

## Appendix C

**Public Consultation Meeting  
Closure of Gartly School  
25 January 2022 at 6.30pm  
Online Meeting**

**Officers present:**

Laurence Findlay, Director of Education & Children's Services, Vincent Doherty (Head of Education), Maxine Booth (Quality Improvement Manager), Rachael Goldring (Learning Estates Team Leader), Gail Dick (Project Officer) and Gemma Dacre (Learning Estates Officer and Wendy Dempster (Administrator) who will be taking the minutes.

Kathryn Twinn (Kennethmont School Head Teacher, Janelle Clark (Area Manager)

**HMI Inspectors present:**

Pamela Adamson, Graham Parry, Donald Paterson

**Elected Members present:**

Councillor Gillian Owen (Chair), Cllr Alison Evison, Cllr Moira Ingleby, Cllr Rosemary Bruce and Cllr Gwyneth Petrie.

Seven members of the public also attended the meeting.

**Apologies:**

No apologies were received.

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

Cllr Owen opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the meeting. She introduced the officers present and advised that a minute would be taken by Gemma Dacre and Wendy Dempster. The meeting would also be recorded for minute purposes.

Cllr Owen confirmed that the format of the meeting would be an overview of the proposal, a PowerPoint presentation followed by an opportunity for questions and comments from the floor. To ensure that everyone had a chance to be heard, all attendees would be muted until the questions section.

Cllr Owen explained that in consultation with the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland which includes representation from every authority within Scotland, and along with the Council's own Risk Assessment procedure a decision was made to hold both public meetings online to remove the Covid-19 risk element to both members of the public and officers of the Council.

However, due to requests received from members of the public to hold a face to face meeting, the consultation period will now be extended to 23 March 2022, and that the

face to face public meeting would be held before the end of this period. The date of venue had yet to be decided and details of the meeting would be sent to all stakeholders in due course. This will be assessed at the time in accordance with health guidelines.

She also advised that if at any point anyone had difficulty hearing or was having technical difficulties preventing them from participating in the meeting to contact the Learning Estate Team to arrange an individual appointment.

## 2. Consultation Overview

Laurence Findlay informed the meeting that the proposal currently under statutory consultation is the closure of Gartly School. The consultation proposes to discontinue education at Gartly School, which is currently mothballed and re-assign its catchment area to that of either Rhynie or Kennethmont School.

An update of the position at Gartly School was given to the Education and Children's Services Committee on 28 January 2021. The Committee instructed officers at that point to conduct a full option appraisal and extensive engagement on all options including the re-instatement of Gartly School following the oil leak in 2018.

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. The pupils that were attending Gartly School are now all attending nearby schools within the cluster.

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.

After deliberation and a vote by Councillors, 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.

This decision required a statutory consultation to be carried out under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, and hence why we are here this evening.

Maxine Booth discussed the following options within the consultation;

- Option 1 – Close Gartly School and merge with Rhynie School
- Option 2 – Close Gartly School and merge with Kennethmont School
- Option 3 – Create a dual zone between Rhynie School and Kennethmont School. This would allow parent to choose between the two schools giving more flexibility for the parents.
- Option 4 – Split the catchment area between Rhynie School and Kennethmont School. This would mean some children would be allocated to Rhynie and some to Kennethmont School.

We want to make sure that the proposal does not have a negative impact on any child. Children currently attending schools affected by this proposal would be entitled to remain for the rest of their primary education within that school, and of course that will 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.

### **3. Questions from the Floor**

Cllr Owen opened the floor to questions, asking anyone wishing to comment may do so by raising the hand icon on the app or desktop screen or type a question in the comment box for officers to answer.

She also requested that individuals introduce themselves and their interest in the meeting (e.g. parent, pupil, staff, community member...). All attendees will now be able to unmute and questions will be taken one by one.

Secretary of the Gartly Community Association:- thank you for extending the consultation period. I think the fact that we have so few people able to attend demonstrates the difficulty that people often have with using things like teams, which is not the most user friendly. Thank you for making the adjustment as it was something that we and many others have asked for. The question I have: is this a foregone conclusion, now that the school is closed, are you now looking at options or is there still some discussion or opportunity for people to make a case for the school to be reinstated?

LF:- Thank you for acknowledging the extension of the deadline, these things are often better face to face and hopefully all being well we can get that done before the 23 March. A number of options were presented to Marr Area Committee and then to Education and Children's Services Committee, these are the four options which were agreed to consult on. This proposal is to consult on the closure of Gartly School and looking to make one of the four options permanent. Continuing education at Gartly School was discounted, these are the options that we are consulting on now, everyone's views and feedback are welcome and will be fed into the statutory consultation process.

MB:- When we were asked to look at options appraisal, we did extensive surveys. We spoke to the Gartly parents, and to residents within the Gartly catchment, we also held public meetings and tried to gather as many views as we could. The surveys we did separately because of the small cohort of Gartly parents and we didn't want their voices to be lost in the larger survey. We felt it was important to consider the views of Gartly residents as well as the Huntly cluster. The views were reported to committee separately to ensure the Gartly School voices weren't lost.

It was at that point we were able to do a full options appraisal looking at the educational benefit of all the options on the table. That is what it has to be based on, the educational benefit for the children involved. It was at that point the Education and Children's Services Committee took a vote and decided the option to reinstate the building, would not be taken forward. Therefore, we were left with these four options which require to go through the statutory consultation for the closure of the Gartly school.

RG:- As we have already covered this evening, the consultation period has now been extended until 23 March 2022. At the end of the period, we will send all representations and documentation relative to the consultation to Education Scotland. We have Education Scotland representatives here this evening who are observing the process. Education Scotland will consider all the information that we provide to them and will also

make arrangements talk with stakeholders to obtain their views. They will write a formal report on the consultation. We will also write a formal report, considering all of the views that are received along with the views of Education Scotland. An officer recommendation based on the feedback will be considered by Marr Area Committee, then Education and Children's Services Committee. A final decision will be made by Full Council. The timescale for that is probably going to be the end of this year due to the extension of the consultation period. It would be presented to Full Council in December 2022 or January 2023. If the decision is made to permanently close Gartly School (Full Council makes that decision) then we must notify Scottish Ministers, then there will be an opportunity for members of the public to request that that decision is called in. They would have a three week period in which to make representations, essentially appealing the decision that has been made by Full Council, if indeed that is the decision that they make. If and when we get to that point, full information will be sent to all stakeholders about how they could then take that forward.

Secretary of the Gartly Community Association:- One of the issues that has been raised is that existing parents have been surveyed but not prospective parents and people whose children are coming into an age range that they would be going to that school. Is the plan to widen the survey and the discussion to those people who have children who wouldn't normally have had an expectation to send their children to that school? The numbers are dwindling at the moment obviously because children are getting beyond a certain age and moving on. But are you taking account of the ones that would be coming into range?

RG:- Yes, absolutely. That is a good question. One of the things that we did both with the survey and with the statutory consultation, in addition to sending it out to the parents of the affected and the staff, we posted a copy of the proposal document and a letter about the survey and details of the meetings to every single property within the Gartly School catchment area. We appreciate that there will be people that are not on social media and or may have moved into the area recently. The consultation is open to all.

LF:- Just to remind those on the call that there is another meeting tomorrow for anybody who maybe hasn't been able to log on this evening. We welcome people to come along to that. If they have been unable to log on today we would appreciate if you could forward this information. As previously mentioned at the beginning, we will be arranging a face-to-face meeting in March so that we can discuss the next steps.

Secretary of the Gartly Community Association:- Could we have a copy of the slides please?

Cllr Owen:- Yes of course.

#### **4. Next Steps**

Cllr Owen outlined the next steps in the process. The consultation period opened on 7 December 2021 and has now been extended until the 23 March 2022. Information will be sent to all stakeholders informing them of the extended consultation period and details of the face to face public meeting.

Any comments you wish to make on the proposal document require to be submitted by 4pm on 23 March 2022.

Comments can be submitted in writing to Gordon House, Blackhall Road, Inverurie AB51 3WA, or by email to [learningestates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:learningestates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk).

We would encourage you to take part in the consultation and give your opinions via the online survey. The link to this questionnaire is on the Education consultation page on the Aberdeenshire Council website.

We are also involving pupils in our discussions, and head teachers have been asked to work with pupils to gain their views on the proposals.

Once the consultation period is over, all written submissions, minutes of this meeting and pupil discussions will be provided to Education Scotland for their consideration who will produce a report on the consultation.

This report along with our own report on the consultation will be presented at Marr Area Committee and Education and Children's Services Committee and Full Council for a decision.

## **5. Close**

Cllr Owen thanked everyone for attending the meeting and the importance of officers gaining feedback. She encouraged anyone who had not been able to participate fully in this online forum to get in touch with the Learning Estate Team and an alternative meeting with individuals will be provided. Any meetings will be held before the end of this consultation period.