

# **CONSULTATION REPORT REGARDING REZONING OF BALMEDIE SCHOOL CATCHMENT AT BLACKDOG**

**2023**

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

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# Contents

1. Introduction
2. The Proposal and Consultation Process
3. Educational Benefits Statement
4. Public Engagement
5. Written Responses
6. Education Scotland Report
7. Education Authority Response to Written and Oral Representations
8. Alleged Omissions or Inaccuracies
9. Compliance with section 9(1) of the schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010
10. Conclusion and Recommendations

– Appendices –

Appendix A - Rezoning of Balmedie School catchment at Blackdog Proposal Document

Appendix B - Public Meeting Minutes

Appendix C - Online Survey Summary

Appendix D - Pupil Engagement Summary

Appendix E - Education Scotland Final Report

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared following a statutory consultation on the proposal to rezone the Balmedie School catchment at Blackdog and align with the Aberdeenshire Council boundary.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The objective of the 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 the Education Scotland report and 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 consultation period;
  - Provide details of any omission from, or inaccuracy in, the proposal document and state how the Council acted on it;
  - Provide officers conclusions and recommendation.

## 2. The Proposal and 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 13 October 2022 Education and Children's Services Committee authorised the launch of a statutory consultation regarding the rezoning of the Balmedie School catchment at Blackdog.
- 2.3 The Proposal included as Appendix A on which the consultation took place was:
- To rezone the Balmedie School catchment area to include the whole of the Blackdog settlement and align with the Aberdeenshire Council Boundary.**
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 The proposal document made clear to relevant consultees that the consultation period would run from 14 October 2022 to 6 January 2023. This adequately covered the required minimum of 30 days school term time.

- 2.6 On 14 October 2022 copies of the proposal document were distributed to;
- Parent Council of Balmedie School
  - Parent/Carers of pupils and pre-school pupils zoned to Balmedie School
  - Pupils of 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 catchment
  - Relevant users of Balmedie School
  - Local Elected Members
  - Balmedie Library
  - Woodhill House
- 2.7 The majority of distribution was through email however, the Blackdog residents and Parents/Carers without email addresses were sent paper copies of the consultation proposal with an accompanying cover letter.
- 2.8 Copies of the proposal document were sent to Balmedie School, both Balmedie Nursery sites, Balmedie Library and Woodhill House to be made readily available to any interested member of the public.
- 2.9 The proposal document was published on the Council website: <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/education-consultations/> a copy of the document was also available on request from Aberdeenshire Council Learning Estates Team.
- 2.10 An advertising poster was sent to Balmedie School, both Balmedie Nursery sites and Balmedie Library which displayed maps, and contained information on the consultation dates, the public meeting details and information on how to engage in the consultation. Large copies of the maps were also sent to Balmedie School and Library.
- 2.11 An online survey was available during the consultation period to gather views and responses regarding the rezoning proposal.
- 2.12 The proposal was advertised on Aberdeenshire Council's social media pages giving an overview of the consultation, public meeting dates and link to the online survey.
- 2.13 An overview of the consultation and public meeting details were advertised in the Aberdeen Evening Express on 3 November 2022.

### **3. Educational Benefits Statement**

3.1 The proposal document contained the Educational Benefits. The statements are replicated here for reference.

3.2 In September 2019, Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy 'Connecting People, Places and Learning' was launched. This was developed by the 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.

3.3 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.

- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 This proposal will alleviate uncertainty regarding school catchment zones and school transport for families living in the settlement of Blackdog.
- 3.7 It will create more social opportunities for children living in Blackdog outwith school hours.
- 3.8 The proposal could alleviate childcare issues for Blackdog parents/carers as Balmedie School has a before/after school club which is run by Aberdeenshire Council.
- 3.9 This will enable children within the same settlement to all attend the same school; enhancing socialisation, friendships and opportunities to strengthen the community.
- 3.10 As the pupils in 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.
- 3.11 Scouting and Guiding groups regularly use the school facilities outwith school hours along with sporting groups.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 During the school year pupils of Balmedie School can participate in a number of events from Sports day to Christmas shows and events.
- 3.14 At Balmedie School there are a number of pupil representation groups that 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.
- 3.15 Balmedie School is part of the Live Life Aberdeenshire, Active Schools programme which will provide additional out of school sporting activities.
- 3.16 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.

## **4. Public Engagement**

### Public Meeting

- 4.1 All parents/carers and stakeholders were invited to a face to face public meeting which was held during the consultation period on 10 November 2022 at Balmedie School. The meeting was attended by parents/carers, staff, elected members and members of the community. A total of seven members of the public attended the meeting, including five parents/carers. The minutes of the meeting are attached as Appendix B.
- 4.2 The Head of Education gave an overview of the proposal and explained that the reasoning behind the proposal was that the Balmedie School catchment runs through the Blackdog settlement and that this was a catchment anomaly dated back from historic council ownership. He also stated that Aberdeenshire Council had carried out an informal survey in May 2022 to gain views and comments on the catchment areas within Blackdog, the results showed that the majority of respondents believe they should be zoned for Balmedie School.
- 4.3 During the meeting there were a number of questions and comments, the main themes were;
- Balmedie School capacity pressures
  - Housing Developments
  - Pupil's choice of schools
  - School Transport
  - School Holidays

### Online Survey

- 4.4 During the consultation period parents/carers, pupils, staff, community members and stakeholders were invited to take part in an online survey to express their opinions on the proposal.
- 4.5 The survey provided a summary of the proposal to rezone the whole of the Blackdog settlement to Balmedie School, a variety of questions and participants were also given the opportunity to leave comments regarding the proposal.
- 4.6 A total of 60 people took part in the survey. A full summary of the online survey is attached as Appendix C.
- 4.7 The majority of participants (58.3%) who completed the survey support the rezoning of the Balmedie School catchment area to include the settlement of Blackdog and align with the council boundary. This included all respondents living in Blackdog, who were mostly parents/carers.

4.8 There were 37 participants of the survey who chose to comment, these were in the themes of:

- The rezoning makes sense/the current zoning does not make sense
- Balmedie School capacity pressures
- Blackdog is within Aberdeenshire so children should attend an Aberdeenshire School
- School Transport
- Housing within the Balmedie School catchment area
- Secondary School catchment areas
- Traffic/Roads surrounding Balmedie School
- Children socialising within Blackdog
- Blackdog children already attending Balmedie School

4.9 There was also a section within the online survey to specifically gain views of children and young people, of which 8 comments were received.

#### Discussion with Pupils

4.10 As part of the consultation process, Head Teachers at Balmedie School and Scotstown School were sent a variety of questions and asked to discuss the proposal with pupils of the school, the summary of these is attached as Appendix D.

4.11 The group of pupils at Balmedie School who were consulted reside within the settlement of Blackdog. They had a mix of views on the proposal and most comments were regarding school transport. There were positive comments on making new friends with children who live close to them and getting a bigger school bus however in contrast there were also children who enjoy their little bus and had worries if too many children come to their school.

4.12 The group of Scotstown School pupils who were consulted also reside within the settlement of Blackdog. They mainly said they did not agree with the proposal with a variety of concerns on traffic and school buses and children not having choice of which school they would like to go to. However, there were also positive comments towards the proposal such as the Blackdog community feeling more linked together and having the same school holidays as the neighbours for more opportunities to play.

4.13 Overall, helpful feedback was received from both Balmedie School and Scotstown School pupils with contrasting comments. The feedback from Scotstown School met officer expectations as existing pupils are happy with the current arrangements. This proposal is not asking anyone enrolled in either school to move and school transport will continue for pupils currently attending both Scotstown School and Balmedie School.



## Staff Engagement

- 4.14 The Head Teacher of Balmedie School made the consultation document available to all members of staff with encouragement to complete the online survey and provided opportunity to discuss the proposal. Feedback from the Balmedie Head Teacher was that the consultation was discussed in a staff meeting and overall staff were happy and there were no specific comments made.

## **5. Written Responses**

- 5.1 All consultees and members of the public were given the Learning Estates contact details with the opportunity to express their comments and questions.
- 5.2 There was one question received through email from a Community Council member stating they would like to publicise the meeting at Balmedie School on their noticeboards and asking if there are any publicity materials, posters, leaflets they could use. Officers replied to the email with an attached advertising poster for the consultation and public meeting.

## **6. Education Scotland Report**

- 6.1 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 E.
- 6.2 Education Scotland attended the face to face public meeting on 10 November 2022 at Balmedie School regarding the proposal.
- 6.3 On the receiving of all the documentation on the proposal, Education Scotland carried out visits to Balmedie School and Scotstown School to discuss the proposal with relevant consultees.
- 6.4 Education Scotland spoke to stakeholders and they were mainly in agreement with the rezoning, however the main concern was regarding the capacity of Balmedie School. It is stated that stakeholders recognise that the proposal only affects the small number of children however there were comments and questions for Aberdeenshire Council on how the capacity issues and increasing traffic around Balmedie School will be addressed.
- 6.5 The Education Scotland report concluded that Aberdeenshire Council sets out a clear rationale for rezoning all of the Blackdog area to Balmedie School. The arrangements to ensure that children who currently attend Scotstown School will be able to continue to do so and receive school transport are reassuring to parents, carers and children. However, stakeholders have significant concerns about the capacity at Balmedie School as new houses continue to be built across its catchment area, including at Blackdog. Education Scotland stated that there will be a need for Aberdeenshire Council to continue to work with stakeholders to consider how this can best be addressed.

- 6.6 Aberdeenshire Council acknowledge and accept Education Scotland's report and will work with stakeholders to assure them of the progress to alleviate capacity pressures at Balmedie School.
- 6.7 The Council also acknowledges the restrictions around the road access to Balmedie School, however this proposal should alleviate some pressure by reducing the amount of parents/carers taking children to and from Balmedie School now as pupils within the Blackdog settlement will be entitled to school transport from August 2023.
- 6.8 School transport will continue for current pupils already on the service from Blackdog to Balmedie School and the bus contractor will be contacted to upsize to a larger vehicle to accommodate the new entitled pupils from August 2023. This should not cause any further issues with access to the school.

## **7. Education Authority Response to Written and Oral Representations**

- 7.1 Officers acknowledge there were many comments and questions regarding the capacity of Balmedie School during the consultation period. Aberdeenshire Council do anticipate that Balmedie School will go over capacity in the future however this proposal is only affecting a relatively small number of established houses, many of whom have children already attending primary schools in the area.
- 7.2 On 2 February 2023 a report regarding South Formartine Primary School Provision was presented to Education & Children's Services Committee. This report outlined two viable options to meet the key drivers of the capacity pressures at Balmedie School and Foveran School following an options appraisal. The Committee advised Officers to progress with Option 1 – replacement school at Foveran. This will be progressed for input into the Capital Plan and if approved will result in the rezoning of Balmedie School catchment area which will address future capacity pressures.
- 7.3 There were several comments regarding Balmedie School's capacity pressures and forecasted pupil numbers in the online survey and public meeting however Aberdeenshire Council only anticipate an average of three pupils annually from this proposal to extend the Balmedie School catchment area to include the whole of the settlement of Blackdog. There were also questions regarding if more teachers will be hired. As stated in the proposal document, if the overall roll at Balmedie School continues to rise there may be a requirement for additional teaching staff.
- 7.4 There were questions from the survey regarding capacity management at Balmedie School such as suggestions of an extension to Balmedie School or a new build school. Balmedie School roll is currently 395 (82% capacity) as of March 2023 and is forecasted to have a roll of 391 pupils in August 2023. As described in 7.2 above, capacity pressures will be addressed.

- 7.5 There was a query received within the survey regarding how developer obligations are spent. The purpose of the developer obligation funding must be identified in a Section 75 legal agreement. For educational developer obligations, this will be for a new school, an extension or other building works that increase the capacity of the school. The timescale for use of these funds is seven years from the date of last contribution.
- 7.6 There were concerns from participants of the survey on road and traffic issues. Aberdeenshire Council do not foresee any further congestion on the road and traffic issues surrounding Balmedie School as a result of this proposal. All pupils attending Balmedie School from the Blackdog settlement from August 2023 will be entitled to school transport, therefore there will be a reduction of parents/carers currently driving their children to school on a daily basis.
- 7.7 During the public meeting a consultee asked about the differing holidays between Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council. When Aberdeenshire Council sets term dates for a five year period, all neighbouring authorities are included in the consultation.
- 7.8 There were some comments that incorrectly stated the secondary school catchment area for Balmedie School. Aberdeenshire Council would like to clarify that Balmedie School is zoned only for Bridge of Don Academy for secondary education and this is currently not expected to change. This rezoning proposal is for Balmedie Primary School catchment area only.
- 7.9 There were also comments that stated that class sizes would increase if this proposal was to be approved. Aberdeenshire Council would like to clarify that class sizes will remain within the following nationally agreed limits:

P1	25 pupils
P2	30 pupils
P3	
P4	33 pupils
P5	
P6	
P7	
Composite Classes (i.e. P3/4)	25 pupils

## 8. Alleged Omissions or Inaccuracies

- 8.1 Section 10(3) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 places a requirement on the Council to provide details of any inaccuracies or omissions within the proposal document which has been either raised by consultees or identified by the Council itself.
- 8.2 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.

8.3 There were no identified inaccuracies or omissions within the proposal document so no further action was required.

## **9. Compliance with Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

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

*After the Education Authority has received HMle's report, the Authority is to review the relevant proposal having regard (in particular) to any relevant;*

- (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) HMle's report.*

9.2 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. Conclusion and Recommendation**

10.1 Officers have carefully considered the opportunities, issues and challenges identified by stakeholders during the informal engagement and formal consultation processes.

10.2 In review of the oral and written submissions to the formal consultation and online survey results, the majority of consultees agree that the Balmedie School should be rezoned to include the whole of the Blackdog settlement.

10.3 All the Blackdog residents who completed the online survey and are directly affected by any change to the school catchment areas, indicated their support for this proposal.

10.4 The council now have three options namely;

- Adopt the proposal to rezone the Balmedie School catchment at Blackdog and align with the Aberdeenshire Council boundary; or
- Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt; or
- Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo.

10.5 There were no suggested amendments made during the consultation period, therefore this is not an option for the Council to take forward. As the majority of respondents support the proposal there would be no merit in maintaining the status quo.

**10.6 The recommendation of officers is that Aberdeenshire Council should adopt the proposal to rezone the Balmedie School catchment area to include the whole of the Blackdog settlement.**