritising the award of school places on the basis of either a sibling link or residence in a school admission zone. Support was expressed for both alternatives and attention drawn to the differing challenges facing

schools in areas such as Throston, where the building of new homes has placed additional pressure on the availability of school places.

- 3.10 Council recognised that this was an extremely complex issue for which there was no easy solution. On this basis, Council was of the view that it would be unhappy at this time to express a view in relation to the proposed oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary controlled primary schools, without further consultations and detailed exploration of the potential wider implications for schools, parents and children.
- 3.11 Council agreed that the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee should be formally advised of this position and asked to consider the submission of the following response be the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder.
- i) That, before any recommendations can be made to the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder in relation to the revision of the oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary aided primary schools:
 - A full review must be undertaken to explore the wider implications of proposals, as identified during the course of debate at the Council meeting on the 14 June 2012; and
 - Wider consultations be undertaken with all stakeholders as part of the full review.
 - ii) That the results of the wider review and consultation process be reported to Council, to enable the formulation of a view / recommendation in relation to the oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary aided primary schools, for consideration by the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder.
 - iii) That given the oversubscription issues facing Throston Primary School, a review of the Throston catchment area be explored / reviewed immediately, taking into consideration the knock on effect for other schools.
- 3.12 In completing the Authority's Call-In procedure, the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, at its meeting on the 15 June 2012, accepted that the decision had been taken in contravention of the principles of decision making in relation to proportionality and reasonableness. As detailed in Section 3.4 above.
- 3.13 The Committee also received the views / comments expressed by Council and accepted them as the basis for its response to the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder. As detailed in Section 3.10 and 3.11 above.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 No options submitted for consideration other than the recommendation(s).

5. IMPLICATIONS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial or other considerations / implications from the consideration of the report by the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee 'Call-in of Decision: Proposed School Admissions Arrangements for 2013-14'.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder be asked to reconsider their decision, on the grounds that it contravened the principles of decisions making in relation to proportionality and reasonableness (as outlined in section 3.12 above).

- 6.2 That in reconsidering their decision, the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee indicates to the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder that:

- i) Before any recommendations can be made to the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder in relation to the revision of the oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary aided primary schools:

- A full review must be undertaken to explore the wider implications of proposals, as identified during the course of debate at the Council meeting on the 14 June 2012; and

- Wider consultations be undertaken with all stakeholders as part of the full review.

- ii) That the results of the wider review and consultation process be reported to Council, to enable the formulation of a view / recommendation in relation to the oversubscription criteria for community and voluntary aided primary schools, for consideration by the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder.

- iii) That given the oversubscription issues facing Throston Primary School, a review of the Throston catchment area be explored / reviewed immediately, taking into consideration the knock on effect for other schools.

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To conclude the call-in process and enable the Children's and Community Services Portfolio Holder to reconsider or reaffirm their decision in relation to this issue.

8. APPENDICES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST, IN THE MEMBERS LIBRARY AND ON-LINE

- 8.1 No appendices are attached to this report

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper(s) were used in the preparation of this report:-

- (i) Reports and Minutes – Children's Services Portfolio - 27 March 2012
- (ii) Call-in Notice – 5 April 2012
- (iii) Report and minutes from Council on the 14 June 2012
- (iv) Reports and Minutes – Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee – 13 April 2012 and 15 June 2012

10. CONTACT OFFICER

Joan Stevens – Scrutiny Manager
Chief Executive's Department - Corporate Strategy
Hartlepool Borough Council
Tel: 01429 284142
Email: joan.stevens@hartlepool.gov.uk