



EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

APPENDIX 1

**CONSULTATION REPORT REGARDING
THE CLOSURE OF LONGHAVEN SCHOOL**

APRIL 2022

**This Consultation Report has been issued by
Education & Children's Services of Aberdeenshire Council in
accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

**If you have difficulty reading this document please contact
Learning Estates Team on 01771 676600
or LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared following a consultation on the proposal to discontinue education at Longhaven School, which is currently mothballed and re-assign its catchment area to either Boddam School and/or Port Erroll School.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 on the above proposal. The objective of this report is to:
- Provide a record of the total number and a summary of written and oral responses received during the statutory consultation period;
 - Provide a statement of the Council's response to those written and oral representations;
 - Provide the full text of Education Scotland's report and a statement of the Council's response to this report;
 - Provide a statement on how the Council reviewed the above proposal following the representations received during the statutory consultation period and the report from Education Scotland;
 - Provide details of any omission from, or inaccuracy in, the proposal document and state how the Council acted on it;
 - State how the Council has obeyed with Section 9(1) and 11A to 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 when reviewing the above proposal;
 - Provide officers conclusions and recommendation.

2 The Consultation Process

- 2.1 The requirement for consulting on a relevant proposal relating to schools is set out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 2 December 2021 Education and Children's Services Committee authorised the launch of a statutory consultation regarding the Closure of Longhaven School.
- 2.3 The proposal document made clear to consultees that the consultation period would run from 7 December 2021 until 24 February 2022. This adequately covered the required minimum of 30 days term time consultation.
- 2.4 On 7 December 2021 copies of the proposal document were distributed to
- Parent Councils of Boddam School and Port Erroll School
 - Parents of the pupils at Boddam School and Port Erroll School
 - Pupils at Boddam School and Port Erroll School
 - Parents of pre-school age children living within the Longhaven School catchment area
 - Staff at Boddam School and Port Erroll School
 - Trade union representatives of Boddam School and Port Erroll School staff

- Cruden Community Council
 - Boddam Community Council
 - Local Early Years Partner Providers
 - Longhaven School catchment residents
 - Education Scotland
- 2.5 The consultation proposal was posted to all residents of the Longhaven School catchment area and emailed to all other consultees. Paper copies were posted where the Council received a delivery failure notification from the email address provided.
- 2.6 Boddam and Port Erroll Schools were provided with spare copies of the proposal, along with maps and a poster which contained information on the public meetings and how to complete the online survey.
- 2.7 A copy of the document was also available on request from Aberdeenshire Council Learning Estates Team.
- 2.8 A copy of the launch poster was distributed to be displayed at Longhaven School and Longhaven Community Hall during the consultation period.
- 2.9 The proposal document was also published on the Council website:
<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/education-consultations/>
- 2.10 Communication regarding a change from a face to face meeting scheduled for 24 January 2022 to an online meeting was distributed to all consultees through a letter or email.
- 2.11 Communication regarding the consultation and public meetings was published on the Council's Website, Facebook and Twitter pages.
- 2.12 The consultation was also advertised in Buchan Observer on 18 January 2022, this included details of the public meetings.
- 2.13 An online survey was available throughout the consultation period.
- 2.14 Online public consultation meetings were held on 24 January 2022 at 6.30pm and on 25 January 2022 at 11.00am.
- 2.15 The consultees were given the option to submit their comments on the proposal via email to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or posted to: Learning Estates Team, Gordon House, Blackhall Road, Inverurie, AB51 3WA.
- 2.16 The consultees were given details on how to contact the Learning Estates Team to arrange individual appointments if for any reason they were unable to attend either of the online meetings. This was also communicated throughout duration of the online meetings.

2.17 Education Scotland received a copy of the proposal document and attended the online public meetings. At the end of the consultation period, they were sent all written representations received by the Council. They then held online meetings with Boddam and Port Erroll Schools. Following their involvement, Education Scotland prepared a report on the educational aspects of the proposal. This aspect is covered in more detail under Section 8 of this report.

2.18 In line with the statutory requirement this consultation report was published on the Aberdeenshire Council's website on 12 April 2022, exactly one week prior to the Buchan Area Committee and more than three weeks prior to the Council taking the decision on whether to implement the proposal.

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/education-consultations/>

3 The Proposal

3.1 The proposal document included as Appendix A to this report, was issued to those individuals and bodies listed under 'Distribution' within the proposal document. The proposal document was also published on the Council website:

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/education-consultations/>

3.2 The schools affected by this proposal are:

- Longhaven School
- Boddam School
- Port Erroll School

3.3 The proposal on which the consultation took place was:

To discontinue education at Longhaven School, which is currently mothballed, and re-assign its catchment area to either Boddam School and/or Port Erroll School.

3.4 The proposal document gave three options for realigning the Longhaven catchment area either in full to Boddam School or in full to Port Erroll School, or combination of both the schools. Five further options for realigning the catchment area were discounted, and two alternatives to closure were identified as being to reopen the school or for Longhaven to remain mothballed.

3.5 The proposal document stated that the Longhaven School catchment area would be reassigned to one or both of the neighbouring primary schools, namely: Boddam School and Port Erroll School.

3.6 The proposal document advised that the proposed changes, if approved, would take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

- 3.7 The proposal document stated that all existing primary aged pupils would continue their education at the schools they are currently attending. Any siblings of those current pupils would be able to join their brother/sister(s) at the same school.
- 3.8 The proposal document confirmed that all pupils within the Longhaven catchment area would be entitled to school transport should they choose to attend the designated school.
- 3.9 If Longhaven School was to be permanently closed, then there would be no requirement for the building to continue as a school. Education and Children's Services would declare the building surplus to requirement.
- 3.10 The options appraisal process has identified a number of alternative uses for the school and Aberdeenshire Council would be happy to work with the local community to see whether the school building could be suitable for community use. This would have to be fully assessed following the Asset Disposal Policy and subject to a Community Asset Transfer Application.
- 3.11 There will not be any staffing implications relating to the proposal if implemented.

4 Educational Benefits Statement

- 4.1 The proposal document contains within it an educational benefits statement. This statement is replicated here for reference.
- 4.2 That statement drew upon the current positive educational experiences that pupils living within the catchment area are having at other local schools. These are in contrast to the experiences that would be available with a roll of fewer than five pupils, should parents wish to enrol their children at Longhaven School again.
- 4.3 Educational benefits are considered below for pupils if either of the options identified are adopted.
- 4.4 Pupils at both Boddam and Port Erroll Schools regularly work in co-operative learning groups. Cooperative learning strategy normally involves four pupils of roughly the same age group working together collaboratively. If Longhaven School re-opened with a low roll that would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static and there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. The pupils may not be of a similar age and could be spread across P1-P7. A low roll would further limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.

- 4.5 Pupils at both Boddam and Port Erroll Schools regularly work in co-operative learning groups. Cooperative learning strategy normally involves four pupils of roughly the same age group working together collaboratively. If Longhaven School re-opened with a low roll that would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static and there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. The pupils may not be of a similar age and could be spread across P1-P7. A low roll would further limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
- 4.6 The proposal would provide improved opportunities for children to develop skills for learning, life and work e.g., increasing opportunities for working with others of a similar age and stage which are very limited in schools of less than eight children in a multi-composite setting.
- 4.7 A larger roll enhances the sustainability and viability of a school and offers greater opportunities to learners.
- 4.8 While it may seem that having fewer pupils in a class would allow a teacher to provide more one-on-one attention, fewer is not always better, when it comes to pupils learning experiences. Classes low in pupil numbers, have disadvantages. These disadvantages are further compounded when a school has a single class, potentially with only one or two children at each year stage.
- 4.9 While one or two pupils absent from a large class isn't a major issue, a small number of absent pupils can make a big difference in a small class. If there are only eight pupils in a class, two missing pupils represent a much larger percentage of the class population, making it more difficult for the teacher to continue with planned lessons.
- 4.10 A larger class is more likely to represent a diverse cross section of society. Pupils benefit from being members of diverse classes because they have the opportunity to hear viewpoints that differ greatly from their own. While some small classes do have a diverse array of members, many are relatively homogeneous in nature and, as such, do not offer pupils the opportunity to learn in a diverse setting.
- 4.11 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the modern school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Both Boddam and Port Erroll Schools have sufficient pupils to allow the children to work collaboratively on various topics and activities. The class teachers will work with both individuals and groups at each stage of the curriculum, and group working allows pupils to develop different skills from those that are developed during individual work.

- 4.12 Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.
- 4.13 Some pupils enjoy the anonymity associated with being a member of a large class. These pupils are uncomfortable in the spotlight and prefer to blend in with the crowd as they move through the process of learning. For pupils of this nature, small classes are far from desirable because in educational settings with reduced pupil numbers they do not have the same opportunity to mix with their peer group. The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age-appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form.
- 4.14 A larger school roll offers children from the Longhaven School catchment area an increased possibility of participating in teams in a range of games. These educational, cultural and sporting activities provide a number of benefits for children in terms of both academic and social development and support the process of transition towards the larger and more varied educational setting of a secondary school.
- 4.15 Port Erroll School has a Stem Cafe which gives pupils the opportunity to explore and develop a deeper understanding as well as a wider skillset in technology, coding, engineering, science and literacy. The school also has a Skills Hub which aims at developing skills for life while supporting ongoing learning. There are opportunities to participate in woodwork, cooking, sewing, photography, film, music and art.
- 4.16 Port Erroll School also offers pupils the opportunity to be on the Junior Leadership Team, Pupil Council, Digital Leaders, Eco Committee and Sustainability Champions. Boddam School offers pupils the opportunity to participate as House Captains and Playleaders.
- 4.17 Pupils at Boddam School and Port Erroll School can participate in the annual Christmas Concert and sports day held at the end of each session.
- 4.18 During the year both Boddam School and Port Erroll School participate in raising funds for various charities.
- 4.19 Some of the educational benefits arise not from larger pupil number (e.g. to form teams of similar age and size), but also because a larger staff and parent body increases the likelihood of interested adults leading a range of activities.
- 4.20 Both Boddam School and Port Erroll School have Parent Councils who support the school and nursery with school improvements and fundraising. All parents

are welcome to attend Parent Council Meetings. If Longhaven School were to re-open there would be an opportunity for a Parent Council to operate, however with a small pupil cohort there would be a smaller number of families to participate results on a greater reliance on individuals to support the school.

4.21 It is Aberdeenshire Council's view that the pupils from the Longhaven School catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at the larger neighbouring schools. Formalising the current arrangements would provide several such benefits, judged against both the Aberdeenshire and National criteria set out in the proposal document.

4.22 All pupils from the Longhaven catchment area currently attend other schools in the Peterhead and Mintlaw clusters. No adverse effects for those pupils are expected to arise from the permanent closure of Longhaven School.

5 Public Engagement

5.1 Public Meetings

All parents/carers and stakeholders were invited to public meetings which were scheduled to be held during the consultation period to discuss the proposal.

A face-to-face public meeting was scheduled to be held at Longhaven Community Hall on 24 January 2022 at 6.30pm. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions this meeting was changed to an online meeting. The rationale for changing the meeting from face to face to online were as follows:

- current guidelines are for all Parent Council and PTA meetings should occur online,
- parents are unable to enter schools or playgrounds,
- number of officers (and therefore households) required to attend,
- mitigation can be put in place to support those with difficulty attending digitally,
- confidence that the Council can meet the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010,
- survey the participants of the virtual meetings to ensure they felt they could hear all of the meeting and had opportunity to comment and question,
- completed risk assessment.

Communication was posted or emailed to consultees advising them of the change to the meeting. A link to the meeting was also provided.

Details of how to contact the Learning Estates Team with a possibility of arranging individual appointments for those stakeholders who were unable to attend either of the online meetings were included within the communication. No contact was recorded.

The second online public meeting was held on 25 January 2022 at 11.00am, as planned.

The first meeting was attended by two public members and the second by one.

The members of the public had no comments to make and no questions were raised, which indicate that there was no opposition to the proposal. Two Councillors made statements.

Full notes of the meetings are attached as Appendices C and D.

5.2 Online Survey

During the consultation period parents/carers, stakeholders and community members were invited to take part in the online survey to express their opinion on the proposal. 12 consultees completed the survey and 10 open ended responses were received. The summary of submitted feedback has been provided in Appendix E. It is not appropriate to share the full transcript of responses, as some responses could identify respondents. The responses have been redacted to prevent identification of any individuals and have also been appended to this report as Appendix F.

The survey asked whether respondents supported the closure of Longhaven School. Eight respondents (67%) support the closure and four (33%) do not support the closure of Longhaven School.

Consultees were asked which option they preferred. *Option 1* (Close Longhaven School and merge with Boddam School) was supported by one (8%) respondent. *Option 2* (Close Longhaven School and merge with Port Erroll School) was supported by two (17%) respondents. *Option 3* (Close Longhaven School and create a dual zone between Boddam School and Port Erroll School) was the most popular with nine respondents (75%) supporting this.

5.3 Discussion with Pupils

As part of the consultation process, Head Teachers at Boddam School and Port Erroll School discussed the proposal regarding the closure of Longhaven School and re-assigning its catchment to either Boddam and/or Port Erroll. Full details of feedback received from both the schools have been provided in Appendix G.

5.4 Staff Engagement

As Longhaven School has been mothballed since October 2018, all staff previously based at Longhaven School have been employed at other establishments or have resigned from their posts. Staff within Boddam and Port Erroll Schools have been given the opportunity to discuss the proposal. No further staff feedback has been received.

6 Written Responses

- 6.1 During the consultation period between 7 December 2021 and 24 February 2022, representations were invited from statutory consultees and interested parties. One written comment to the consultation was submitted and it is provided below:

“I agree with the proposal to close given the circumstances in which the school finds itself, which are unfortunate to say the least. In a small rural community, the school is often the heart of the community and in this case gave support to the adjacent public hall through its rental for physical education, concerts and PTA events; made good use of the community-owned playing field, to which it had a direct safe access; and also created passing trade for the village shop from parents dropping-off and picking-up. In addition, the school put on various events in the public hall over the course of the school year which brought the community together.

All that has now been lost owing to the very strange manner of the council appointing the one teacher based at the school to a new post and not delaying that appointment until the vacancy at Longhaven was filled or, more logically, arranging temporary cover when the teacher went off to her new posting. In this, there is a lesson to be learned by the Education Department.

Given the school effectively closed its doors in April 2018, coming up for four years ago, it is important that this process, while adhering to all statutory requirements, is carried out as swiftly as possible so the school buildings can be repurposed, whether by the authority or a private purchaser, and not be left to deteriorate.

I understand once this consultation is complete that Education Scotland will consider the matter before it comes back to the Buchan Area Committee. This should be done prior to the summer recess if reporting deadlines allow.

In respect of the Longhaven School Zone, it is my understanding that some children within zone already attend Longside School, with others attending Boddam and Port Erroll Schools. Looking at the map, the far north-west of the zone would indeed be more inclined towards Longside both by distance and by length of unclassified or C Class roads which would need to be travelled on to reach any of the alternative schools. These roads are unlikely to receive much by the way of treatment during periods of snow or ice. Consideration should therefore be given to either splitting the Longhaven School Zone three ways (Port Erroll, Boddam and Longside), or designating it as a triple-overlap zone where parents have the choice of the three schools.”

7 Education Authority Response to Written and Oral Representations

- 7.1 Comments received during the consultation period have been carefully considered and the Council response is provided below. The comments fall into the following themes.

7.2 Recruitment arrangements at Longhaven School

A comment was made about appointing a Longhaven School teacher to a different post and not delaying that appointment until the vacancy at Longhaven was filled or not arranging a temporary cover.

As explained in the Options Appraisals document, in 2018 the Council experienced ongoing staffing and recruitment challenges trying to appoint for the Head Teacher and Teacher posts. The school roll dropped from 12 to five pupils due to a number of families moving schools for several reasons. Upon consultations with affected families, the remaining five pupils were placed at local schools, while the Council continued to readvertise the posts. The closing date for the posts was extended due to there being no applicants. When a potential candidate for the Head Teacher post was identified, Longhaven School families were approached to discuss the position of the school, but the families wished to remain in their new schools. At that time there were still no applications for the Teacher post.

7.3 Re-assigning the Longhaven catchment to Longside School or creating a triple zone between Boddam, Port Erroll and Longside Schools

A comment was made that the Longhaven School catchment area should be split between Boddam School, Port Erroll School and Longside School or a triple zone created between the three schools, since the far north-west of the Longhaven School catchment area is more inclined towards Longside School.

Officers took into consideration merging the Longhaven School catchment area into the Longside School catchment. However, this option was discounted on the basis that it would require for most of the Longhaven pupils to travel further to get to school, and once they reach secondary school age they would need to travel to Mintlaw Academy. The distances from the furthest north-west part of the Longhaven School catchment area to Longside School and Mintlaw Academy is approx. 4.5 miles and 7.5 miles, accordingly. The distance from the most distant parts of the Longhaven catchment to Boddam School, Port Erroll School and Peterhead Academy is approx. 6.2 miles, 4.6 miles and 6 miles, accordingly. Since Longside School and Mintlaw Academy lie within Mintlaw Cluster this option would require a change in the existing cluster boundaries and subsequently another consultation that involved Longside School and Mintlaw Academy.

Creating a triple zone between Boddam, Port Erroll and Longside was not an option that was initially considered as a part of the options appraisal process. Officers have further considered this option, and if a triple zone was offered to Longhaven pupils to attend either Boddam, Port Erroll or Longside, but remaining zoned to Peterhead Academy, then this could be adopted as a minor

amendment to the existing consultation. On this basis there would be no requirement for further consultation, and this could be a viable solution. However, if Longhaven pupils were zoned to Longside School for their primary education but remained zoned to Peterhead Academy for their secondary education, they would be in the position of attending a different secondary school to the majority of their peers at Longside School who would be zoned to Mintlaw Academy.

The Council agreed this option could be explored again should there be further interest. This option seems not to be echoed by the Longhaven community members, as during the informal engagement and consultation period no survey respondents suggested that the Longhaven School catchment should be zoned to Longside School or a triple zone should be created between Boddam, Port Erroll and Longside Schools. The views detailed at Section 6.1 have not been echoed by any other consultees.

7.4 Re-assigning the Longhaven catchment to Dales Park School

During the Buchan Area Committee meeting a comment was made that merging Longhaven School with Dales Park School continued as a possible option.

Officers considered merging the Longhaven School catchment area into the Dales Park School catchment and concluded this option would not be reasonable. As outlined in Section 9 of the Proposal Document, Dales Park School has recently gone through a rigorous consultation period to relocate to the new Peterhead Community Campus in 2025. The distance to Dales Park School would be greater than the other options considered.

As in the case of rezoning the Longhaven School catchment area to the Longside School catchment, this option hasn't been put forward for consideration by the Longhaven community, neither during the options appraisal period nor the statutory consultation.

7.5 Unclassified roads safety during winter months

A concern was raised regarding treatment of unclassified roads during periods of snow or ice if Longhaven School is reassigned to Boddam School or Port Erroll School instead of Longside School.

Aberdeenshire Council provides home to school transport for around 10,000 pupils daily to schools across Aberdeenshire. There are already pupils transported by the Authority to Boddam School and Port Erroll School. This includes pupils from the Longhaven catchment.

The travel distance and travel time between Longhaven School and Boddam

School and Port Erroll School is not considered to be unreasonable. It is not uncommon for pupils to travel greater distances on more minor roads to reach their school and travelling for primary school education is common across Aberdeenshire because of the geography of the area.

It is recognised that adverse weather in the winter can impact on travel arrangements across Aberdeenshire. It is not unusual for pupils travelling to primary schools to be affected by severe weather. Head Teachers take into account the local circumstances when deciding to close the school and/or send pupils home early. All schools in Aberdeenshire have an emergency closure plan for severe weather in place which is drawn up by the Head Teachers following a risk assessment and in consultation with school transport operators.

7.6 Community Impact – Loss of the school

A comment was made that the school is the heart of the community which would be ripped out if the school was to close.

Longhaven School has been mothballed since 2018 due to a falling roll as the result of successful placing request made by parents to other local schools. The data on pupil numbers indicates that there are families living in the area but that they are not attending the local school. It is clear that families living in the catchment area are travelling to access education as well as other services, such as GP, dental surgeries, shops and other community facilities. It appears to be an accepted part of life within the community.

The school was not generally used by the community. With the exception of Councilor's Surgeries, there were no regular lets of the school in recent years by the community. This indicates that the community does not rely on the school as a public/community facility. There is a well used Community Hall beside the school available for lets.

The evidence outlined above indicates that there will be little impact on the existing arrangements of the community as well as its sustainability if the school was closed.

A comment was made that former pupils of the school should be given an opportunity to go back and visit the school.

Should the decision be made to close the school, options will be considered for allowing this to take place. This would need to be subject to relevant risk assessments.

7.7 Negative impact on Longhaven pupils if the school was to reopen

A comment was made that the school has not been open for sufficient time to ensure that children within the catchment area are now settled at other schools - to move them back to a much smaller school could be detrimental to them.

The comment was noted. Throughout informal engagement and during the consultation period, none of the parents/carers of pre-school and school age children living within the Longhaven School catchment area expressed a wish to re-enrol their child(ren) at the school if it was reopened. They were concerned regarding the viability of the school if it reopened with such a small roll.

7.8 Longhaven School performance

A comment was made that Longhaven has traditionally been a very good school.

With insufficient number of pupils on the roll, the Council is not able to deliver viable education for Longhaven pupils. Making educational experiences viable and ensuring that pupils receive the entirety of the broad curricular entitlements require interaction between pupils of different age groups.

The educational benefits statement outlined in the proposal document were considered and explained but this did not imply that the education provided at Longhaven School was poor quality.

7.9 Longhaven resources

Comments were made about remaining resources left in the school and that they should be distributed between Port Erroll and Boddam Schools to provide them with more resources and ensure these don't go to waste.

The Council is determined to ensure that learning estate become more sustainable and negative impact on the environment is reduced. This includes commitment to the circular economy on reusing surplus resources, equipment and furniture wherever possible.

If a decision is made to permanently close the school, schools will be approached to express an interest in the furniture, equipment and resources in the first instance. Options for distribution to community groups would also be explored as a second stage.

7.10 Future of the building and potential uses

Comments were made that the building should be sold or repurposed, whether by the Authority or a private purchaser, but not to be left to deteriorate, should the decision be made to close the school.

Any use of the building that is not as a primary school, require the school to be formally closed before they are implemented.

Aberdeenshire Council has an Asset Disposal Policy which must be followed when assets become surplus to requirements. If a decision is made to permanently close Longhaven School, there would be no requirement for the building to continue as a school. It would be the intention of the Service to declare the building surplus to requirement, other council services will be approached to express an interest in the site. This would have to be fully assessed through the asset disposal procedure. Thereafter any surplus council sites can be subject to a Community Asset Transfer Application.

The engagement sessions and options appraisal sought suggestions from the community about how they would like the school building to be used if it was closed. A full list of suggestions and comments with an overview of the requirements for them to be implemented was outlined in the Options Appraisal document. Many of the suggestions provided would require a commitment from other sectors within Aberdeenshire Council or NHS involvement or private sector commitment to be effective. These can be explored further depending upon the Council decision on the consultation.

7.11 Decision making process

A comment was made for the consultation report to be presented at the Buchan Area Committee prior to the summer recess, if reporting deadlines allow.

The consultation report will be considered by Buchan Area Committee on 19 April 2022.

7.12 Environmental Impact

At the Education & Children's Services Committee advice was given to officers to provide estimates of the potential reduction of carbon footprint if Longhaven School was to close.

There are 11 mainstream pupils residing in the Longhaven catchment, who already travel to local schools, for which there is an environmental impact. Nine pupils travel to Boddam School and Port Erroll School. Out of those pupils, four are transported by the Authority and five by their parents. Two pupils travel to Longside School and they are transported by their parents.

Analysis has been carried out to identify the additional emissions of CO₂ arising from the current transport arrangements for Longhaven pupils attending Boddam School, Port Erroll School and Longside School. The base figures for pupils transported by the Authority have been received from the Passenger Transport Unit. For all other pupils an assumption has been made that each family is transporting their own children to school and an average CO₂ emissions figure of cars registered for the first time comes from the most recent UK Government data.

The annual CO₂ emissions due to Longhaven pupils travelling to local school are 2 tonnes. This should be set against the annual emissions of 50 tonnes

from the Longhaven School building, when it was last operational, which results in 48 tonnes of CO₂ emissions reduction annually in the event of closure.

The negative environmental impact due to travel arrangements of Longhaven pupils is minimal due to the very small number of children and short distances involved.

7.13 Options to be discounted

Three comments were made by three separate respondents in terms of options that should be discounted:

- Option 1 (close Longhaven School and merge with Boddam School) should be discounted as it makes more sense, transportation wise, splitting the catchment between two schools utilising existing transport.
- Option 2 (close Longhaven School and merge with Port Erroll School) should be discounted as there should be choice for parents/pupils rather than making them go to a school that may be in wrong direction for commuting or they may live close to a community that go to another school.
- Option 3 (close Longhaven School and create a dual zone between Boddam School and Port Erroll School) should be discounted so pupils in the Longhaven area can have friends in the village.

Comments have been noted.

8 Education Scotland Report

8.1 In line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, a report was produced by Education Scotland on the educational aspects of the proposal.

8.2 Education Scotland attended the public meetings held on 24 and 25 January 2022 regarding the Council's proposal.

8.3 Education Scotland virtually met with relevant consultees of Longhaven School, Boddam School and Port Erroll School.

8.4 The Education Scotland report is reproduced in full as Appendix H.

8.5 The Education Scotland report supports the proposal and is summarised below:

- Education Scotland broadly agree with the Council's educational benefits statement and are confident there is sufficient merit to consider the permanent closure of Longhaven School.
- Education Scotland recognise that Aberdeenshire Council have actively engaged with the wider community to explore all reasonable alternatives to the closure of Longhaven School prior to the statutory consultation.

- Education Scotland agree that the proposal, should it proceed, will have minimal impact on the environment or on any other school due to very low numbers of children from the existing Longhaven catchment. Both Boddam School and Port Erroll School also have significant capacity to accommodate any increased roll and stakeholders welcome the stability offered by the increased rolls of other local schools.
- All stakeholders who spoke with Education Scotland are in favour of the Council's proposal to discontinue education at Longhaven School. The main concern expressed by consultees is to secure productive use for the already vacant school building.
- All stakeholders who spoke with Education Scotland unanimously prefer the third option: to create a dual zone/shared catchment with Boddam School and Port Erroll School. Education Scotland agree that this is a reasonable consideration.
- Parents welcome the commitment made to allow all children, and younger siblings, to continue their education at their current school regardless of new catchment arrangements.
- Stakeholders value the different opportunities and experiences in larger schools. Examples cited include, larger peer groups, leadership opportunities and range of additional activities and clubs.

8.6 The Council welcomes the Education Scotland report and accepts its findings. In response to the findings contained within the report, Aberdeenshire Council's response is as follows:

- The Council has acknowledged the community concern about the future of the school building. Should the proposal go ahead any alternative use of the building would have to be fully assessed following the Asset Disposal Policy and subject to a Community Asset Transfer Application.
- The Council has acknowledged that consultees who spoke with Education Scotland prefer the dual zone catchment to be created between Boddam School and Port Erroll School allowing decisions about schooling to be made on a personal basis and secure transport options to both schools.

9 Alleged Omissions or Inaccuracies

9.1 Section (10)(3) of The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out a requirement on the Council to provide details of any inaccuracies or omissions within the proposal document which has either been raised by the consultees or identified by the Council itself. The Council must also provide a statement on

the action taken in respect of the inaccuracy or omission, or, if no action was taken, to state that fact and explain why.

9.2 Officers are required to publish its response to representations made during the consultation period within its final Consultation Report.

9.3 There were no areas identified by consultees as being inaccurate or omitted from the proposal document during the consultation period.

10 Compliance with Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

10.1 Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 states that:

After the Education Authority has received HMIE's report, the Authority is to review the relevant proposal having regard (in particular) to:

- (a) written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the consultation period,
- (b) oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting,
- (c) HMIE's report.

10.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by officers where all the questions and comments raised were considered in detail. Data and factual information was checked where required and advice and input was sought from other Council Services where needed to consider the issues raised. This ensured that the Council met the requirements to review the proposal under Section 9(1) of the 2010 Act.

10.3 Officers of the Education Authority have listened carefully to the points made at the public meeting and have considered equally and carefully the written representations.

10.4 The Education Authority's position is set out in Section 8 of this document.

10.5 The proposal was reviewed to consider whether any of the representations led the Council to reconsider other options as being reasonable alternatives to the proposal to close Longhaven School and rezone to Boddam School and/or Port Erroll School. None of the representations led officers to conclude that any of these options should be reconsidered as reasonable alternatives.

10.6 The educational benefits were reviewed in respect of the Education Scotland report and representations made. There were no factors included in the Education Scotland report or representations made requiring any aspect of the educational benefits to be reconsidered.

10.7 There were no aspects included in the representations made which provided a different conclusion in relation to the rural school factors.

11 Compliance with Sections 11A to 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

11.1 Longhaven School is a rural accessible school, and the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires the Authority to have special regard to the following factors:

- (a) the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal,
- (b) the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal.

As Longhaven School is a rural school, special regard was paid to the rural school factors. These were considered fully in the Options Appraisal stage and set out in the Proposal Document. Prior to launching the statutory element of the consultation, opportunities were provided to all members of the community to either suggest ways to make the school viable again or alternative uses for the building that would benefit the community.

The Council received representations regarding the loss of the school, the use of the building, the impact on the community and the likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements as well as its environmental impact. These aspects have been set out in the Options Appraisal and Proposal documents.

The Council has further reviewed its proposal and the review considered whether our assessment of the rural school factors continued to be appropriate considering the representations received. The Council's updated assessment is detailed further below.

11.2 Likely effect on the local community

Loss of the school

In response to representations made during the consultation period, the Council's further assessment of the loss of the school to the community is detailed in Section 7.6.

Use of the building

In response to representations made during the consultation period, the Council's further assessment of the impact on the community's use of the building is detailed in Section 7.10.

11.3 Likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements

Travel arrangements

In response to representations made during the consultation period, further information on the likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements is detailed in Sections 7.5.

Environmental impact

In response to representations made during the consultation period, further information on environmental impact due to different travel arrangements and the school closure is detailed in Section 7.12.

12 Representations to Scottish Ministers in terms of Section 15 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

- 12.1 If the Authority makes a final decision to implement the proposal, it will require to notify the Scottish Ministers of that decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and consultation report. This must be done within six working days of that decision. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal.
- 12.2 Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process is known, the Authority cannot proceed to implement the proposal.
- 12.3 If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, they must refer the proposal to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels who may refuse to consent to the proposal or grant their consent to the proposal subject to conditions or unconditionally.
- 12.4 It should be noted that the legislation allows for any person to make representations to Scottish Ministers within three weeks of the Council taking their final decision to implement a closure proposal.
- 12.5 Aberdeenshire Council will take the decision on whether or not to implement this closure proposal at its meeting on 30 June 2022. If the decision is taken to implement the closure proposal, any representations to Scottish Ministers, therefore, in this context need to be with the Ministers within three weeks of this date. Therefore, any representations must be made to Scottish Ministers by 21 July 2022.
- 12.6 Anyone wishing to make representation to Scottish Ministers during the three-week period referred to above should do so by email to schoolclosure@gov.scot or in writing to:

The Scottish Government
School Infrastructure Unit
2A (South) Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ.

13 Conclusions

- 13.1 In review of the oral and written submissions to the formal consultation and survey results, it is clear that there is stakeholder support for the proposal to close Longhaven School.
- 13.2 Officers have carefully considered the opportunities, issues and challenges identified by stakeholders during both the informal engagement and formal consultation processes.
- 13.3 The Council now has 3 broad options, namely:
- (a) Adopt the proposal; or
 - (b) Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt; or
 - (c) Amend the proposal significantly and undertake a further consultation exercise on a new proposal; or
 - (d) Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo.
- 13.4 Each option is discussed below.

(a) Adopt the Proposal

If the Council chooses to adopt the proposal and close Longhaven School on a permanent basis then one of the three options for merging Longhaven School outlined in the proposal document would also need to be chosen.

The most popular option amongst respondents was *Option 3*, to create a dual zone between Boddam School and Port Erroll School. This option is supported by nine (75%) respondents, out of all 12 respondents to the survey. Eight (67%) respondents to the online survey support the closure of Longhaven School. Out of those seven (87%) is in favour of *Option 3*. All consultees that spoke with Education Scotland have also chosen *Option 3* as a preferred one.

If the Council adopts the proposal, it would be on the basis that the educational benefits set out in the proposal document would materialise and a period of uncertainty for the community would come to an end. Children will have access to greater learning opportunities and experiences and increased socialisation through being part of a larger school. Opportunities to participate in peer support, classroom learning, learning groups across stages and between classes and opportunities to engage in lunchtime, after school and team events will be increased. Projected numbers of children within the Longhaven catchment are insufficient to make the school viable. A significant factor in this is parental placing requests to other schools. Boddam School and Port Erroll School have the capacity to accommodate additional children. The proposal will assist the Council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources.

In summary, the key points that have been highlighted during the consultation period are as follows:

- The report from Education Scotland acknowledges that the proposal has clear educational benefits for pupils. These include larger peer groups, continuity in educational provision from ages 3-12, wider leadership opportunities for children and access to a wide range of facilities and extra-curricular activities. Children whom HM Inspectors engaged with shared their favourable experiences in their schools, both learning experiences and extra-curricular clubs such as coding, cooking and woodwork.
- The Council, having had special regard to the rural school factors, does not consider that the proposal will adversely affect the sustainability of the community. Indeed, there may be a positive opportunity for the Longhaven School building to be used for community use if it ceases to be used as a school.
- The proposals have generally been supported by the parents/carers, staff and the wider community who responded to the proposal.
- The distance between Longhaven School and the two schools is approximately 2.5 miles and a number of pupils are already making this journey attending Boddam and Port Erroll, some as the result of successful placing requests. Free home to school transport would be provided for all pupils from the Longhaven catchment area to attend Boddam School and Port Erroll School.

(b) Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt

During the Buchan Area Committee held on 11 January 2022 and as part of the written responses to the proposal, suggestions were made by Local Councillors to:

- split the Longhaven School catchment to Boddam School, Port Erroll School and Longside School,
- create a triple-zone between Boddam School, Port Erroll School and Longside School,
- consider Dales Park School as a viable option.

The proposal was reviewed to consider whether any of the representations led the Council to reconsider above suggestions as being reasonable alternatives to the proposal to close Longhaven School and rezone to Boddam School and/or Port Erroll School. None of the representations led officers to conclude that any of these options should be reconsidered as reasonable alternatives. The Council's position had been outlined in Section 7 of this report.

(c) Amend the proposal significantly and undertake a further consultation exercise on a new proposal

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that changes to the school estate are subject to rigorous statutory consultation. Any significant amendments to the proposal would require a full consultation with pupils, parents/carers and the wider community of all affected by the proposal schools.

Allowing for appropriate governance the process can take in the region of nine months to complete.

This is considered to be unreasonable to go through another lengthy statutory consultation process. The uncertainty surrounding the future of the school has impacted on the community and it is hoped that this statutory consultation to close Longhaven School will give clarity to the community and a sense of certainty regarding their children's education.

Having reviewed the Education Scotland report and feedback from consultees, officers concluded that the basis of the original proposal continues to be the most appropriate response to the unsustainable school roll of Longhaven School.

(d) Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo.

This option would be to continue to mothball Longhaven School. Maintaining the status quo would continue the uncertainty for the community. The repeated attempts to seek enrolments to school, suggest that it would be difficult for Longhaven School to re-open with a viable roll in the near future.

Withdrawing the proposal, the Council would be failing to recognise or respond to the educational and social benefits for Longhaven children. Education Scotland has recognised that the proposal would lead to clear educational benefits for Longhaven pupils.

14 Recommendation(s)

- 14.1 On the basis of the feedback received during the consultation period and taking account of the educational and social benefits of the proposal, it is concluded that the following proposal is the most reasonable, appropriate, sustainable and viable option for Longhaven School:
- 14.2 **The recommendation of officers is that the Council should adopt the proposal to permanently close Longhaven School and re-assign its catchment to both Boddam School and Port Erroll School creating a dual zone enabling parents to select between one of these schools.**