

CALL IN REQUEST

Date of decision publication: **21st June 2024**

Delegated decision ref: N/A or

Executive Board Minute no: **Minute 7**

Decision description: **Little Owls Nurseries Review**

Discussion with Decision Maker:

Prior to submitting a Call In, a nominated signatory must first contact the relevant officer or Executive Member to discuss their concerns and their reasons for wanting to call in the decision. Part of this discussion must include the Member ascertaining the financial implications of requesting a Call In.

Please identify contact and provide detail.

Director/author of delegated decision report.

Executive Board Member

Detail of discussion (to include financial implications)

Cllr Ryan Stephenson spoke with Julie Longworth (Director of Children and Families) and Phil Evans (Chief Officer, Resources, Transformation and Partnerships) on 25th June 2024. Issues discussed included the consultation associated with the proposals, clarity of aims and desired outcomes, and the options considered in the context of the authority's financial challenge.

Cllr Stephenson enquired about the financial implications of requesting a call-in and was advised that there was no significant issue or additional costs associated with calling-in the decision and closures could still proceed.

Reasons for Call In:

All requests for Call In must detail why, in the opinion of the signatories, the decision was not taken in accordance with the principles set out in Article 13 of the Council constitution (decision making) (principles of decision making) or where relevant issues do not appear to be taken into consideration. *Please tick the relevant box(es) and give an explanation.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Proportionality (ie the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Due consultation and the taking of professional advice from officers
<input type="checkbox"/>	Respect for human rights
<input type="checkbox"/>	A presumption in favour of openness
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clarity of aims and desired outcomes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	An explanation of the options considered and details of the reasons for the decision
<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive promotion of equal opportunities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Natural justice

Explanation

The proposal to close three Little Owls nurseries, and review the future of a further 12, will negatively impact families across the city including in areas of high deprivation by disrupting the lives of vulnerable children in terms of their routine and wellbeing, and potentially causing some parents/carers to stop work or training because they cannot find or commute to suitable alternative provision or adjust to new costs.

We have the following specific concerns about the decision:

1. Consultation – the report notes that there were 141 parent/carer attendees at the engagement events. This is a small proportion of the 1,800 children on roll in all settings, raising questions about the availability of the engagement sessions and the lack of further options to engage with the proposals. We also note that one of the common themes raised by attendees was a “lack of transparency” about the decision making process, which is concerning, and leads to an impression that this is being done to families rather than with them.
2. Clarity of aims and desired outcomes – the motivating factor for the proposals is to make financial savings, but there is a lack of vision in the report about what the right balance of provision looks like, notwithstanding the review that has already taken place. This is exemplified by the significant uncertainty surrounding the future of the further 12 sites that are to be subject to market testing; it is unclear whether these sites will be amalgamated, or offered through a different provider, or potentially closed, meaning the impact of the decisions in this report extends beyond the 94 families affected by the closure of three sites. It is also concerning that future decisions about each of these 12 sites are being delegated to the Director, rather than being brought back to Executive Board, which could reduce the opportunity for robust oversight and challenge of these decisions.
3. An explanation of the options considered and details of the reasons for the decision – it is noted that the proposals in the report have been advanced in order to meet the financial challenge faced by the authority. However parents value these services and it is unclear why the authority has not sufficiently explored alternatives to closure. At paragraph 91, the report says: “Due to the current finance challenge Leeds City Council is experiencing, the proposals detailed in this report were the only available options sufficient to address the current overspend whilst still ensuring the Council meets its Early Years childcare sufficiency duty.” This provides insufficient clarity on whether alternatives were considered and, if they were, why they were rejected.

Leeds City Council Scrutiny Support


A Call In request may be made by a **minimum** of:

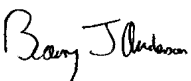
5 non-executive Members of council from the **same political group**;

or;

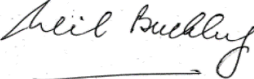
2 non-executive Members of council if **they are not from the same political group**.

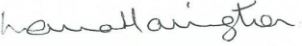
This Call In request should be submitted to Scrutiny Support, 1st Floor West, Civic Hall by 5.00pm by no later than the fifth working day after the decision publication date. The following signatories (**original signatures only**) request that the above decision be called in.


Nominated Signatory Print name Councillor Ryan Stephenson Political Group Conservative Group


Signature Print name Councillor Barry Anderson Political Group Conservative Group



Signature Print name Councillor Caroline Anderson Political Group Conservative Group


Signature Print name Councillor Neil Buckley Political Group Conservative Group


Signature Print name Councillor Norma Harrington Political Group Conservative Group

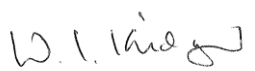
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Signature 
Print name Councillor Mark Dobson
Political Group Garforth & Swillington Independents Group

Signature 
Print name Councillor Oliver Newton
Political Group Morley Borough Independents Group

Signature 
Print name Councillor Robert Finnigan
Political Group Morley Borough Independents Group

Signature 
Print name Councillor Wayne Dixon
Political Group Social Democratic Party

Signature 
Print name Councillor Wyn Kidger
Political Group Local Independent Party

Signature 
Print name Councillor Stewart Golton
Political Group Liberal Democrat Group

Leeds City Council Scrutiny Support

For office use only: (box A)

Received on behalf of the Head of Democratic Services by:

Robert Clayton – Principal Scrutiny Adviser

Date: 28 June 2024 Time: 10.25AM SSU ref: 2024/25 - 80

For office use only: (box B)

Exemption status
checked:

Call In authorised: Yes

Date checked:

Signed: Robert Clayton

Signatures checked:

Date: 28 June 2024

Receipts given:

Validity re article 13