

FALKIRK COUNCIL

**Subject: REPORT BACK ON FORMAL CONSULTATION -
PROPOSED CLOSURE OF TORWOOD SCHOOL**
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 7 March 2007
Author: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the last meeting of Education and Leisure Committee on 30 January 2007, approval was given to go out to a period of formal consultation on the closure of Torwood School.
- 1.2 Members may recall that a report was previously brought to Education and Leisure Committee on 11 November 2003 detailing two formal consultations that focused on the proposed inclusion of additional support needs facilities in the new North Larbert and Maddiston Primary Schools. There was overwhelming support for both facilities.
- 1.3 It was made clear at the time that Torwood School would be replaced by new facilities and that its closure would be subject to a further consultation.
- 1.4 The new North Larbert and Maddiston Primary Schools are planned to open in August 2007, followed by the additional support needs facilities in October 2007. It is proposed that the pupils and staff are transferred from Torwood School once these facilities are open and operational.
- 1.5 The purpose of this report is to feed back to committee the results of the consultation exercise and to propose an appropriate way forward.

2. CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 2.1 Following on from the Education and Leisure Committee's decision of 30 January 2007, a formal public consultation on the proposal to close Torwood School and define separate catchment areas for the new North Larbert and Maddiston facilities was carried out. The period of consultation was from 31 January to 28 February 2007.
- 2.2 To initiate the consultation process and in accordance with regulations, a notice was placed in the Falkirk Herald and the consultation paper (see Appendix 1) was made available in public libraries, one stop shops and on the council website. A press release was also issued immediately following the committee decision. In addition, the Torwood and Maddiston school boards were directly consulted on the proposal, as well as all parents at both schools.

- 2.3 The process followed through this consultation exercise has been governed by the Education (Publication and Consultation etc) (Scotland) Regulations 1981. These regulations oblige us to consult with all parents that would be affected by a school closure and rezoning, and with the school boards, with a further responsibility to ensure that there is a notice in the local paper regarding the proposals.
- 2.4 A public meeting was also held at Torwood School on 12 February 2007 to discuss the proposal and a formal record of the meeting is attached as Appendix 2.

3. RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

- 3.1 There were no written responses to this consultation.
- 3.2 Several issues were raised at the public meeting, and these are detailed in Appendix 2, but none were pertaining directly to the matters out to consultation.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 As no written responses were received to this consultation, there are no objections to this proposal.

5. PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

- 5.1 It is proposed that plans are made to proceed with the closure of Torwood School following transfer of staff and pupils to the new specialist facilities at North Larbert and Maddiston Primary Schools.
- 5.2 It is also proposed that the catchment boundaries are set as outlined in the Appendix 3. These boundaries represent a 50:50 split in the current school age populations, are broadly based on secondary cluster, and balance likely travel times and planned future community growth.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 **That committee agrees to close Torwood School following the transfer of staff and pupils to the new specialist facilities at Maddiston and North Larbert Primary Schools.**
- 6.2 **That committee agrees to the delineation of catchment boundaries for the two new facilities as shown in Appendix 3.**

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Director of Education

Date:

Contact Officer: Richard Teed, ext 6621

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL



Falkirk Council
Education Services

**PROPOSAL FOR CLOSURE OF TORWOOD SCHOOL AND
TRANSFER OF PUPILS AND STAFF TO NEW NORTH LARBERT
AND MADDISTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

A Consultative Document



BACKGROUND

In October 2003, parents of Torwood School were amongst those consulted on a proposal to include new, purpose built Additional Support Needs facilities within two new primary schools, one to replace Maddiston Primary, and one to serve new housing developments in North Larbert.

It was made clear at the time that it was intended that the two new facilities would replace Torwood School, which would ultimately close. However, it was also made clear that the proposal to close Torwood School would be subject to a later consultation.

There was overwhelming support for inclusion of the two new facilities within these new build schools, from parents at Torwood, Maddiston and Stenhousemuir Primary Schools.

Plans are well advanced, and both new schools are currently under construction. The schools are both planned to open for Primary 1 to 7 pupils in August 2007, whilst the specialist facilities are both expected to be ready to open by October 2007.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed that all staff and pupils currently at Torwood School are transferred to either the new Maddiston and North Larbert schools once both replacement facilities are complete and ready to open. The detailed arrangements and allocation of staff will be carried out in full consultation with all members of staff at Torwood School. The new facilities are expected to be ready for October 2007, so the transfer would be planned on this basis.

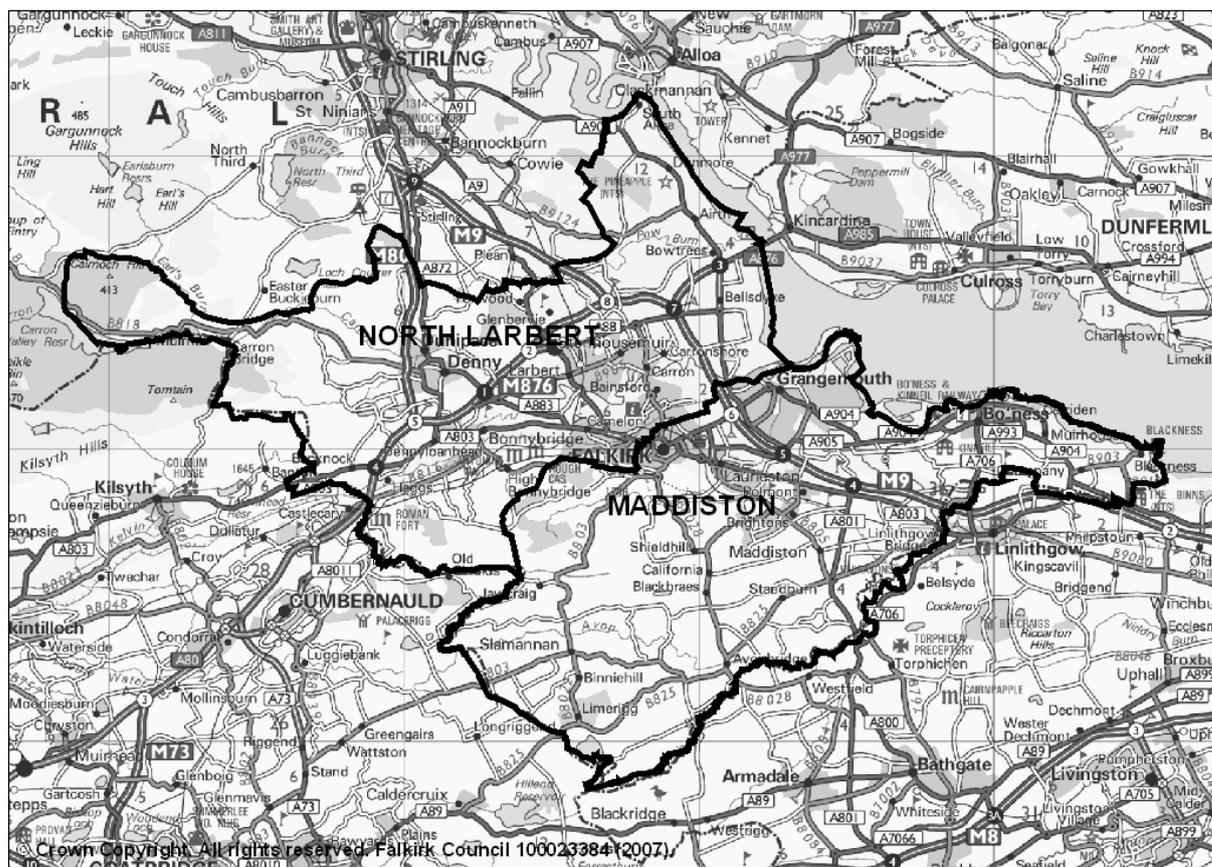
Both primary schools will have a headteacher with overall responsibility for each new specialist facility, but the day to day operation of the facilities will be the specific responsibility of a deputy headteacher who will be appointed at each school. Existing staff:pupil ratios will be maintained.

Once all staff and pupils have transferred to the new schools it is proposed that Torwood School is closed. It is currently the Council's intention to sell the land to raise funds to offset the cost of building the two replacement facilities.

The two facilities that will replace Torwood School are of equal size and it is proposed that each facility will serve 50% of the Falkirk population. The catchment areas proposed are shown in the maps overleaf. They each serve almost exactly 50% of the current school-age population, optimise travel times and are broadly aligned with current primary and secondary school catchments.

Although current pupils are not evenly spread between the two proposed school catchments, the distribution is expected to balance out over time. Because of the low pupil numbers, however, there is often likely to be an imbalance, and where this occurs, as is currently the case, it is proposed that places will be offered based on proximity or particular need to ensure that neither facility is over- or under-occupied.

Proposed Catchment Areas for New Additional Support Needs Facilities



CONSULTATION

We hope you agree that the opening of two new purpose-built facilities is a positive move with regard to improved environment and facilities, increased capacity, more opportunity for pupils to access mainstream primary classes, and reduced travelling time to school for many pupils. However, we realise that it will be a significant change for all those affected and urge you to raise any concerns that you may have, ask us any questions you may have and respond to the proposals outlined in this document.

As part of the consultation process, you are invited to attend a public meeting on Monday 12 February at 7.00 pm in Torwood School.

Written responses to this document will be accepted from individuals, organisations or interested parties **at any time up to Wednesday 28 February 2007** and should be addressed to:

The Director of Education
Falkirk Council Education Services
McLaren House
Marchmont Avenue
Polmont FK2 ONZ

Or sent by e-mail to: consultations.educ@falkirk.gov.uk

If you have any questions that you would like to discuss with us directly please contact Richard Teed (01324 506621) or Jennifer Anderson (01324 506608).

**PROPOSAL FOR CLOSURE OF TORWOOD SCHOOL
AND TRANSFER OF PUPILS AND STAFF TO NEW NORTH LARBERT
AND MADDISTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

**Minute of Public Consultation Meeting
Held in Torwood School On Monday 12 February 2007 AT 7.00 pm**

Consultation Panel:

Tom Coleman, Convenor of Education & Leisure Committee
Gary Greenhorn, Head of Educational Resources
Richard Teed, Senior Forward Planning Officer
Trevor Baxter, Additional Support for Learning Manager
Ellen Hamilton, Curriculum Support Officer (ASL)
Dorothy Hill, Headteacher, Torwood School
Eddie MacLennan, Headteacher, Maddiston PS, seconded as Quality Improvement Officer

In Attendance:

Mike McGowan, Project Architect for North Larbert Primary School
Jennifer Anderson, Forward Planning Officer

Parents/members of local community - approximately 20.

Councillor Coleman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the panel. He explained that Gary Greenhorn would provide background information on the consultation through a presentation and Richard Teed would provide information on the revised catchment areas. The floor would then be opened for questions.

Gary Greenhorn asked if everyone had a copy of the 'Frequently asked Question and Answer' sheet and encouraged questions from the floor. He advised of the requirement to take a formal record of the meeting.

Background information was provided on the proposed closure of Torwood School and the planned opening of the new facilities, the timescales on the transfer of pupils and the proposed catchment areas. The consultation meeting provided an opportunity to report on the new provision at both North Larbert and Maddiston Primary Schools which are currently under construction. Slides were shown on the current stage of construction of both schools.

Further background information was given on the 2003 formal consultation and the legislative requirement to consult on the proposed closure of Torwood School. The resultant outcome from the 2003 consultation was unanimous support for inclusion of specialist ASN facilities in North Larbert and Maddiston Primary Schools. It was clarified that we have a one month period of consultation during which written responses to the proposed closure are invited either by e-mail or by letter on or before 28 February 2007. At the end of the consultation period a report incorporating all responses will be submitted to Falkirk Council by 7 March 2007 for consideration at the full Council Committee.

Details were provided on the proposed timescale on the opening of the Additional Support Needs facilities in both North Larbert and Maddiston Primary Schools in October 2007 at which time it is proposed that staff and pupils are transferred and Torwood School is closed.

He advised that there will be 4 classrooms in each new school whereas there are only 5 classrooms in Torwood School. The current roll at Torwood is 21 and there will be up to 24 places in each unit which represents increased capacity in addition to the benefits of the new purpose-built facilities. It is likely that most pupils will have reduced travel and travel time and will benefit from more integration within the school. Each of the Additional Support Needs facilities will have a depute headteacher.

Richard Teed talked about the analysis undertaken to determine the catchment split for both schools and advised they are broadly based on current secondary school clusters to create a 50:50 split in the current school age population. He explained that travel times and future community growth were also taken into consideration.

Mike McGowan advised that information and plans on the new North Larbert and Maddiston Primary Schools were also available to look at after the meeting.

Gary Greenhorn opened the meeting to questions from the floor:

Question: Will the teachers who work with specific pupils remain with those pupils should they go to different schools? It was stressed that children need familiarity.

Answer: (Dorothy Hill) When class changes occur in the next school session there is no guarantee that a teacher moves with the pupil. It is unlikely therefore that this will happen. We will have more teachers so we don't know at this stage but it is unlikely they will all match. (Ellen Hamilton) Every effort will be made to ensure that there is at least one familiar person working with the pupils.

Statement: A member of the audience stated they felt one familiar face is not acceptable pointing out that of the 4 teachers in Torwood School one teacher could go to Larbert and 3 to Maddiston.

Answer: (Ellen Hamilton) It is more likely that there will be more than one familiar face but we could look at recruiting earlier and have this in place. This is to be looked at.

Question: Will the current staff:pupil ratio remain the same?

Answer: (Trevor Baxter) The school capacity will increase but the staff ratio will stay the same.

Question: Is there any difference between the 2 schools?

Answer: (Mike McGowan) The design of both schools is different but the room sizes, room types (eg sensory rooms etc) will be the same although they will look different.

Question: Will they have the same play area as the other pupils in the school?

Answer: (Mike McGowan) They will have separate play areas but if appropriate they will have the opportunity to play together. They will have a secure area to play safely.

Question: Will trips which children currently go on remain the same?

Answer: (Dorothy Hill) The trips will be the same. There are currently 2 Sunshine Variety Club coaches, one of which is old. We have put in an application for a further coach as it is known the school is being split and this is being looked at. Money is being raised towards the new coach and although we have to contribute £12,000 we already have this. In addition, Interserve are currently supporting Torwood School. They have a promotion that if they go for a full month without an accident or incidents they donate £400. The current fund from Interserve is currently sitting at approximately £2,000.

Question: Will both schools have separate dining facilities and café?

Answer: (Mike McGowan) Yes.

Question: Will there be anything that is integrated between the schools and the ASN facilities, for example school shows?

Answer: (Dorothy Hill) This would be dependent on the children and if it is not detrimental to them. However this is the advantage of being on the same campus making it much easier to get children back into the unit if they are opposed to working in an integrated environment. Having a separate campus at the moment makes this more difficult and does not permit the opportunity to share.

Question: What is happening to the Torwood School building?

Answer: (Gary Greenhorn) This will be up to Falkirk Council.

Question: Is the council aware that the land on which the school is built was bequeathed to children of Torwood which is a particularly difficult place to bring up small children because of safety? We would like the community to remain as it is.

Answer: (Gary Greenhorn) Before the council looks at future plans it will look at all the local implications and any legality in terms of a bequest will require to be complied with.

Statement: Another member of the audience advised that as a group they use the school facilities and have done so for many years. It was suggested that it could be used for community purposes. There are also no sporting facilities in Torwood and there is anxiety, particularly as there is an older age group living locally, that the site will be developed for housing.

Response: (Gary Greenhorn) There are no plans at this time on what to do with the building but the community will have an opportunity to put forward their opinion through consultation at a later date. Councillor Coleman made reference to the new Denny High School and facilities, sports fields, etc being retained at the old school.

- Question:** Why was a new school not built back in 2003 on the Torwood site.
- Answer:** (Councillor Coleman) It was recognised that the Torwood School was old and needed attention but because there were plans for two new schools there was an opportunity for children to go to schools closer to home.
- Statement:** A parent advised that children actually enjoy the journey.
- Statement:** Concern was expressed that we are taking a good resource where all the expertise is and moving it from one site to two bases.
- Response:** Ellen Hamilton referred to the previous consultation when the parents were in favour of it.
- Statement:** The previous consultation voted for other children to be involved in mainstream education as a lot of parents were spending time going back to other schools. We have mainstream schools in Bo'ness. We are taking a good facility and breaking it up. It would have made more sense to invest money in Torwood as a building.
- Question:** Will there be a hydrotherapy pool in the schools?
- Answer:** (Gary Greenhorn) There will be no hydrotherapy pool but there will be new state of the art facilities and we are committed to that provision.
- Statement:** Concern was expressed that it will be frightening for children with disability attending a mainstream school as other children can be cruel and can bully.
- Another parent was of the opinion that all children are scared and he felt that it would be better for his child to be integrated into mainstream education and that children should get the opportunity to do so.
- The point was made that parents chose to send their children to Torwood School as there are specialist facilities.
- Response:** (Trevor Baxter) It is not proposed to put children into mainstream schools with opportunities to have contact with mainstream school children without proper management. Everyone will learn from the experience as mainstream children get to know about children who have specialist needs.
- Question:** Is there is an inventory of Torwood equipment and will computers, smart boards and other equipment be shared? What are the plans to provide all of this in both facilities?
- Answer:** (Gary Greenhorn) We will look at putting in new equipment and there will be no loss of access to any equipment.
- Question:** If when the schools are built and where smart boards were donated can a parent dictate that a smart board will go to a certain school?
- Answer:** (Gary Greenhorn) Yes, if donations were specifically made then retention of equipment will be appropriate. The school will always welcome fund raising.

Question: As facilities and access to the hydro pool at Carrongrange School are currently shared how will this be managed where access is allocated in time slots and we may have additional pupils and two groups instead of one?

Answer: (Gary Greenhorn) We will ensure there is no loss of access to these facilities by managing their shared use effectively.

Question: Will the first part of the new session start as normal?

Answer: (Gary Greenhorn) The session will start as normal. We plan to move the pupils and staff over in October 2007.

Question: On moving to Maddiston will the minibus be shared with the school if it belongs to Torwood School?

Answer: (Dorothy Hill) The future use of the school bus will be no different as to how it is currently managed at Ladeside in using and sharing facilities and buses.

Kath Hamill, headteacher at Ladeside discussed the fears of parents on the opening of the Ladeside facility for autistic children and further commented on the positive opportunity which was offered to the children.

Question: Will there be an opportunity to visit the schools before opening?

Answer: (Gary Greenhorn) Once the schools are open we will invite parents and pupils along for a visit.

Question: If we decide that Larbert would be better for our children what does the process involve in requesting them to attend North Larbert School and would there be any obstacles in the way?

Answer: (Richard Teed) A placing request can be submitted as for any child and it will be considered following the normal procedure. Placing requests are granted where we have no grounds for refusal.

(Councillor Coleman) Placing requests for the new facilities could be granted as there is sufficient space to accommodate them.

Question: What is the timescale for placing requests?

Answer: Richard Teed outlined the placing request timescales. Councillor Coleman emphasised there is no problem in dealing with placing requests for Torwood children and asked if parents would advise other parents to put forward any questions they have.

Question: Could we could advise the Prince's Carers Trust about the proposals?

Answer: (Gary Greenhorn) This request is noted.

Gary Greenhorn reminded the audience to email or write in to us with any questions by 28 February 2007.

Gary Greenhorn encouraged parents to take time to look at the plans of both new schools and information on the catchments. The meeting was then closed.

