



CONSULTATION REPORT REGARDING THE CLOSURE OF GARTLY SCHOOL

September 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

Contents

1. Introduction
2. The Consultation Process
3. The Proposal
4. Educational Benefits Statement
5. Public Engagement
6. Written Responses
7. Education Authority Response to Written and Oral Representations
8. Education Scotland Report
9. Alleged Omissions or Inaccuracies and Additional Information
10. Compliance with Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010
11. Compliance with Sections 11A to 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010
12. Representations to Scottish Ministers in terms of Section 15 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010
13. Conclusion
14. Recommendation(s)

– Appendices –

- Appendix B - Closure of Gartly School Consultation Document
- Appendix B1 - Analysis of Surveys
- Appendix B2 - Financial Template
- Appendix C - Minutes of Meeting – 25 January 2022
- Appendix D - Minutes of Meeting – 26 January 2022
- Appendix E - Minutes of Meeting – 15 March 2022
- Appendix F - Pupil Feedback – Kennethmont School
- Appendix G - Pupil Feedback – Rhynie School
- Appendix H - Online Survey Report
- Appendix I - Education Scotland Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared following a consultation on the proposal to discontinue education at Gartly School, which is currently mothballed and re-assign its catchment area to that of either Rhynie School or Kennethmont 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;
 - 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 12 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 when reviewing the above proposals;
 - 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 Gartly 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 more than adequately covered the required minimum of 30 days term time consultation. Following the wishes of the community the consultation was extended by one month to 23 March 2022. This extension was communicated to all consultees.
- 2.4 On 7 December 2021 copies of the proposal document were distributed to
- All residents of the Gartly School catchment area
 - All pupils and parent/carers of pupils currently attending Rhynie Nursery, Rhynie School and Kennethmont School.
 - Parent Councils and staff of Rhynie and Kennethmont Schools
 - Strathbogie Community Council, Huntly Community Council and Tap O Noth Community Council
 - Relevant users of Gartly School

- Local Elected Members
- Private Early Years Partner Providers within Huntly Cluster
- Trade Union Representatives of the affected staff
- Education Scotland

- 2.5 The consultation proposal was posted to all properties within the Gartly School catchment area and emailed to all other consultees.
- 2.6 Both Rhynie School and Kennethmont School were provided with copies of the proposal, along with maps and a poster which contained information on the public meetings and how to access 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 early years establishments within the Huntly Cluster.
- 2.9 The proposal document was also published on the Council website:
<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/education-consultations/>
- 2.10 Communication regarding the consultation was published on the Council's Facebook and Twitter pages. Social media was updated regularly throughout the consultation period.
- 2.11 The consultation was also advertised in the Huntly Express on 20 January 2022, and 10 March 2022, these included details of the public meetings.
- 2.12 An online survey was available throughout the consultation period.
- 2.13 The consultees were also given the option to submit their comments to on the proposal via email to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or posted to: Learning Estates Team, Gordon House, Blackhall Road, Inverurie, AB51 3WA.
- 2.14 Online meetings were held at 6.30pm on 25 January 2022, and at 11am on 26 January 2022.
- 2.15 A third public meeting was held at 6.30pm on 15 March 2022 at the Community Hall (Tin Hut), Old Military Road (A97), Huntly, AB54 4PX.
- 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 held on 25 and 26 January 2022 as well as the in-person meeting held on 15 March 2022.

- 2.18 At the end of the consultation period, Education Scotland were provided with all documentation relating to the consultation. They also held virtual visits to Kennethmont School and Rhynie School, which included discussion with relevant consultees. Following their involvement, Education Scotland prepared a report on the educational aspects of the proposal. This aspect is covered in more detail within Section 8 of the report.
- 2.19 Adhering to the statutory requirement this consultation report was published on the Aberdeenshire Council's website on 13 September 2022, exactly one week prior to Marr Area Committee and more than three weeks prior to the Council taking the decision on whether to implement the proposal.
<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/>

3. The Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal document included as Appendix B 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 proposal on which the consultation took place was:
- To discontinue education at Gartly School, which is currently mothballed and re-assign its catchment area to that of either Rhynie School or Kennethmont School.***
- 3.3 The schools affected by this proposal are;
- Gartly School
 - Rhynie School
 - Kennethmont School
- 3.4 On 13 December 2018 an oil leak was identified at Gartly School. As a result, it was agreed that the school would be decanted to Kennethmont School with nursery pupils going to Rhynie School, as it was anticipated the situation would be resolved relatively quickly.
- 3.5 Despite extensive remediation works undertaken at Gartly School to excavate, process and properly dispose of a considerable volume of contaminated soil and other material, the problem was not resolved.
- 3.6 During 2019 meetings were held for members of the public as well as workshops for parent/carers of the pupils of Gartly School. The temporary solution at Kennethmont School with both schools operating two classes, using all three classrooms and the dining area was not suitable for a prolonged period. Parents were given the choice of either relocating as a school to Rhynie School keeping the Gartly School identity or, merging with the classes at either Kennethmont School or Rhynie School for the duration of the works. The parental voice was very clear that remaining as a separate school was

important, and as a result, in October 2019, Gartly School was temporarily relocated to Rhynie School.

- 3.7 In December 2018 the roll at Gartly School was 36 pupils. In February 2021 the roll at the school had declined to 7 pupils on roll.
- 3.8 The roll was predicted to fall due to a large P1 cohort that joined the school in 2016 and would move to the academy in 2023.
- 3.9 On 4 March 2021, parents/carers of Gartly School were advised by the Head of Education, that Gartly School would be mothballed from August 2021. This timescale allowed families a period of time to consider which school they preferred their children to continue their education and also allow for extended transitions. Pupils choose to attend Rhynie, Kennethmont and Gordon Primary Schools.
- 3.10 An update of the position at Gartly School was given to the Education and Children's Services Committee on 28 January 2021. The Committee agreed for officers to conduct a full option appraisal which would include extensive engagement on all options including the re-instatement of Gartly School.
- 3.11 The outcome of the option appraisal was presented to Marr Area Committee on 15 June 2021 and to Education and Children's Services Committee on 26 August 2021.
- 3.12 Marr Area Committee considered that the process of determining the school's future should be parent led, with the opinions of those most impacted being taken on board. They also considered that consultation, involvement and engagement with local families was of paramount importance.
- 3.13 Marr Area Committee also highlighted the importance of a small community having access to a local school serving the community and recognises the complexities of the issues that have resulted in the lengthy time to seek a resolution.
- 3.14 After deliberation and a vote, the Education and Children's Services Committee supported the option to formalise the current arrangement (at that time) with Rhynie School i.e., the permanent use of Rhynie School for all pupils currently in the Gartly catchment area. Effectively this would mean that Gartly School would close and merge into Rhynie School.

4. Educational Benefits Statement

- 4.1 In September 2019, Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy 'Connecting People, Places and Learning' was launched. This was developed by Scottish Government and COSLA and contains ten guiding principles. Local Authorities are required to take account of these principles in planning changes to their school estate, namely:

- Learning environments should support and facilitate excellent joined up learning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners;
- Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners, meet varying needs to support inclusion and support transitions for all learners;
- The learning estate should be well-managed and maintained, making the best of existing resources, maximising occupancy and representing and delivering best value;
- The condition and suitability of learning environments should support and enhance their function;
- Learning environments should serve the wider community and where appropriate be integrated with the delivery of other public services in line with the place principle;
- Learning environments should be greener, more sustainable, allow safe and accessible routes for walking, cycling and wheeling and be digitally enabled;
- Outdoor learning and the use of outdoor learning environments should be maximised;
- Good consultation about learning environments, direct engagement with learners and communities about their needs and experiences, and an involvement in decision making processes should lead to better outcomes for all;
- Collaboration across the learning estate, and collaboration with partners in localities, should support maximising its full potential;
- Investment in Scotland's learning estate should contribute towards improving learning outcomes and support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

4.2 At the Education and Children's Services Committee on 18 March 2021, the revised Learning Estates Strategy which sets the minimum standards for the various elements of educational buildings to achieve optimal educational benefit, was approved. The strategy for Aberdeenshire Council's Learning Estate sets out three values, Equity, Excellence and Inclusion. These are core to all decision making.

4.3 The educational benefits for pupils if either of the options mentioned in Section 8 are adopted are detailed within the following paragraphs;

4.4 Pupils at both Rhynie School and Kennethmont School regularly work in co-operative learning groups. Cooperative learning strategy normally involves four pupils of roughly the same age group working together collaboratively.

4.5 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 Rhynie School and Kennethmont School 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.

- 4.6 A larger school roll offers children from the Gartly 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.
- 4.7 At Rhynie School pupils have an opportunity to participate in a range of groups, namely, Pupil Council, House Captains, Rights Respecting Schools, Eco-Committee, a buddy system and playground leaders.
- 4.8 Pupils at Kennethmont School can participate in Pupil Council, Eco-Committee, Junior Road Safety Officers. They also have access to gardening within Leith Hall. This is excellent outdoor learning for pupils.
- 4.9 As with sports, the larger rolls at Rhynie School and Kennethmont School provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities. Instrumental Tuition is available in both schools from P4 onwards.
- 4.10 Both Rhynie School and Kennethmont School take part in an annual Rugby Festival and Cricket Festival, as well as holding their own school Sports Days. In addition, Rhynie School takes part in a Scottish Country Dancing Competition.
- 4.11 The P6/7 pupils at Kennethmont School join another school in the Huntly Cluster for a bi-annual residential trip to Dalguise Adventure Centre, this helps to develop friendships for their transition to S1.
- 4.12 World Book Day and Book Fairs organised by Scholastic Group are held at both Rhynie School and Kennethmont School.
- 4.13 During the school year both Kennethmont School and Rhynie School participate in a number of other activities such as various charity days, school day trips.
- 4.14 Both Rhynie School and Kennethmont School have an active Parent Council who meet every term and support the school and nursery with school improvements and fundraising. They actively seek to represent the views of the parent forum and to keep the forum updated with information. All parents are welcome to attend Parent Council Meetings. The benefits of parental involvement in their children's education are clearly recognised and any increase in parental involvement has the potential to directly benefit children in their learning.
- 4.15 The Parent Partnership at Kennethmont School run an after school club every Friday afternoon. This encompasses sport, crafts, opportunities to socialise as well as quieter games and play.

- 4.16 Officers recognise prior to the oil leak Gartly was of a similar roll to both Kennethmont School and Rhynie School and therefore when operational within its own building was delivering educational benefits outlined in 4.16 through to 4.25. Larger pupil numbers at both Rhynie School and Kennethmont School compared to the low roll at Gartly School at the point of mothballing support the following educational benefits.
- 4.17 Some of the educational benefits arise not just from larger pupil numbers (e.g., to form teams of similar age and size), but also because a larger staff and parent body increase the likelihood of interested adults leading a range of activities.
- 4.18 Operating a school with a reduced number of pupils over a greater age range, would have increased challenges in ensuring that all children develop the four capacities of Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors.
- 4.19 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.
- 4.20 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.
- 4.21 The proposal would also 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.
- 4.22 A larger roll enhances the sustainability and viability of a school and offers greater opportunities to learners.
- 4.23 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.
- 4.24 While one or two pupils absent from a large class is not 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.

- 4.25 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.
- 4.26 It is Aberdeenshire Council's view that the pupils from the Gartly 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 above.
- 4.27 As all pupils from the Gartly School catchment are currently attending Drumblade, Kennethmont, Rhynie and Gordon Primary Schools no adverse effects for those pupils are expected to arise from the permanent closure of Gartly School.

5. Public Engagement

Public Meetings

- 5.1 All parents/carers and stakeholders were invited to a public meeting which was scheduled to be held during the consultation period to discuss the proposal. The meeting was scheduled to be held on 25 January 2022 at 6.30pm within Gartly Community Hall (Tin Hut).
- 5.2 However, due to the current COVID-19 restrictions officers were unable to hold the face to face meeting. Communication was sent to all parent/carers and stakeholders informing them that the face to face meeting would no longer take place and the meeting would be held online. A link to the meeting along with guidance on accessing the meeting was also provided.
- 5.3 The meeting was chaired by Councillor Owen and was attended by parents, staff, elected members of the community. Seven members of the public attended the meeting. The minutes of the meeting are attached as Appendix C.
- 5.4 During the meeting there were questions and comments that covered the following topics:
- Face to Face Public Meeting
 - Re-instatement of Gartly School
 - Inclusion of prospective parents
- 5.5 A second online meeting was held at 11am on 26 January 2022.

- 5.6 The meeting was chaired by Councillor Owen and was attended by parents, staff, elected members of the community. Two members of the public attended the meeting. The minutes of the meeting are attached as Appendix D.
- 5.7 No questions or comments were received at the meeting.
- 5.8 Requests were received from members of the public, Gartly Community Council and elected members to hold a face to face public meeting. A meeting was organised to be at 6.30pm on 15 March 2022 within the Gartly Community Hall (Tin Hut).
- 5.9 The meeting was chaired by the Head of Education and Children's Services, and was attended by parents and members of the community. Thirteen members of the public attending the meeting. The minutes of the meeting area attached as Appendix E.
- 5.10 During the meeting there was questions and comments regarding
- Re-instatement of Gartly School
 - Inclusion of prospective parents
 - Maintenance of the grounds at Gartly School
 - Status of Gartly School
 - The process that led to the decision to close the school

Discussion with Pupils

- 5.11 As part of the consultation process, Head Teachers at Rhynie and Kennethmont Schools discussed the proposal regarding the Closure of Gartly School. Some of the comments that were made are listed below and the full comments are attached as Appendices E and F.

Online Survey

- 5.12 During the consultation period parent/carers, stakeholders and community members were invited to take part in an online survey to express their opinion on the proposal.
- 5.13 The survey provided a summary of the proposal regarding the Closure of Gartly School. Participants were also given the opportunity to leave comments regarding the proposal.
- 5.14 A total of 31 people took part in the survey. A full summary of the online survey is attached as Appendix H.
- 5.15 Parents/cares who resides within the Gartly intimated that their preferred outcome for the proposal would be either Option 2 (Merge with Kennethmont School) or Option 3 (Dual zone between Kennethmont and Rhynie School).
- 5.16 They thought Option 4 (Split the Gartly School catchment area between Rhynie and Kennethmont School) should be discounted as this would split the parish

of Gartly even further having children within the same area attend different schools.

- 5.17 Some participants expressed concern that if Gartly School was merged with Kennethmont School it would go over capacity, as approval has been given for housing development within the Kennethmont School catchment.
- 5.18 It should be noted that the parent/carers that reside within the Gartly School catchment area are strongly against the closure of Gartly School, preferring that the school was re-instated. However, the wider Huntly community is in support of the closure of Gartly School.

Kennethmont School

- 5.19 The following three groups of pupils from Kennethmont School were consulted with regarding the consultation.
- Primary 6 and 7 who previously attended Gartly School
 - Primary 6 and 7 who have only attended Kennethmont School
 - Primary 3-5 at Kennethmont School
- 5.20 From the pupils who had previously attended Gartly School they felt the advantages of a larger school, were that there were more people to get to know, play with and more friends. There are different environments to explore and teachers to get used to.
- 5.21 The disadvantages of a larger school were that there were too many people, not sure who to choose to play with and felt it can be crowded and lots of younger children.
- 5.22 They felt the benefits of a small school is that there is more room to play and they get their own ipad.
- 5.23 The disadvantages that there is no one to play with, limited opportunities to play and it is easier to be spotted if you misbehave.
- 5.24 The children who had originally been at Gartly School also said that they thought it was a good thing that they came to Kennethmont School first before Rhynie School because they knew lots of the children from nursery. They said that Kennethmont School is fun, there is plenty of exercise and fresh air. They also said that Gartly School and Kennethmont School weren't separated but able to play together and know one another from the first day. They found Rhynie School harder - it was noisy and they felt more nervous there.
- 5.25 The children also added that they don't want Gartly School knocked down; they would rather it rotted away and they would like the things inside to be saved.

Rhynie School

- 5.26 From the pupils that had previously attended Rhynie School, they thought they might make more friends. The disadvantages might be that there would be more bullies, might have to do work they are not ready for, too many people and teachers.
- 5.27 The benefits of a small school would be that there are less people, nice teachers, easy work, big playground, and lots of fun.
- 5.28 They thought the disadvantages of being at a small school was that there are too many dolls and baby toys, they would like to bike to school, but can't.
- 5.29 They have no worries about merging with Rhynie School at first, they had concerns that they wouldn't fit it, but made friends and have no other worries.
- 5.30 They thought the existing things about merging with Rhynie School would be different toys as well as making new friends and arranging playdates.

Staff Engagement

- 5.31 As Gartly School has not been operational since December 2018 and mothballed from August 2021, staff that were employed at the school have been employed at other establishments. Staff at Kennethmont School and Rhynie School were given the opportunity to discuss the proposal, staff members haven given their feedback through the online survey.

6. Written Responses

Support Consultation

- 6.1 During the consultation period between 7 December 2021 and 23 March 2022, representations were invited from statutory consultees and interested parties.
- 6.2 Officers received seven written communications, five were requesting that officers hold a face-to-face public meeting. One was in relation to school transport and is provided below;
- 6.3 *One of the options is to split the boundary with both Kennethmont and Rhynie schools. Due to where we live that would mean we would be zoned for Rhynie school and not Kennethmont school. I know it was previously promised that children wouldn't have to move schools and siblings would be allowed to join them at the school they had chosen. I'd like reassurance that this is still the case and my child can stay at Kennethmont school and siblings can join (them) at Kennethmont in the future with transport - which is currently provided.*
- 6.4 The remaining comment was in support of the option to close Gartly School and merge with Rhynie School and is provided below;

6.5 *My conclusion, after reading the December 2021 Proposal Document, is based on four points:*

- *Economic: the immediate cost of refurbishment and future costs*
- *Educational; pupils need external stimulation*
- *Short termism: that school could be at risk from the river*
- *'Green' issues: oil heating, insulation*

Economic

6.6 *The pupil cost per the document is astronomical, and unsupportable.*

6.7 *The overheads of the premises, just on the non educational side, are a major expense, and whilst it could be argued that such costs are offset by school transport, the Document implies otherwise.*

Educational

6.8 *Whilst it is an excellent premise for children to be walked to school in a safe environment, where everyone knows each other, the lack of stimulation from travel, exposure to new vistas, pursuits from mixing with children from other schools on a regular basis, and the latter stimulus for the pupils in the new school, is a major consideration.*

6.9 *Further, as one of my cousins pointed out to me, such a size and age mix as at Gartly (and other small schools) makes teaching plans difficult to make and maintain, particularly if, as now, we have a health problem. It surely means that curriculum progress is problematic, particularly should any of the teaching staff succumb. It also requires a particular skillset in the teacher, which may be detrimental in the recruitment process.*

6.10 *See also 'Green Issues' below*

Short Termism

6.11 *The school premises are close to the river, and the railway. Given current climatic conditions, it is entirely possible that flooding from the river could cause closure, and equally increase in the river flow could damage the railway embankment with problems from the rail track developing.*

Green Issues

6.12 *We hear so much about moving from fossil fuels to greener energy these days, and clearly the school is dependent on oil. This must be a major problem.*

6.13 *Further, to move to another greener heating source apparently requires maximum draft proofing and insulation, thus the school would appear to require further investment to meet these costs*

- 6.14 *All in all, it appears that Rhynie school is close enough, and appears to have the resources which will stimulate these children. It would mean less than half an hour added to pupils 'school day' and they would be safe and warm in school transport.*
- 6.15 *I suggest that if the parents of individual families have a real problem with Rhynie, there could be an option to choose another school such as Kennethmont but only on a permanent basis, as schooling cannot be disrupted by moving back and forth in educational year on year. (Point 8.24)*
- 6.16 *I have kept these points brief. I believe they are covered admirably in the Proposal Document.*
- 6.17 *I appreciate that Aberdeenshire Council, as with all local authorities following the recent Scottish Budget, will have financial restrictions, and thus have had consideration for the funds available for the Education Budget.*
- 6.18 *My option would therefore be OPTION 2, formalise the current arrangement.*
- 6.19 *It seems perfect since Rhynie also offers nursery facilities.*
- 6.20 *However, I would support consideration in the future of a new educational hub (Option 7) by extending say, Rhynie School to take pupils from the current Huntly Cluster. This would need further consultation with affected families, but smaller schools may not be educationally or financially viable given teacher recruitment problems in the north of Scotland (point 14.3). This would also give existing staff more possibilities for development, thus motivation.*

7. Education Authority Response to Written and Oral Representations

School Status

- 7.1 During the public meeting members enquired on the status of Gartly School. On 4 March 2021, parents/carers of Gartly School pupils were advised that the school would be mothballed from August 2021. The school remains mothballed. The ongoing statutory consultation is for the closure of Gartly School, the consultation is being carried out in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

Option Appraisal

- 7.2 Members of the public meeting asked what factors had been taken into account, and the process for decision making in relation to Gartly School.
- 7.3 Due to an oil leak Gartly School has not been operational since December 2018.
- 7.4 One to one meetings and workshops were held with the parent/carers of the pupils of Gartly School. In addition, public meetings were also held, these were

well attended by concerned parents/carers and members of the local community. Several updates were also issued by the Head Teacher (supported by the Communications Team). Updates were also shared with Ward Members and Scottish Government.

- 7.5 On 28 January 2021 an update of the position of Gartly School was presented at the Education and Children's Services Committee. The Committee requested officers to conduct a full option appraisal and extensive engagement on all options including the re-instatement of Gartly School, merging with neighbouring school, a new rural hub and the possibility of adding an extension to existing schools.
- 7.6 To ensure a holistic approach was adopted officers engaged widely to explore ways to improve education, social and related opportunities for all children, young people and the wider community within the Huntly cluster. The engagement with Gartly School parent and carers was an essential part of the process.
- 7.7 Engagement with the parent/carers of the pupils of Gartly School was a key element of the option appraisal.
- 7.8 Surveys were included as part of the engagement, these were for Gartly School parent/carers, residents residing within the Gartly School catchment area and the wider Huntly Cluster. Officers felt it was important that the views of each survey were reported on separately to ensure the Gartly School voices were heard.
- 7.9 Public meetings were also held in an attempt to gather as many views as possible from the community.
- 7.10 The outcome of the option appraisal was presented to Marr Area Committee and to Education and Children's Services Committee.

Financial Implications

- 7.11 Remediation work was undertaken to address the contamination at Gartly School at a cost of £451,000. To reinstate Gartly School to a useable condition would require further remediation work to be undertaken both internally and externally. An indicative financial cost for the re-instatement of the original building would be around £1,035,000.

Re-instatement of Gartly School

- 7.12 During the public meeting members enquired if Gartly School would be re-instated. On 15 June 2021, the outcome of the option appraisal was presented to Marr Area Committee, the Committee considered that the process of determining the school's future should be parent led, with the opinions of those most impacted being taken on board. They also considered that consultation, involvement and engagement with local families was of paramount importance.

- 7.13 Marr Area Committee also highlighted the importance of a small community having access to a local school serving the community and recognises the complexities of the issues that have resulted in the lengthy time to seek a resolution.
- 7.14 On 26 August 2021, after deliberation and a vote, the Education and Children's Services Committee did not support the option to re-instate Gartly School and it would not be taken forward. Officers are now consulting on the four remaining options in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

Inclusion of Prospective Parents

- 7.15 During the public meeting members enquired if prospective primary school parents has been informed of the consultation. To ensure prospective parents were captured in the consultation the proposal was posted to all properties within the Gartly School catchment area. The proposal was also distributed to the parent/carers of children attending Rhynie Nursery as well as all private nurseries within the Huntly Cluster.
- 7.16 Social media was also updated regularly throughout the consultation period as well as appearing in the local press.

Early Years Provision

- 7.17 Requests were received regarding early years provision. Prior to the oil leak, Gartly School had a capacity of 20 early years places, with 13 children attending. Rhynie School also had a capacity of 20 early years places with 11 children attending. Both nurseries provided half day provision. School nurseries do not have catchment areas.
- 7.18 In December 2018, Gartly nursery was relocated to Rhynie School and children attended afternoon nursery sessions. In August 2019 Gartly children were offered morning or afternoon sessions within the Rhynie setting. In August 2020, due to the National Directive to increase the Early Learning and Childcare provision to 1140 hours in total, Gartly nursery combined with Rhynie nursery with a capacity of 20 places which met the demand of the two settings at that time.
- 7.19 The nursery at Rhynie School continues to operate daily from 9am – 3pm. There are currently 21 children enrolled at the nursery. In August 2022, 17 children will be attending the nursery at Rhynie School.

Face-to-Face Public Meeting

- 7.20 Originally the consultation period ran from 7 December 2021 until 24 February 2022. As mentioned in 5.2 above, due to COVID-19 restrictions the face-to-face meeting schedule for 25 January 2022 was held online.
- 7.21 Requests were received from members of the public, Gartly Community Association and elected members to hold a face-to-face meeting. The

consultation period was extended by one month to 23 March 2022 to accommodate this request. All stakeholders were advised of this additional meeting which was held on 15 March 2022.

Transport

- 7.22 During the consultation queries were received regarding school transport entitlement. It is important that the proposal does not have a negative impact on any child.
- 7.23 Pupils affected by mothballing of Gartly School are in receipt of school transport to their chosen school. Current arrangements will continue, which will also be offered to their siblings. This means, as well as being able to stay in their current schools, transport will continue for them as already arranged.

Capacity at Kennethmont School and Rhynie School

- 7.24 Concerns were raised regarding the capacity at Kennethmont School and Rhynie School. Education and Children's Services publish school roll forecasts for all primary and secondary schools on an annual basis. Data from a variety of sources including birth rate data and housing land database are included.
- 7.25 Rhynie School has a capacity of 71, the current school roll is currently 37 pupils (seemis extract 29 August 2022). The school roll forecast indicates that the roll will remain around 37 in future years.
- 7.26 Due to the number of toilets at Kennethmont School the published capacity was set at 50 pupils, although a maximum of 60 pupils could be accommodated in line with premises regulations. An additional toilet has been installed at Kennethmont School during Summer 2022, increasing the capacity to 75.
- 7.27 The current school roll is currently 71 pupils (seemis extract 29 August 2022). It is anticipated that the roll will decrease slightly within the next few years.

Maintenance of Grounds

- 7.28 At the public meeting queries was raised regarding the ongoing maintenance of the grounds. The play equipment at the school has been inspected, and from April 2022 the grass around the equipment has been regularly cut. Members of the public also have access to the play equipment.
- 7.29 Due to the condition of the land the community playing field is currently unavailable to members of the public. This will be addressed once the future of the school building is determined.

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. The full report is attached as Appendix I.
- 8.2 Education Scotland attended the on line public meetings on 25 and 26 January 2022, as well as the in person meeting on 15 March 2022 regarding the Council's proposal.
- 8.3 Educational Scotland carried out virtual visits to the sites of Kennethmont School and Rhynie School, including discussions with relevant consultees.
- 8.4 Education Scotland are of the view that there are sound reasons for Aberdeenshire Council to consider the long term viability of Gartly School. The proposal provides clarity for the parents and the community with regard to the future education provision in the area. HM Inspectors believe that the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council has the potential to deliver overall educational benefits for children in the Gartly School catchment area. Children currently benefit from working with a larger peer group closely aligned to their age and stage.
- 8.5 The educational aspects of the Education Scotland report are summarised below;
- 8.6 Education Scotland acknowledge that the Council took the decision to decant Gartly School to Kennethmont School in December 2018 to ensure the safety of its users following the identification of an oil leak. Nursery children were decanted to Rhynie School. Considerable contamination of the site of Gartly School was discovered during remedial works. Initially, it was anticipated the situation would be resolved relatively quickly.
- 8.7 Education Scotland recognise that despite efforts by the Council to rectify the contamination, the problem remains unresolved. Public meetings were held on 5 February 2019, 23 May 2019 and 2 September 2019 to update parents/carers and the local community. These meetings were well-attended. The temporary solution was for Gartly School to operate as a separate school within Kennethmont School building. This was not suitable for a prolonged period of time. A workshop was held for parents/carers on 10 September 2019 to discuss options. Parents/carers stated their wish for Gartly School to retain its separate identity. As a result, Gartly School was temporarily relocated to Rhynie School in October 2019.
- 8.8 Education Scotland recognise that the Council has outlined a number of educational benefits which it believes will result from the four options being proposed. HM Inspectors agree with some, but not all, aspects of the council's educational benefits statement. The educational benefits stated are, in some cases, too broad and generalised. In its final paper the council should outline these more clearly with more specific detail. However, despite this, HM

Inspectors are confident that there is sufficient merit to consider the permanent closure of the Gartly School.

- 8.9 Children who spoke with Education Scotland shared their favourable experiences of being part of Rhynie School or Kennethmont School. They feel this has increased their friendship groups and increased their options when playing together. Children particularly value being able to benefit from outdoor spaces. Some liked having more children of the same age and stage. They feel this peer support is helpful during learning activities such as numeracy. Larger peer groups increase the range of options in drama activities. Gartly children currently attending Kennethmont School were strong in their opinion that they wish to remain there.
- 8.10 Parents who spoke with Education Scotland were mixed in their views. Some felt the council's approach to the handling of the oil leak led to an inevitability that Gartly School would close. Others felt the financial implications of reinstating Gartly School meant the council had no option but to ensure 'best value'. Several parents identified the benefits of their child attending Kennethmont School or Rhynie School. Some parents felt that the educational experience currently provided was very similar to that delivered by Gartly School prior to it being mothballed. A few parents feel that the necessity to move schools over the past few years has been particularly detrimental to children with additional support needs. Parents from the Gartly community have become actively involved in wider aspects of school life in both schools. Parents feel included in these school communities and contribute to wider school activities.
- 8.11 Education Scotland noted that almost all stakeholders expressed a strong desire for choice in their discussions. Their preferred option is the creation of a shared catchment or dual zone (option 3). Stakeholders also highlighted the need to consider potential capacity issues at Kennethmont School.
- 8.12 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, Education Scotland also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. The Council considered carefully if there were any reasonable alternatives to closure of the school before it consulted on the proposal. It undertook three option appraisal surveys between February and April 2021 to inform the statutory consultation process. The surveys considered seven potential options for the future of Gartly School. Those invited to provide their views included; the parents of Gartly School, all residents within the Gartly catchment area, and parents from schools in the Huntly Cluster. The views of community councils and private nurseries within the Huntly Cluster were also sought. The council used the outcome of these surveys to inform the production of the four options include in the consultation proposal.
- 8.13 Parents and members of the Gartly community have consistently shared their desire to retain Gartly School over the past few years. Some believe the community has already been affected by the temporary closure of the school on the grounds of health and safety. They believe the school served as the heart of the community, providing a vital link for families.

- 8.14 Education Scotland recognised that the main adverse effect of the closure of Gartly School is the extended travel time for children and families. Children living in close proximity to Gartly School miss being able to walk or cycle to school. The additional travelling time for individual children varies depending on the school transport route allocated. Travel time to Gartly School was significantly less than some children are currently experiencing. There will be no impact on the current travel times being experienced by children travelling to either Kennethmont School or Rhynie School as a result of this proposal. Current travel arrangements will continue.
- 8.15 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;
- 8.16 The Council's has acknowledged their preferred option was for Gartly School to close and merge with Rhynie School (option 1), and that the preferred option is option 3: the creation of a shared catchment or dual zone.
- 8.17 The Council has acknowledged consultees have legitimate concerns regarding the capacity of Kennethmont School.
- 8.18 The Council has acknowledged that should the decision to close Gartly School be finalised, the council should work with the community to explore future plans for the former school building and grounds.

9. Alleged Omissions or Inaccuracies and Additional Information

- 9.1 Section (10)(3) of the 2010 Act also places a requirement on the Council to provide details of any inaccuracies or omission within the proposal document which has either been raised by the consultees or identified by the Council itself.
- 9.2 This section of the 2010 Act also requires the Council to 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 why.
- 9.3 Officers are required to publish its response to representations made during the consultation period within its final Consultation Report.
- 9.4 On 7 December 2021, the day the consultation was launched officers were made aware that the address of the Gartly Community Hall (Tin Hut), where the public meeting was to be held on 25 January 2022 was inaccurate.
- 9.5 On 7 December 2021, the proposal document was re-distributed to all parent/carers and stakeholders, accompanied by a letter detailing the amended address for Gartly Community Hall (Tin Hut).

- 9.6 In addition to those individuals and bodies listed under 'Distribution' within the proposal document. The Proposal Document was also distributed to the new Tap O Noth Community Council.
- 9.7 Originally the consultation period ran from 7 December 2021 until 24 February 2022. As mentioned in 5.2 above, due to COVID-19 restrictions the face to face meeting schedule for 25 January 2022 was held online.
- 9.8 Requests were received from members of the public to hold a face to face meeting, to accommodate these requests the consultation period was extended to 23 March 2022. The face to face public meeting was held at 6.30pm on 15 March 2022 within Gartly Community Hall (Tin Hut).
- 9.9 During the public meeting on 15 March 2022, two attendees stated that although they resided within the Gartly School catchment area, they had not received a posted copy. On checking the distribution list of addresses used to distribute the proposal within the Gartly School catchment area, both the residents addresses were included. The proposal document was sent by 2nd class mail on 3 December 2021.

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

- (i) written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the consultation period,
- (ii) oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting,
- (iii) 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 carefully the written representations. The Education Authority's position is set out in this document.
- 10.4 The Education Authority's position is set out in Section 8 of this report.
- 10.5 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 considered.

- 10.6 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 Gartly School is a rural accessible school, 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.

- 11.2 As Gartly School is a rural school, special regard was paid to the rural school factors. These were considered fully within the Option 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 suggest alternatives to the closure.

Effect on the local community

- 11.3 The school building in Gartly has not operated as a school since December 2018. The Council recognises that Gartly School was a sustainable learning community prior to the oil leak in 2018. It is also recognised that the uncertainty surrounding the future opening of the school has impacted on the community greatly and it is hoped that this statutory consultation will give clarity to the community and a sense of certainty regarding the future of their children's education.
- 11.4 During the engagement process surrounding the future of Gartly School all residents within the catchment area have been communicated and consulted with regularly to ensure that the impact on the community is understood by officers.

School Transport

- 11.5 The Council recognises that children living beside the school can no longer to walk or cycle to school. The additional travelling time for individual children varies depending on the school transport route allocated. Current school transport contracts will continue.

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 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 the decision. Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of the final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal.

- 12.2 Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, Scottish Ministers will take account any relevant representations made to them. Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process is known, the Authority cannot proceed to implement the proposal.
- 12.3 If 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 legislations 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 24 November 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 14 December 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. Conclusion

- 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 Gartly 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 the following options:
 - Adopt the proposal; or
 - Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt or;

- Amend the proposal significantly and undertake a further consultation exercise on a new proposal; or
- Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo.

13.4 Each option is discussed below

Adopt the Proposal

13.5 If the Council chooses to adopt the proposal and close Gartly School on a permanent basis then one of the four options for Gartly School outlined in the proposal document would need to be chosen.

13.6 The most popular option amongst participants was Option 3, to close Gartly School and create a dual zone between Rhynie School and Kennethmont School. This option was supported by 12 (39%) out of all 31 participants of the survey.

13.7 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. Kennethmont School and Rhynie 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.

Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt

13.8 During the consultation period no suggestions were received from stakeholders that would require a minor amendment to the proposal.

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

13.9 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, parent/carers and the wider community of all affected by the proposed schools.

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

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

13.12 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 conclusion for Gartly School.

Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo

13.13 This option would be to continue to mothball Gartly School. Maintaining the status quo would continue the uncertainty for the community. The school would remain mothballed until such funding could be identified, there is currently no scope within the Capital Plan

13.14 Withdrawing the proposal, the Council would be failing to recognise or response to the educational and social benefits for Gartly children. Education Scotland has recognised the proposal has the potential to deliver overall educational benefits for the children within the Gartly School catchment area. Children are currently benefitting from working with larger peer groups closely aligned to their age and stage.

14. Recommendation(s)

14.1 The recommendation of officers is that the Council should adopt the proposal to permanently close Gartly School and re-assign its catchment area to both Kennethmont School and Rhynie School creating a dual zone enabling parents to select between one of these schools. Children would also receive school transport to their chosen school.