



Agenda Item 9

**Report on the Consultation on the
Proposed Mothballing of Bothkennar
and Limerigg Primary Schools**

Falkirk Council

Title: Report on the Consultation on the Proposed Mothballing of Bothkennar and Limerigg Primary Schools
Meeting: Education Executive
Date: 26 March 2019
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide the Education Executive with:
- report back on the recent informal consultation undertaken on the proposed mothballing of Bothkennar and Limerigg Primary Schools; and
 - recommendations on the way forward

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Education Executive is asked to:

- 1) note the responses from the recent consultation;**
- 2) agree that Limerigg and Bothkennar Primary Schools should be mothballed from August 2019, and that pupils attending these schools can transfer automatically to Slamannan and Beancross Primary Schools; and**
- 3) authorise Children's Services to put measures in place to support pupils transferring to the alternative catchment schools during the current school session if that is requested;**

3. Background

- 3.1 The term "Mothballing" refers to a temporary decision to close a school where the roll has fallen to very low levels and the Education Authority consider it not to be presently viable.
- 3.2 The Education Executive on 4 September 2018, agreed the criteria and parameters for schools to be considered for mothballing. They also agreed management actions to be taken when schools are considered for mothballing.
- 3.3 The School Census for the 2018/19 showed that two schools fell within the agreed parameters to be considered for mothballing, which were:

"where a primary school roll has 10 or less catchment area pupils, as reported in the Annual School Census, then the Director of Children's Services should consider this for mothballing"

Bothkennar and Limerigg Primary Schools both fell below this threshold with 4 and 5 pupils respectively.

- 3.4 Due to the limited number of pre-school children living within the catchment area of these schools, the number of catchment pupils at either school is very unlikely to exceed 10 within the next two years. It is therefore the view of Children's Services that these two schools should immediately be considered for mothballing, from the end of the current term in June 2019.

4. Considerations

Consultation Process Undertaken

- 4.1 The first step in this process was to consult with affected parents and other families who reside in the defined catchment areas. The details of the consultation that has been undertaken are outlined in Sections 4.2 – 4.5.

Purpose of the Consultation

- 4.2 There is no legislative requirement to consult on a proposal to mothball a school. However, it is good practice to gather the views of those affected prior to making a decision, particularly where this could lead to a formal proposal to close the school at a future date (which would require a full statutory consultation).

Who was Consulted

- 4.3 A letter was sent to all families with pre-school or primary age children (with the exception of Primary 7 children as they are not affected), living in the catchment areas of these two schools as they may be affected by this proposal. The letters sent are attached as Appendix 1a and 1b.

Period of the Consultation

- 4.4 The letters were sent out on 17 January 2019 and those consulted were given 4 weeks to respond. The consultation closed on 15 February 2019.

Responses to Consultation

- 4.5 A total of 19 letters were sent out to Bothkennar catchment families and 21 letters to those living in the Limerigg Primary School catchment.

There were 2 responses to the consultation, one from each catchment area. Neither family currently has a child enrolled at either school nor raised any objection to the proposal. The responses are detailed in Appendix 2 with some details redacted to avoid identifying individual pupils.

5. Proposed Way Forward

Mothballing of Bothkennar and Limerigg Primary Schools

- 5.1 Children's Services propose that Bothkennar and Limerigg Primary Schools are mothballed from the end of the current academic session (2018/19).
- 5.2 All children currently enrolled at these schools, and those that have applied to start Primary 1 in August, will be automatically transferred to the alternative catchment school unless a successful placing request is made to a non-catchment school. The alternative catchment school for Bothkennar Primary School is Beancross, and for Limerigg Primary School is Slamannan.
- 5.3 Following the mothballing, free home to school transport will be offered to all children living in the Limerigg and Bothkennar primary school catchment areas who are attending their alternative catchment school (Slamannan or Beancross).
- 5.4 If pupils choose to transfer from Limerigg or Bothkennar Primary Schools to their alternative catchment school during the current academic session (2018/19) before the mothballing takes effect, then a placing request will not be required and assistance with transport will be offered. This may result in these schools being closed/mothballed before the end of the current academic session.
- 5.5 Staff who work at these 2 schools will be offered re-deployment elsewhere in the Service. The trade unions will be updated via the Service Partnership Forum and the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT).
- 5.6 Demand for places at both schools will be reviewed annually following the primary 1 enrolment process. If either or both of these schools remains mothballed for a period of 2 years, a further report will be brought to the Education Executive on future options.

6 Implications

Financial/Resources

- 6.1 As pupils enrolled at the two affected schools will transfer to their alternative catchment school, additional resources will be given to the alternative catchment school in line with the schools' per-capita formula and normal class configuration assessments.

There will be additional costs to provide home to school transport to the alternative catchment schools. However, this will be offset by the reduction in operational running costs resulting in the temporary closure of both schools, and any efficiencies derived from fewer classes being required.

Legal

- 6.2 A statutory consultation is not required when proposing that a school be mothballed.
- 6.3 Any staff deemed to be “surplus”, following these schools being mothballed, will be offered re-deployment elsewhere within the service. No job losses will arise from this. However, there will be a reduction in the overall number of teachers required by the Authority. This will be reflected in the number of new teachers recruited for the next academic session.

Risk

- 6.4 None

Equalities

- 6.5 An Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA) has been undertaken on this proposal. The assessment found that there was a low risk to selected groups which can be mitigated against using existing policies.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 6.6 Both schools will be maintained in a reasonable condition on a wind and watertight basis, pending a future decision being made as to their viability in 2 years.

7 Conclusions

- 7.1 The very low demand for places at Bothkennar and Limerigg Primary schools mean that these two schools are not currently viable and should be mothballed. The recent informal consultation with families that would be affected has confirmed that there is no objection to this measure.

Director of Children's Service

Author – Richard Teed, Senior Forward Planning Officer, Children's Services,
01324 506621, richard.teed@falkirk.gov.uk

Appendices

- Appendix 1a and 1b – Consultation letters
- Appendix 2 – Summary of Feedback from Consultation Responses.

List of Background Papers:

- None

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

Letter sent to families living in the Bothkennar PS catchment

“Consultation on Proposal for the Mothballing of Bothkennar Primary School

You may be aware that the school roll at Bothkennar Primary School has fallen to very low levels this session and there are currently only 4 pupils enrolled at the school. Children’s Services will consider “mothballing” for any primary school where the school roll has 10 or less school pupils, and this is now what is proposed.

Mothballing is a process for temporary closure when the school roll falls very low. In these circumstances, the Authority and/or community may consider that the school is not currently viable, but do not wish to close it immediately because there is the prospect that pupil demand will increase in the future. Pupil demand will then be reviewed at least annually for the mothballed school to determine whether the school re-opens or not.

The purpose of this consultation is to gather the views of those who would be immediately affected by a temporary closure and report back to the Council’s Education Executive in March before a final decision is taken. We are consulting all parents and carers of pre-school and primary age pupils living in the Bothkennar Primary School catchment area.

The proposal is that Bothkennar Primary School is mothballed from August 2019 (session 2019/20).

Why are we proposing to mothball Bothkennar Primary school?

A school with one very small multi-composite class across 7 year stages may be the only viable option for very remote rural communities such as those found in the highlands and islands. However, Skinflats is not a remote village and is just over 2 miles from Beancross Primary School in Grangemouth which can offer pupils a lot more than Bothkennar Primary School is able to currently offer with such a small school roll.

Beancross Primary School can offer a broader curriculum, more activities, and a more diverse peer group for pupils. There are inherent difficulties and additional costs associated with operating a school for so few pupils and this compromises what can be offered to pupils at Bothkennar.

It is the view of Children’s Services that Bothkennar Primary School is currently not viable and an improved learning experience can be offered to the pupils at Beancross Primary School.

How does the proposal affect pupils currently at the school?

For the period that Bothkennar Primary School remains closed, the catchment area will be Beancross Primary School for any catchment pupils that are displaced. All catchment pupils currently at Bothkennar Primary School, or due to start in August 2019, will automatically transfer to Beancross Primary School. School transport will be provided.

Any non-catchment children attending Bothkennar Primary School under a placing request will automatically transfer to Beancross Primary School with their peers unless we receive a placing request for an alternative school.

How does the proposal affect pupils living in the catchment area who are already attending Beancross Primary School?

All pupils living in the Bothkennar Primary School catchment that are already attending Beancross Primary School under a placing request will become entitled to free school transport for as long as the school is closed.

Will the school close permanently following a mothballing decision?

A permanent closure may be proposed at a future date if pupil demand does not increase to a reasonable level. In the event that a permanent closure is proposed, there will be a formal consultation with all those affected (parents, staff, pupils, wider community) in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, before any final decision is taken.

Before the Council make a final decision on this, I would like to hear from you. Please complete the online response form at:

<https://say.falkirk.gov.uk/childrens-services/4ddd66c9>

or respond by email to educ.consultation@falkirk.gov.uk. You can also write to me at the address on the front of this letter.

If you would like to discuss this proposal further, please phone the number at the head of the letter. Please note that telephone conversations will not be recorded as part of this consultation.

Please respond online, or in writing by Friday February 15th. Your response will be reported to the Council's Education Executive on 27th March where a decision will be taken on whether to mothball Bothkennar Primary School from August 2019."

Letter sent to families living in the Limerigg PS catchment

“Consultation on Proposal for the Mothballing of Limerigg Primary School

You will be aware that the school roll at Limerigg Primary School has fallen to very low levels this session and there are currently only 5 pupils enrolled at the school. Children’s Services will consider “mothballing” for any primary school where the school roll has 10 or less school pupils, and this is now what is proposed.

Mothballing is a process for temporary closure when the school roll falls very low. In these circumstances, the Authority and/or community may consider that the school is not currently viable, but do not wish to close it immediately because there is the prospect that pupil demand will increase in the future. Pupil demand will then be reviewed at least annually for the mothballed school to determine whether the school re-opens or not.

The purpose of this consultation is to gather the views of those who would be immediately affected by a temporary closure and report back to the Council’s Education Executive in March before a final decision is taken. We are consulting all parents and carers of pre-school an

The proposal is that Limerigg Primary School is mothballed from August 2019 (session 2019/20).

Why are we proposing to mothball Limerigg Primary school?

A school with one very small multi-composite class across 7 year stages may be the only viable option for very remote rural communities such as those found in the highlands and islands. However, Limerigg is not a remote village and is less than 2 miles from Slamannan Primary School which can offer pupils a lot more than Limerigg Primary School is able to currently offer with such a small school roll. Slamannan Primary School is still relatively small, but with roughly one class per year stage it can offer a broader curriculum, more activities, and a more diverse peer group for pupils.

There are inherent difficulties and additional costs associated with operating a school for so few pupils and this compromises what can be offered to pupils.

It is the view of Children’s Services that Limerigg Primary School is currently not viable and an improved learning experience can be offered to the pupils at Slamannan Primary School.

How does the proposal affect pupils currently at the school?

For the period that Limerigg Primary School remains closed, the catchment area will be Slamannan Primary School for any catchment pupils that are displaced. All catchment pupils currently at Limerigg Primary School, or due to start in August 2019, will automatically transfer to Slamannan Primary School. School transport will be provided.

Any non-catchment children attending Limerigg Primary School under a placing request will automatically transfer to Slamannan Primary School with their peers unless we receive a placing request for an alternative school.

How does the proposal affect pupils living in the catchment area who are already attending Slamannan Primary School?

All pupils living in the Limerigg Primary School catchment that are already attending Slamannan Primary School under a placing request will become entitled to free school transport for as long as the school is closed.

Will the school close permanently following a mothballing decision?

A permanent closure may be proposed at a future date if pupil demand does not increase to a reasonable level. In the event that a permanent closure is proposed, there will be a formal consultation with all those affected (parents, staff, pupils, wider community) in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, before any final decision is taken.

Before the Council make a final decision on this, I would like to hear from you. Please complete the online response form at:

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If you would like to discuss this proposal further, please phone the number at the head of the letter. Please note that telephone conversations will not be recorded as part of this consultation.

Please respond online, or in writing by Friday February 15th. Your response will be reported to the Council's Education Executive on 27th March where a decision will be taken on whether to mothball Limerigg Primary School from August 2019."

Summary of Feedback from Consultation Responses

Response 1 (Bothkennar PS catchment parent):

“The proposal does not affect my child (*..as they attend another primary for reasons stated*)

I think the proposal is a good idea as it is not sufficient to keep a school open for less than 10 kids.”

Response 2 (Limerigg PS catchment parent):

“Limerigg Primary School is our catchment school, however we chose to apply out of catchment (*..for reasons stated and intend to send their other child to the same out of catchment school..*) so the proposal to close Limerigg Primary School should not affect our family.”