

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

OCTOBER 2022

PROPOSAL DOCUMENT

**REZONING OF BALMEDIE SCHOOL
CATCHMENT AT BLACKDOG**

**Consultation open between
14 October 2022 and 6 January 2023**

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

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL IS PROPOSING, SUBJECT TO THE OUTCOME OF THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION PROCESS:

- **To rezone the Balmedie School catchment area to include the whole of the Blackdog settlement and align with the Aberdeenshire Council boundary.**
- **The proposal would apply to all primary age pupils within the settlement of Blackdog from August 2023.**
- **There will be no requirement for existing primary school pupils to move schools if their catchment area changes.**

This document has been issued by Aberdeenshire Council in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. The Act requires that changes to the school estate, including a school boundary or catchment area, are subject to rigorous statutory consultation.

The schools affected by this proposal are:

- Balmedie School
- Scotstown School
- Greenbrae School

DISTRIBUTION

A copy of this document is available on the Aberdeenshire Council website: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/> or by emailing learningestates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

This document will be provided to:

- Parent Council of Balmedie School
- Parent/Carers of pupils and pre-school pupils zoned to Balmedie School
- Pupils at Balmedie School
- Staff at Balmedie School
- Trade union representatives of Balmedie School staff
- Belhelvie Community Council
- Residents of the settlement of Blackdog
- Aberdeen City Council
- Education Scotland
- Local Early Years Partner Providers within the Balmedie School Catchment
- Relevant users of Balmedie School

A copy of this document is also available from:

- Balmedie School
- Balmedie Library
- Balmedie Nursery
- Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen, AB16 5GB
- Learning Estates Team (call 01771 676600 or email LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk to arrange for a paper copy to be posted)

1. Legislative Background

- 1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (Section 1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (Section 3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Aberdeenshire Council strives to allocate its resources in a way that ensures the quality of all its services. It attaches particular importance to providing the best possible educational experience for all pupils within its schools.
- 2.2 This proposal document is focussed upon Balmedie School, located within the Formartine area of Aberdeenshire. Balmedie School is one of ten Primary schools within the Ellon Cluster, however it is zoned to Bridge of Don Academy for Secondary School provision. This proposal does not impact upon secondary education.
- 2.3 This proposal document contains several maps. Pdf copies of all maps will be available on the Aberdeenshire Council website at the address given on page 2 of this document. Printed copies of the maps will also be available on request at Balmedie School and Balmedie Library.
- 2.4 The consultation will run from Friday 14 October 2022 until Friday 6 January 2023. A public meeting will be held to discuss the proposal at 6.30pm on Thursday 10 November at Balmedie School, Forsyth Road, Balmedie, AB23 8YW.
- 2.5 The consultation process for this proposal is set out in detail in Section 15.

3. Reason for Proposal

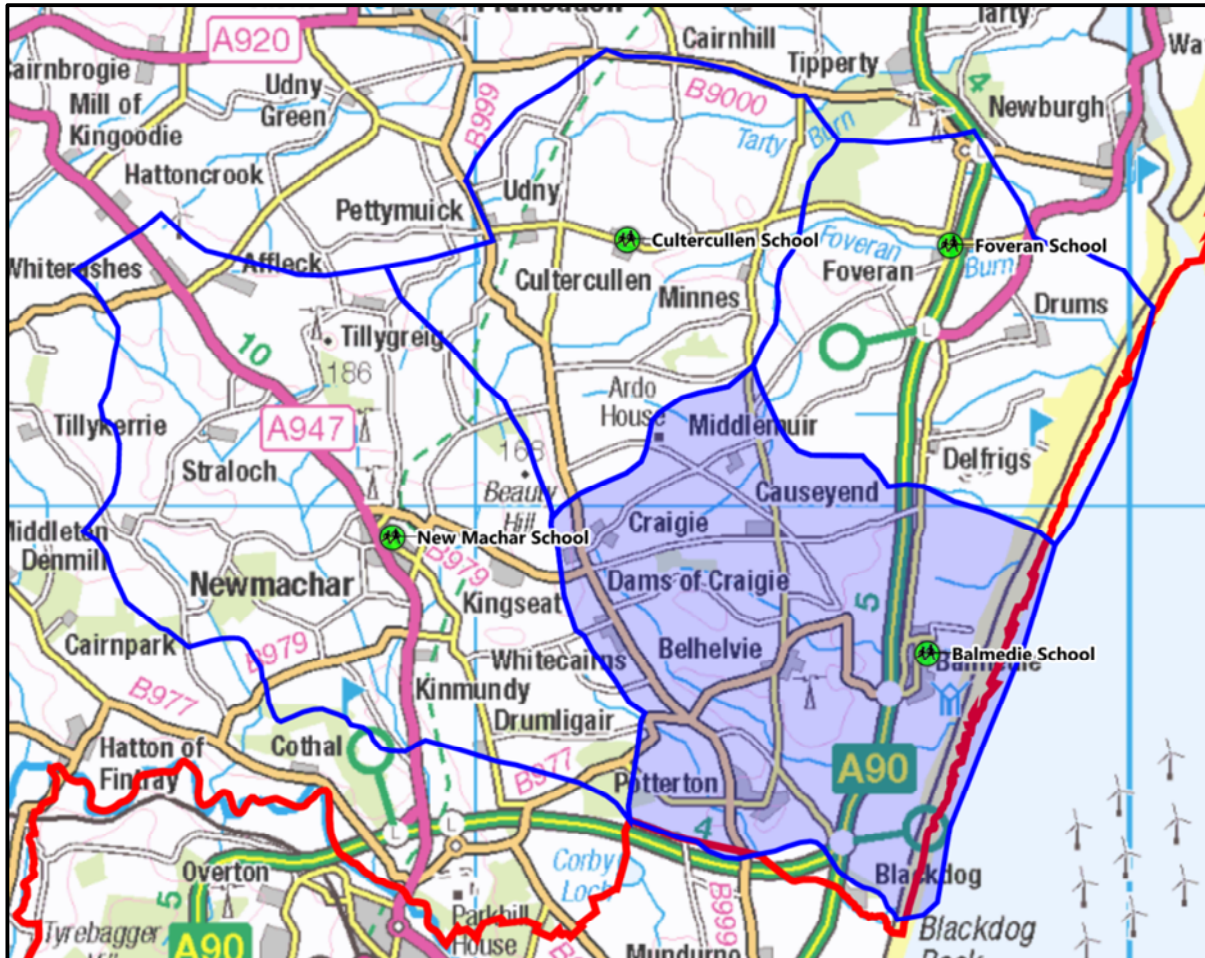
- 3.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
- 3.2 The current Balmedie School catchment area runs through the settlement of Blackdog. The effect of this is that houses in the north of Blackdog are zoned to Balmedie School, whilst houses to the south of the settlement are zoned to Scotstown School within Aberdeen City Council jurisdiction. A small part of the rural area to the west of Blackdog is zoned to Greenbrae School also within Aberdeen City Council jurisdiction.
- 3.3 As the settlement has grown due to new housing, there have been a number of queries from families living within the settlement of Blackdog expressing uncertainty on catchment areas and school transport entitlement.
- 3.4 In May 2022, Aberdeenshire Council carried out an informal survey for the residents of Blackdog to gain their views on the current primary school catchment areas.

- 3.5 The informal survey gave a summary of the current primary catchments for the Blackdog settlement and a variety of questions regarding primary age children within Balmedie and which school they think their postcode should be zoned for. There was also a comment box for any additional views.
- 3.6 The survey concluded that the majority of residents within Blackdog believe they should be zoned for Balmedie School.
- 3.7 The common themes on the feedback from the survey was that as Blackdog is within Aberdeenshire, children should be zoned for an Aberdeenshire School and that Balmedie School is the closest primary. It was also felt that families would like all children within the community to be zoned to the same school.
- 3.8 The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that when a change is to be made to a school boundary or catchment area then a formal consultation must be undertaken with all relevant stakeholders.

4. Balmedie School

- 4.1 Balmedie School is within the Ellon Cluster with nine other Primary Schools; Arnage, Auchterellon, Ellon Primary, Foveran, Hatton (Cruden), Meiklemill, Newburgh Mathers, Slains and Tipperty Schools. Balmedie School is zoned for Bridge of Don Academy for Secondary Education.
- 4.2 Balmedie School is located on Forsyth Drive, Balmedie. The school is non-denominational and serves the settlements of Balmedie, Blackdog, Belhelvie, Potterton, Whitecairns and the surrounding rural areas.
- 4.3 Scottish Government guidelines classifies Balmedie School as “accessible rural” (area with a population of less than 3,000 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more.)
- 4.4 The catchment area for the school stretches from Ardo to the north, bordering with Foveran and Cultercullen Schools, dividing the settlement of Blackdog to the south and bordering with Aberdeen City Schools; and the area of Craigie to the west which borders with New Machar School. Map 1 below shows the catchment area for Balmedie School and Aberdeenshire neighbouring schools.

Map 1 – Balmedie School catchment area and Aberdeenshire surrounding schools



- 4.5 The school has a capacity of 484 pupils. It is an open plan, one storey building that can accommodate 16 classes. It has three general purpose halls which can be utilised for dining, P.E. and assemblies. The halls can open up to one large space. There is non linked temporary accommodation which comprises of two classrooms and a separate nursery building on the grounds of the school. The school has an outdoor tennis/basketball court to the back of school, large grass playground with wooden play equipment and wooded area. Balmedie School features disabled parking, two accessible toilets, wheelchair access, multi-sensory room and nurture space.
- 4.6 Balmedie School has a production kitchen which serves lunches for Newburgh Mathers and Foveran Schools. There is a community room which accommodates a before/after school club.
- 4.7 Balmedie nursery is located within a separate building on the school site and can accommodate 50 children per session. Nursery provision is also provided from Potterton Community Centre and can accommodate 24 children per session.
- 4.8 Every local authority in Scotland is required to grade their schools for condition and suitability. The gradings range from A to D for each category with the following values:

- A: Good – Performing well and operating efficiently (85-100%)
- B: Satisfactory – Performing adequately but with minor problems (60-85%)
- C: Poor – Showing major problems and/or not operating optimally (40- 60%)
- D: Bad – Does not support the delivery of services to children and communities (0-40%)

- 4.9 Balmedie School is rated as A (89%) for educational suitability and rated B for building condition as per the Education Core Facts April 2022.
- 4.10 In August 2022, Balmedie School had a roll of 399 pupils which is 82% of the capacity.

5. Blackdog

- 5.1 The settlement of Blackdog is within Aberdeenshire Council and is on the boundary with Aberdeen City, north of Bridge of Don.
- 5.2 The original settlement has around 80 properties which are zoned to Scotstown School. There is a masterplan for 600 houses within Blackdog which indicate further growth within the settlement in future years, however to date around 50 have been built in the years up to 2018. These new houses are largely zoned to Balmedie School however the boundary crosses through Booth Gardens therefore pupils living there are zoned to different schools.
- 5.3 Due to the small number of new houses falling outwith the Balmedie catchment area within Booth Gardens, Aberdeenshire Council has an informal agreement in place for these properties to be treated as in zone to Balmedie School and provided with school transport.
- 5.4 Over the last 3 years Aberdeenshire Council have received an average of 3 placing requests per year to attend Balmedie School from residents of Blackdog.

6. Details of Proposal

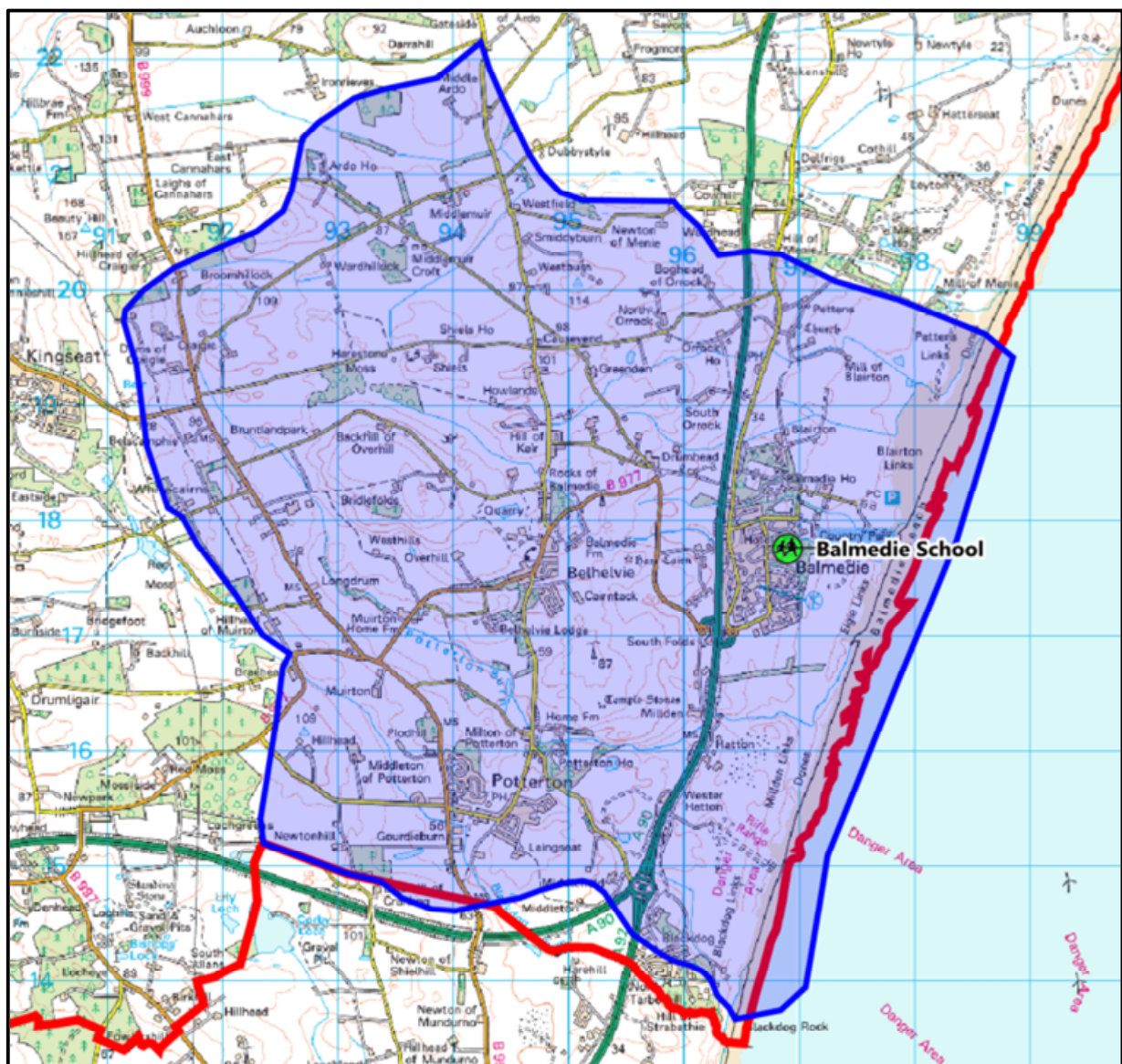
Rezoning of Balmedie School Catchment at Blackdog

- 6.1 Aberdeenshire Council proposes to extend the catchment area of Balmedie School to the south aligning with the Council boundary between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City, including the whole of the settlement of Blackdog within Balmedie School.
- 6.2 The council proposal is that Balmedie School catchment area should be amended with effect from August 2023, and from this date all new pupils starting primary school within the settlement of Blackdog should attend Balmedie School. The council also proposes that all existing primary pupils attending Scotstown School continue to do so. If the proposal is implemented any siblings of current pupils would also be able to attend Scotstown School subject to Aberdeen City Councils Placing Request Policy.
- 6.3 It is important that this proposal does not have a negative impact upon any children currently attending schools affected by this proposal and that they have continuity in their education. No existing children will be required to change

school if this proposal is adopted. This would only come into effect for new children moving into the area, or for the new cohort of P1 pupils from August 2023.

- 6.4 Currently the school nurseries in Aberdeenshire do not have catchment areas, therefore early years provision is not impacted by this proposal.
- 6.5 Pupils residing within the Balmedie School catchment are zoned to Bridge of Don Academy for secondary education, this proposal does not affect the secondary provision. All pupils within the Blackdog settlement will still be entitled to attend Bridge of Don Academy. The area to the west of the A92 are zoned to Oldmachar Academy, this proposal will not affect this.
- 6.6 Map 2 below shows the current catchment area for Balmedie School and the council boundary in red.

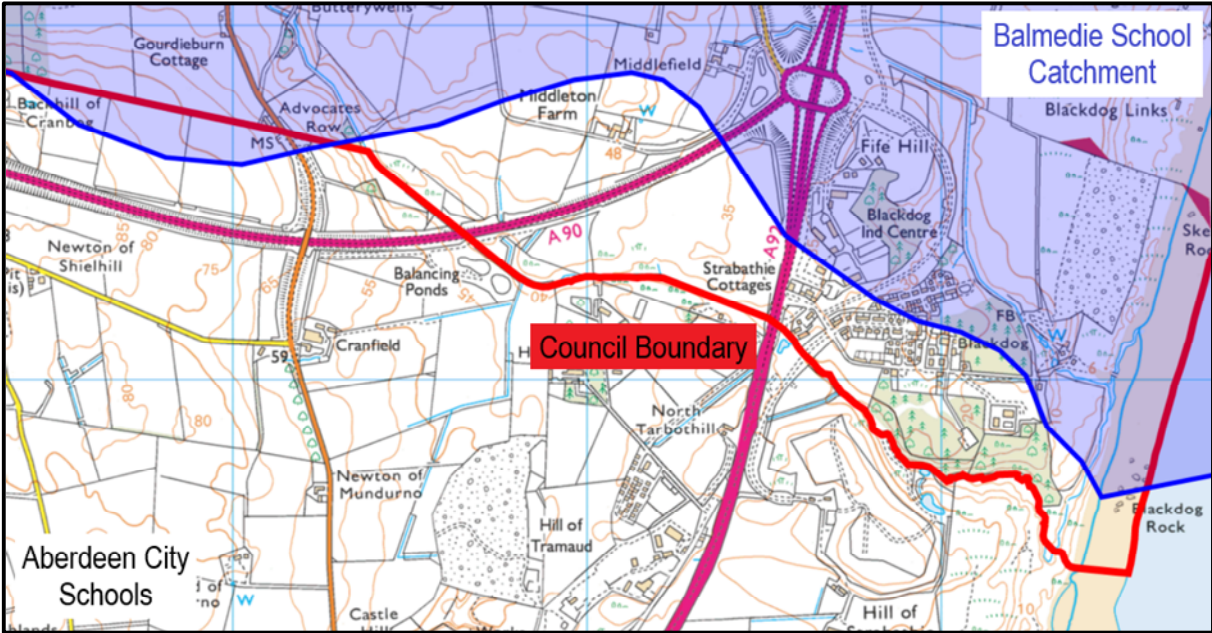
Map 2 – Balmedie School current catchment area



- 6.7 Balmedie School is approximately 3.5 miles from the Blackdog settlement and Scotstown School is approximately 4.5 miles.

6.8 Map 3 below shows the southern boundary of the Balmedie School catchment and its route through the settlement of Blackdog. The red line through the centre of the map shows the boundary between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils. The proposal is to move the school catchment area in line with this council boundary.

Map 3 – Settlement of Blackdog



6.9 Table 1 below shows the published 2021 based school roll forecast for Balmedie School.

Table 1 – Published 2021 based School Roll Forecast for Balmedie School

Balmedie School	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Total Roll	398	423	456	498	509	510
Total Capacity	484	484	484	484	484	484
Percentage of Capacity	82%	87%	94%	103%	105%	105%

6.10 The forecast for 2022 predicted 398 pupils which proved to be largely accurate with 399 pupils enrolled in August 2022.

6.11 It is anticipated this proposal would increase the School Roll Forecast for Balmedie School with an average of 3 pupils per year. 2022 based school roll forecasts are currently being developed and will take into account this potential change.

6.12 Approval of the new local development plan will result in some additional housing sites coming forward that will be included in future forecasts.

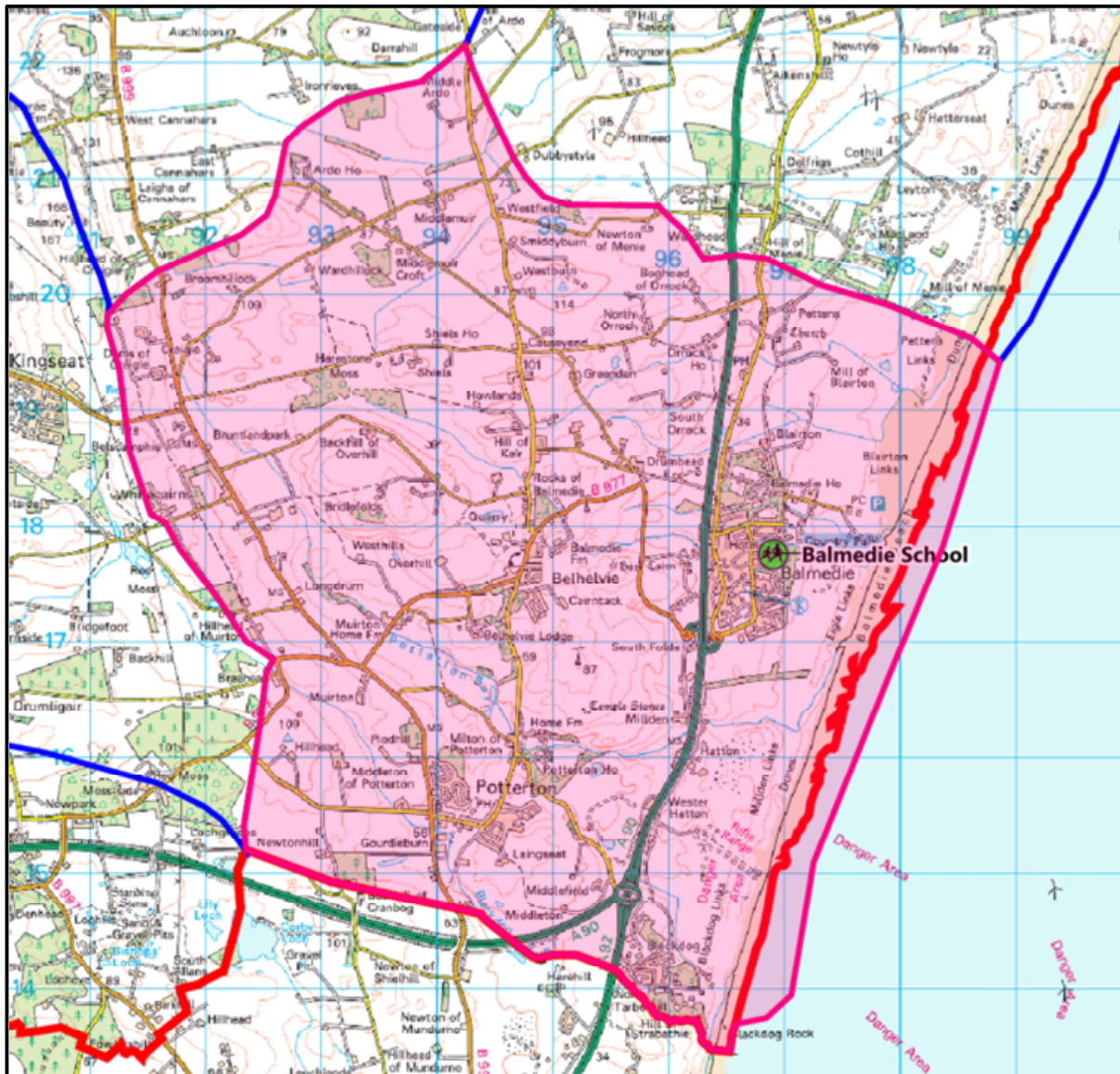
6.13 It is anticipated that Balmedie School will exceed capacity in future years, this is mainly due to housing within the area however Aberdeenshire Council are

looking at options to alleviate these pressures through Option Appraisals that are fit for the future.

6.14 If this proposal is approved all pupils within Blackdog would be included within the options appraisal for Balmedie School.

6.15 Map 4 below shows the proposed catchment area for Balmedie School aligning with the Council boundary, including the whole of the settlement of Blackdog.

Map 4 – Proposed Balmedie School catchment area



7. Educational Benefit Statement

7.1 In September 2019, Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy 'Connecting People, Places and Learning' was launched. This was developed by Scottish Government and COSLA. This 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.

7.2 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. They are core to all decision making.

7.3 The proposed amendment to the Balmedie School catchment will consolidate Aberdeenshire Council's informal agreement of giving in zone entitlement places and school transport to the residents within Booth Gardens.

7.4 This proposal will support the views of the majority of residents within Blackdog who believe that the Blackdog settlement should be zoned for Balmedie School.

7.5 This proposal will alleviate uncertainty on school catchment zones and school transport for families living in the settlement of Blackdog.

7.6 It will create more social opportunities for children living within Blackdog outwith school hours.

- 7.7 The proposal could alleviate childcare issues for Blackdog parent/carers as Balmedie School has a before/after school club which is run by Aberdeenshire Council.
- 7.8 This will enable children within the same settlement to all attend the same school enhancing socialisation, friendships and opportunities to strengthen the community.
- 7.9 As pupils within the Blackdog settlement currently attending schools will not be asked to move schools they will continue to receive good quality education in whichever setting they attend.
- 7.10 Scouting and Guiding groups regularly use the school facilities outwith school hours along with sporting groups.
- 7.11 Balmedie School use the woodlands surrounding the school for outdoor learning and have trained Forest School and Beach School staff. The school bought an outdoor yurt through fundraising which they use for activities and events. The school also has a partnership with the Sand Bothy in Balmedie which enhances their outdoor provision.
- 7.12 During the school year pupils of Balmedie School can participate in a number of events from Sports day to Christmas shows and events.
- 7.13 At Balmedie School there are a number of pupil representation groups which pupils have the opportunity to participate in which include; House Captains, Health and Wellbeing groups, Rights Respecting groups, eco groups, charity groups and a sing and smile music group.
- 7.14 Balmedie School is part of the Live Life Aberdeenshire, Active Schools programme which will provide additional out of school sporting activities.
- 7.15 The Parent Council at Balmedie School meets once per term to support the school and organise fundraising. 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.

8. Effect on the Local Community

- 8.1 Aberdeenshire Council recognise the uncertainty on primary school catchments within the Blackdog settlement and how this has impacted the community. It is hoped that this proposal will give clarity on the primary school catchment in the future.
- 8.2 The Blackdog residents will all be in zone for Balmedie School therefore School Transport will be provided alleviating the uncertainty and concerns about transport within the community.
- 8.3 There will be more social opportunities for families and children within the community if the settlement of Blackdog is zoned for one primary school.
- 8.4 This proposal supports the wishes of the majority of participants expressed

through the Blackdog informal survey.

9. School Transport

- 9.1 From August 2022 there are 15 pupils receiving school transport from Blackdog to Balmedie School at a cost of £148.35 per day.
- 9.2 The change in school zones for the Blackdog settlement would increase the school transport as current pupils attending Balmedie School and new children entering education in the Blackdog settlement from August 2023 will be entitled.
- 9.3 There are currently six pupils on the waiting list for School transport who would become entitled to school transport to Balmedie School from August 2023. This will either require a larger vehicle or an additional vehicle which could have cost implications.
- 9.4 The additional school transport should not cause any more congestion to Balmedie School due to the reduction of parent/carers vehicles commuting to school.
- 9.5 There is currently one school transport contract from Blackdog to Scotstown School carrying 7 pupils at a cost of £130.38 per day. If this proposal is approved there will be fewer pupils requiring this contract therefore the cost will be a reduced in time.
- 9.6 Aberdeenshire Council do not provide school transport to Greenbrae School.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1 As mentioned in Section 9 above the proposed changes would result in an increase in costs for school transport provision, which would need to be met by Aberdeenshire Council.
- 10.2 Balmedie School may have a need for additional teaching staff due to the additional zoned pupils however the changes would be gradual and would be managed through existing HR recruitment policies.
- 10.3 The rising roll at Balmedie School is already expected to require capital investment in order to provide increased capacity within the Blackdog to Ellon corridor. The small number of additional pupils generated from this proposal will not impact significantly upon the level of investment required.

11. Sustainability

- 11.1 As discussed in section 9 there will be an increase in School Transport. However, there should be a corresponding reduction in parent/carers using their own vehicles which will result in a reduction of CO² emissions.
- 11.2 Balmedie School is a shorter distance from Blackdog than Scotstown School therefore this would be an overall positive environmental impact in relation to transport emissions.

12. Implications for Staff

- 12.1 As the overall roll at Balmedie School continues to rise there may be a requirement for additional teaching staff.
- 12.2 Additional Support Needs (ASN) teaching and pupil support staff are allocated to each school in accordance with an annual assessment of need across the cluster.
- 12.3 Trade Unions are included in the consultation process. Any impacts for staff will be addressed under existing HR policies.

13. Equal Opportunities

- 13.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is a statutory requirement on the Council to assess the policies and practices necessary to meet the requirements of anti-discrimination and equalities legislation. It also affords an opportunity for the Council to consider the impact on the education service. An IIA has been carried out as part of the consultation process.
- 13.2 The purpose of an IIA is to examine policies and practice in a structured way to make sure that adverse effect on groups with protected characteristics are avoided. It is also a tool to enable the Council to assess what positive steps it can take to promote equality of opportunity and measure the results of the actions that have been taken.
- 13.3 With regards to the rezoning of Balmedie School to include the whole of the Blackdog settlement, it is not believed that this will have a negative impact on any of the groups with protected characteristics. Any negative impact identified through the consultation will be addressed in the final consultation report.
- 13.4 As part of the consultation process the Council will consult with a wide range of stakeholders, including staff, parents/carers and young people and will address any comments about equity during this consultation.
- 13.5 Under The Equality Act 2010 education providers must not treat disabled pupils less favourably and should take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage. Existing arrangements in place for pupils within the schools affected with additional support needs will continue.

14. Alternatives to Proposal

Retain the Status Quo

- 14.1 Blackdog settlement would stay within the current primary catchments of Balmedie School within Aberdeenshire Council and Scotstown School within Aberdeen City Council. The rural area to the west of A92 would continue to be zoned to Greenbrae School.
- 14.2 This option would not have an impact on primary, secondary or early years provision and all current pupils would continue their education within their

currently zoned schools and there would be no change to school transport entitlement.

15. Consultation Arrangements

- 15.1 At its meeting on 13 October 2022, Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children's Services Committee were asked to agree that a proposal document should be issued as a basis for consultation. No decision will be taken by the Council on the proposal contained in the paper until after the end of the consultation period. The Council will then receive a report on the consultation and will reach a view on the proposal.
- 15.2 A copy of this document will be issued to all of the consultees listed on the first page of this document and it will also be published on the Council's website: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/>
- 15.3 The period for consultation will run from 14 October 2022 until 6 January 2023 which covers a minimum period of 30 school days.
- 15.4 A face-to-face public meeting will be held to discuss the proposal at 6.30pm on Thursday 10 November at Balmedie School. Anyone wishing to attend the meetings are welcome. The meetings will be convened by the Council and the Council will present the reasons for bringing forward the proposal. There will be an opportunity for questions and comments at the meeting. A minute will be taken so that comments can later be summarised and considered.
- 15.5 Opportunities will be provided for the staff working in Balmedie School to discuss the proposals. Opportunities will also be arranged for pupils at Balmedie School to engage in the consultation in a manner appropriate to their age.
- 15.6 An online survey will be available as part of the consultation. This can be completed at the following address or by scanning the QR code below: <https://tinyurl.com/BalmedieSchoolRezoning>



- 15.7 The Council will also consider any written comments which should be emailed to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk. Alternatively, any comments can be sent to Learning Estates, Gordon House, Blackhall Road, Inverurie, AB51 3WA. Comments should be received no later than 4pm on 6 January 2023.
- 15.8 A copy of this document will also be sent to Education Scotland. They will also receive a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council during the consultation period. They will also receive a copy of any oral representations made at the public meeting and a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational

aspects of the proposal. In preparing their report, they may visit the school and make such reasonable enquiries as they consider appropriate.

16. Consideration of Consultation Responses

- 16.1 The Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, survey results, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made to it by any person at the public meeting. It will then prepare a report on the consultation. This report will be published in electronic format and will be available on the Council website.
- 16.2 The report will include a record of the total number of written representations made during the consultation period, a summary of the written representations and a summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting. The report will also include the Authority's response to the Education Scotland Report, a response to issues raised through any written or oral representations it has received, together with a copy of the Education Scotland Report and any other relevant information, including details of any alleged inaccuracies and how these have been handled. The report will also contain a statement explaining how the Council has complied with the requirement to review the proposal in light of the Education Scotland Report and representations (both written and oral) that it received.
- 16.3 The last section of the report will include an officer recommendation as to whether the proposals should be adopted and implemented. The Consultation Report will be published at least three weeks prior to the Council making a decision.
- 16.4 A final decision is likely to be made by the Council on the proposed changes in Summer 2023.

17. Decision Making

- 17.1 The consultation report will be considered firstly by Formartine Area Committee who will be asked to make a recommendation on whether the proposed changes are implemented.
- 17.2 Following Formartine Area Committee, Education and Children's Services Committee will consider the report and be asked to approve the officer recommendation in the report. This is expected to be in Summer 2023.

18. Conclusion

- 18.1 Taking the above into account Aberdeenshire Council recommends rezoning the Balmedie School catchment to include the whole of the Blackdog settlement.
- 18.2 The Statutory Consultation will give clarity to the community of Blackdog ensuring all pupils are zoned to one school.
- 18.3 The proposed changes will reflect the wishes of parent/carers within the settlement of Blackdog, helping to relieve the uncertainty with entitled School transport and all children being zoned for the same school.

- 18.4 From August 2023 all new primary age children moving into the settlement of Blackdog or the new cohort of P1 pupils from August 2023 should attend their newly zoned school of Balmedie School.
- 18.5 Existing pupils will not be required to change schools. This will also apply to any younger siblings of current pupils attending Scotstown School subject to Aberdeen City Councils Placing Request Policy.
- 18.6 This proposal paper is issued in terms of the authority's procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements.