

# Hetton Town Council



## Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of Hetton Town Council held remotely on 4 March 2021

### **Present:**

Cllrs R Coulson (from Item 4a), J Defty, T Dodds, R Elvin, D Geddis, R Heron, M Hopper, K Pearson (Town Mayor), K Rowham, S Waterston and C Willis.

In attendance:

G Keedy, Town Clerk (TC)  
Members of Public (MoP) x 41  
Local Democracy Reporter

### **1) Apologies for absence**

TC reported that he had received an apology from Cllr D Turner (illness).  
Town Council resolved to approve the apology received.

No apologies for absence had been received from Cllr J Blackburn, J Green, Cllr A Liversidge, Cllr D Liversidge or Cllr M Thornton.  
Town Council resolved that these absences be recorded as unapproved.

### **2) Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3) Public participation**

Town Council resolved to allocate a period of up to 30 minutes.

MoP: Expressed concerns about potential exposure to asbestos during proposed of rebuild of Hetton Primary School; and additionally the reported spend by SCC on Civic Centre furniture when Hetton Nursery is proposed for closure.

MoP: Outlined suggestions to ameliorate the financial position including ongoing promotion of the school.

MoP: Highlighted the SEN support available at Hetton Nursery and expressed concerns about potential exposure to asbestos during proposed of rebuild of Hetton Primary School.

MoP: Made a plea to SCC Portfolio holder for Hetton community to be given the opportunity to continue to work to save the school.

Several MoP's took the opportunity to praise the outstanding support the nursery had given to their children, with particular emphasis on SEN provision.

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### **4) Proposal of Sunderland City Council to discontinue Hetton le Hole Nursery.**

TC provided an update on 2 x queries raised at previous meetings, following guidance sought from the Advisory Service of Society of Local Council Clerks.

TC advised that the Town Council had no powers to run the nursery. He added that some limited powers were available under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 to provide financial assistance, but these could not be invoked to provide a subsidy.

#### **a) Campaign update**

Christine Collins, Chair of Hetton Nursery Governing Body introduced this item and thanked Town Council for their support.

Ms Collins précised steps taken to date and highlighted concerns re the financial methodology used by SCC to support the closure proposals.

Ruth Williamson, Head Teacher advised that FoI requests to SCC had indicated significant financial under spend in funding to support nursery schools and queried why these amounts could not be allocated to support the continued operation of Hetton Nursery.

#### **b) Town Council response to the proposal**

Following a proposal by Cllr R Elvin, seconded by Cllr D Geddis, Town Council resolved that the Town Council object to the proposal by Sunderland City Council to close Hetton Nursery School on the following grounds:

- 1) Maintained nursery schools are required to provide high quality early education, led by specialist Head Teachers and delivered by qualified teachers especially in deprived areas and to put parents and families at the centre of their work. D of E guidance November 2019 states "The decision-maker should give the greatest weight to responses from those stakeholders likely to be most directly affected by a proposal – especially parents of children at the affected school. The decision-makers are expected to adopt a presumption against the closure of maintained nursery schools". This has not to have been complied with.
- 2) Sunderland City Council has permitted and encouraged unfair competition by allowing numerous private nurseries to undercut state schools by insisting that state schools are required to have higher qualified staff and meet the costs of being a school but only provide them with the same level of funding as private and voluntary providers. The Council is effectively privatising nursery education by the back door.
- 3) The Council has been derelict in its duties by not actively involving and discussing with the school, the school governors, residents, families and Hetton Town Council possible ways to overcome the difficulties of falling roll numbers and the associated reduction in income because of unfair competition permitted by them. It has been acknowledged in documented meetings that the financial vulnerability of the Nursery is not due to mismanagement of funds but due to the methodology behind the funding formula and the unavoidable costs associated with a Maintained Nursery School.

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### Item 4b cont ....

- 4) The City Council has not provided any Covid-19 relief funds to the school despite having received many millions from central government. Relief has been given to private nurseries. Covid-19 losses estimate at £74,381.00. In total over the last three years there was an under spend of £4,014,000 for the Early Years Funding and Inclusion Funding. Why has additional funding not been provided for this nursery and other maintained nurseries to clear any outstanding deficits to ensure these much-needed nurseries are adequately funded.
- 5) The budget forecast is inaccurate. Toddlers are at 97% capacity and the baby room is in a similar position. Interest for enrolment for September 2021 is high. With Toddlers moving up this will allow more places for the this much in demand service. New developments close by such as Blossom Park (identified by SCC as a source for new intake) coupled with the nursery's other plans, as published in their recent power point presentation, are likely to increase numbers by at least 3 which would eliminate the projected deficit.
- 6) The Council referred to the uplift given to the nursery as the reason for at least one other school going into deficit while maintaining that all maintained nursery schools receive their additional financial support through an agreed formula. This is a deliberate distortion of the facts. In the funding year 2019-2020 five out of eight Maintained Nursery Schools ended the year with a deficit In-year balance.
- 7) Hetton Town Council believes on the grounds of physical, mental and emotional Health as well as Safety that it is inconceivable the Council is considering transferring these young and vulnerable children into temporary demountable classrooms for a period of up to 3 years and at the same time reconfiguring the asbestos ridden existing building. We have not been provided with the costings, but investigations would suggest that it will cost around £50,000 + Vat per year to rent them. We believe that this money should be allocated towards any deficits for the foreseeable future and during this interim period the Council should undertake proactive work with all interested parties to ensure the future success of Hetton le Hole Nursery school.
- 8) Hetton Town Council is concerned about the legality of the Council Cabinet taking the decision to move forward to a statutory consultation 5 days before the pre consultation closed as this did not permit all responses to be considered.

GK 11 03 21

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Signed:

Date: