



**Perth & Kinross Council
Education & Children's Services
Statutory Consultation Public Meeting**

**Minute of Meeting Held on Wednesday 14 November 2018
At 7.00pm in Inchtute Primary School**

Present

Councillor Caroline Shiers	Convener, Lifelong Learning Committee
Sheena Devlin	Executive Director (Education & Children's Services)
Karen Robertson	Service Manager - Business Services
Carol Taylor	Service Manager - Resources

In Attendance

Councillor Angus Forbes	Perth and Kinross Council
Councillor Alasdair Bailey	Perth and Kinross Council
Ken McAra	Education Scotland

Caroline Nash – Minutes	Perth & Kinross Council
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5 members of the public

Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Shiers opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public in attendance to the statutory consultation public meeting and introduced herself and the Council Officers to the members of the public.

Format of meeting

Sheena Devlin explained the format the meeting would follow and how other similar events had been undertaken.

The proposal

Sheena Devlin explained the consultation proposal to the attendees:

The Council proposes that subject to the outcome of this proposal:

- Provision of a school at Abernyte Primary School be permanently discontinued with effect from 1 July 2020, or as soon as possible thereafter;
- That the pupils of Abernyte Primary School catchment area permanently receive their education at Inchtute Primary School, from 2 July 2020 or as soon as possible thereafter; and
- That the delineated catchment area of Inchtute Primary School be permanently extended to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Abernyte Primary School from 2 July 2020.

Sheena Devlin advised that copies of the slides can be provided.

Sheena Devlin informed the meeting what each officer would discuss and gave Sharon Johnston's apologies to the meeting. Sheena Devlin explained that if officers were unable to answer to any questions raised, the answers would be incorporated into the Consultation Report.

Statutory Consultation Process

Karen Robertson outlined the process of the statutory consultation. She highlighted that the process is strictly determined by legislation to ensure thorough and robust processes across authorities in Scotland. The legislation sets out how and when the Council must undertake certain activities. The process started with the consideration by Lifelong Learning Committee on 22 August 2018 which granted permission to undertake a statutory consultation. Karen Robertson emphasised that no decisions regarding the permanent future of Abernyte Primary School have been made. The Council must first seek the views of statutory consultees and report back to Committee with recommendations.

The Proposal Paper including an educational benefits statement was published on the Council's website and statutory consultees were written to. Public notice adverts and social media were used to publicise the consultation to other interested parties. The period of consultation will run from Monday 29 October 2018 to Friday 14 December 2018 which includes a period of 33 school days. The purpose of this consultation is to seek representations from interested parties. Anyone who wishes to make their views on the proposal known to the Council can do so, and there are a number of ways they can do this, whether online, in writing or in person. Any representations made at the public meetings are noted and will be included as verbal representations and will be published.

Karen Robertson explained the next steps:

- Involvement of Education Scotland
- Preparation of the Consultation Report
- Decision of Lifelong Learning Committee
- Notification to Scottish Ministers

Q. When Education Scotland reviews the education aspect of both schools what are they doing?

A. Sheena Devlin explained the phrase to review the education aspect of the proposal as being an independent and impartial review of the Council's Proposal Paper. The review will have a particular focus on the educational aspects of the proposal. Education Scotland visit the schools and meet with focus groups of pupils, staff and parents as part of that review.

Q. What does Education Benefit mean?

A. Sheena Devlin advised that the education benefits are the Council's assessment of the likely educational benefits that it believes would accrue for the children and young people affected if the proposal was to be implemented. The Council must demonstrate why the proposal is of overall positive educational benefit to the pupils of the affected schools.

Comment - After the meeting I looked for the Act and couldn't locate it.

Comment - The wording is overall benefit – this is what the pupils gain.

A. Sheena Devlin advised that the Educational Benefits Statement is not comparing the schools. Education Scotland will make a judgement of what the educational experience is.

Comment – The educational benefits could be neutral which means they could be the same at both schools.

A. Sheena Devlin advised that where there are Education Benefits we need to state what they are.

Karen Robertson advised that once the Council received the report from Education Scotland it is required to consider the content of that report along with representations made and respond to these within its Consultation Report. The Consultation Report is required to be published for at least 3 weeks before being presented to Elected Members of Lifelong Learning Committee for a final decision.

If the report is submitted with the proposal as it stands, and Lifelong Learning Committee do not approve that, then that is the end of the process and the Local Authority cannot review the proposal to close the school again for at least 5 years.

Comment - So you are giving instruction to the Council to approve or not approve.

A. Karen Robertson advised that it is not the Officers that make the decision.

Officers present a report to the Elected Members with a recommendation and that is considered as part of the democratic decision-making process of the Council.

Officers do not give instruction to Elected Members.

Sheena Devlin explained that the independent and impartial report from Education Scotland carries significant weight. However, the final report must set out what the benefits of the proposal would be and set out the story of what justifies the preferred recommendation.

Comment - I am just wondering on the timeline which is lengthy hanging over the school.

A. Sheena Devlin confirmed that the timeline is lengthy and the process requires to be undertaken robustly and not be rushed.

Q. In terms of this stage, is it an option to go back to pre-consultation? This proposal was prompted by the pre-consultation outcome. Can these consultations go back? We would have provided critique to the original catchment review in the options appraisal. My concern is that this is written in language that the catchment review information is fact. We feel the facts are inaccurate. How can the process go back to what the community pushed for?

A. Karen Robertson advised that it is not an option to go back to pre-consultation at this stage. Lifelong Learning Committee had considered all the options within the options appraisal and agreed to undertake a statutory consultation on the proposal to close Abernyte Primary School. That process will be completed and the outcomes reported back to Lifelong Learning Committee for any further decisions to be made.

What needs to happen now is for the consultees who advise that the facts are inaccurate is for the evidence of these to be submitted as representations on the proposal.

Comment – Requests to change the catchment at Abernyte for 20 years have been rejected as it was too complicated. Now a catchment review is part of this so it can be done.

Comment - The catchment review was limited. The Council needs to look at what catchment area would work. You have not looked at what will alleviate pressure in Carse schools. You have chosen certain areas and this is what has been put in front of the Council. The community provided feedback but my feedback was not included as we live in Inchtute and not Abernyte. Feedback was provided that the catchment area should be reviewed and you conclude that people are happy for the school to close and pupils to be bussed to another school.

A. Carol Taylor advised that in order to develop a more accurate understanding of the potential for a catchment change which would lead to an increased roll at Abernyte, all families (parents/carers living with primary or children under 5) known to the Council living in the potential new catchment area were contacted to discuss the potential catchment change. This included those families living in the current catchment for Abernyte and those included in the identified area north of the A90. Families living in the Abernyte Primary School catchment area were included in the meetings to ascertain whether they would consider moving their school age children back to the school or placing their under 5's at the school in the future if the catchment was extended.

Comment - Families that live in the catchment area have put in placing requests for other schools as they thought Abernyte is going to be closing.

Comment - The Council ignored a request for families to be housed in affordable housing and have placed people in affordable housing who do not have any children. Education and Property should be working together. It's difficult to get planning permission in this area. It's taken me 2 years to get planning permission. This report is damaging to the Abernyte area with its inaccurate figures and facts. There are outright lies in this report.

Sheena Devlin addressed the statements made on the inaccuracies and lies in report and expressed they are not lies or factually incorrect. If other information comes to light with significant substance then this is what will be included in the Council's Consultation Report and submitted to Lifelong Learning Committee.

Comment – You are not prepared to stand up in public and admit you are liars and the report is full of lies.

Sheena Devlin refuted the statement made by the member of the public. Sheena Devlin clarified that she would address the two particular examples provided. With regard to placing a couple in a house that didn't have children, it was advised that Education and Children's Services has no input to the legal allocation of housing and had sight of the letter which had been sent advising of the Council's Housing Policy priorities for allocating affordable housing.

Comment – But it was thoughtless though, taking away affordable housing that could have had children that would attend the school.

In response to the second point of inaccurate pupil numbers, Sheena Devlin advised that the Council is very clear regarding the number of pupils living in school catchment areas. However, there are lots of different reasons people make placing requests to attend other schools.

Q. What is the one main reason?

A. Sheena Devlin confirmed there are many reasons and parents don't have to state their reason for making a placing request. Carol Taylor advised in respect of the catchment review the outcome of the initial assessment was detailed in the options appraisal which went to Lifelong Learning Committee in March 2018. A further report was presented to Lifelong Learning Committee in August 2018 which provided the outcome of the further assessment.

Comment - I read that.

A. Carol Taylor advised that as a result of feedback from the Abernyte Primary School community drop-in sessions, Council Officers engaged twice with families of primary aged children and under 5's who live in area to the north of the A90 in the Inchtute Primary School catchment area as this was identified as a potential extension to the Abernyte Primary School catchment area. This was carried out firstly through an on-line survey and secondly through individual meetings with families held in May 2018.

Comment - People who already have children in Longforgan don't want to send their children to Abernyte.

Comment – It was brought up at the time of the pre-consultation why Knapp was taken out of Abernyte catchment area.

A. Sheena Devlin advised that she could not comment on when Knapp children stopped attending Abernyte Primary School. A catchment review can only be undertaken by Officers if the Council have given permission.

Post meeting note - There have been no changes to the catchment area affecting Longforgan since 1996.

Comment - Longforgan pupils are moving to Errol. Abernyte could be used for them.

A. Carol Taylor advised there are too many pupils at Longforgan to fit into Abernyte.

Q. What is Inchtute capacity at the moment?

A. Carol Taylor advised the current occupancy is 81%.

Q. What is Errol capacity at the moment?

A. Carol Taylor advised she did not have the exact figure to hand but that the current occupancy is less than 70%.

Q. Why not look at Knapp?

A. Carol Taylor advised that the Council did consider all areas north of the A90.

Comment - You didn't think of changing it to Abernyste. Longforgan parents didn't want to move to Abernyste.

Sheena Devlin summarised that there has been significant debate around catchment area and there are clear concerns regarding the catchment review. The Council will consider the points brought up.

Comment - We have spoken to John Swinney MSP about this.

A. Sheena Devlin noted that there is significant dissent around the catchment review report that was used and will undertake to ensure this is considered fully in the Council's final report.

Q. So what we think is inaccurate, we can do a report and send it in?

A. Sheena Devlin advised that any information in the report that is considered not to be accurate should be submitted to the Council as part of the consultation for further consideration.

Karen Robertson advised of the indicative timescales which were working on taking the final report back to Lifelong Learning Committee in May 2019. If the final report states the school is still proposed to close then that is not the end of the process. The Council have to inform Scottish Ministers within 6 working days. Scottish Ministers will consider the consultation and representations can be made to Scottish Ministers during the first 3 weeks of their consideration. Scottish Ministers have 8 weeks to make a decision on whether to grant consent or refer the matter to the independent School Closure Review Panel. Therefore, this could take up to November 2019

All the reports and related documents are on the Abernyste page of Perth and Kinross Council website.

Comment – The report does not include when other schools closed.

A. The report commences from the start of this consultation and further information will be published on representations made in the final Consultation Report. That will include points recorded tonight. Any comments or views after tonight must be submitted by 5.00pm on 14 December via online form, email or in writing to the Council.

Vision and Background

Sheena Devlin outlined the process of the school estate review so far. Communities had been encouraged to participate in the pre consultation work to inform the options appraisal using a wide variety of mechanisms, including a drop-in session, email as well as the availability of an online questionnaire. This information was presented to Lifelong Learning Committee on 21 March 2018. Further work was undertaken to investigate extending the catchment area. The outcome of this was presented to Lifelong Learning Committee on 22 August 2018, and it was approved that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to close Abernyste Primary School and this meeting is part of that process.

The capacity of Abernyste Primary School is 44 pupils. At Census 2017 there were 5 pupils.

There are currently 11 pupils living in the catchment area and 6 of these attend other PKC schools. There is a duty on Council to make best use of public resources and ensure best value is achieved whilst optimising the educational experience for every pupil.

Sheena Devlin acknowledged that the audience may have different views on the information shared.

Likely Effect of the Proposal on the Local Community

Sheena Devlin advised that rural schools are classified by the Scottish Government as accessible rural, remote rural or very remote rural. Abernyte is classified as an accessible rural school. Families living in the catchment area are travelling to access education as well as other services in nearby relatively large villages. The community has easy access to amenities. The village of Abernyte is close to good road links to both Perth and Dundee and a number of relatively large villages including Errol, Inchtute, Longforgan and St Madoes. These villages have amenities including post offices, shops, GP surgeries, churches, hotels and schools.

The local community use the school for activities such as the wine club and heritage group use the school throughout the year. Within Abernyte itself, the church building is also available for use by the community and there are village halls and church buildings in nearby villages as well as the other Carse schools.

Comment - Think some of the feedback we will put in when discussing the report will be around these statements.

Transport Arrangements

Karen Robertson advised that the approximate travel distance between Abernyte Primary School and Inchtute Primary School was 3.4 miles. If Abernyte Primary School was permanently closed, all children would be transported by the Council to Inchtute Primary School, including those who currently attend Inchtute Primary School from Abernyte Primary School catchment area as a placing request.

Q. When the meeting was held in 2017, lots of ideas were put forward regarding improving Abernyte School as it is a good building. Inchtute classes are big. Why not have the idea of Inchtute children using Abernyte as a Campus? What happened to those suggestions? Nowhere in the report are there any options for addressing the school roll apart from the catchment area. Where are the all the ideas that were shared in this report?

A. Sheena Devlin confirmed that all the information gathered was considered. Carol Taylor advised that all the information is in the options appraisal report reports in March and August. She also stated that the catchment review was overwhelmingly the preferred response from the pre-consultation.

Q. What about a nursery at Abernyte? You get nursery at Inchtute and you are looking at expanding nursery provision and what about exploring suggestions that have been put forward. You were given lots of suggestions and options but now we have only been given one.

A. Carol Taylor advised that there are few pre-school pupils living in Abernyte catchment area. The Council explored the catchment review option as that was the key area which could create an increased and sustainable pupil roll for Abernyte.

Comment - You didn't explore the other options. We all know the school roll is decreasing. An ASN pupil has thrived in Abernyte.

A. Sheena Devlin acknowledged that different people have different views on what can be provided at small schools and what can be provided at larger schools such as better sporting opportunities at bigger schools.

Comment - Choice is good.

Sheena Devlin explained the Early Learning and Childcare expansion from 600 hours to 1140hours. Funding has been received from the Scottish Government and the Council has to maximise the use of existing buildings or increase capacity in existing provision, not build new. Not all premises would be suitable for nursery provision and this is determined by the Care inspectorate. Each child is entitled to the number of hours within a certain area but not necessarily at a named place.

Comment – You are building to expand Inchtute. We have empty classrooms already at Abernyte. Consider putting some nursery pupils in Abernyte. Or ASN pupils.

A. Sheena Devlin confirmed that this feedback will be considered and included in the final Consultation Report. In respect of the point made regarding ASN, ASN provision or classes cannot be established without statutory consultation. However, Perth and Kinross Council would seek to avoid schools being over split sites due to the operational and management issues which can arise from split sites.

Educational Benefits

Sheena Devlin detailed a summary of the key Educational Benefits which are set out in detail in the Proposal Paper. The Educational Benefits Statement is an important part of the process and Education Scotland will assess the educational aspects of the Council's proposal. The Educational Benefits set out what education provision would be provided to children if the school was to close and education was to be provided in a different setting. It is not intended to provide a comparison between the two schools. When a closure proposal is assessed there needs to be criteria and the balance between educational benefit and best value must be taken into account. Education Scotland has a statutory role to assess the educational benefits and if the Council overstated these, they would be quick to tell us. Some aspects may be neutral in terms of educational benefit and, therefore, these would not be included as an educational benefit.

Comment - The Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education Report, Chapter 6 paragraph 86 says “the educational difference between schools is more often marginal than decisive and that requiring an authority to magnify small differences in provision has led to tensions between communities within a local authority’s area, which benefits no party in these decisions.” Is this not implying you do get the same benefits at both schools?

A. Sheena Devlin advised the report does not imply there is no educational benefit at Abernyte. The report sets out what education provision would be provided to children if Abernyte was to close and education was to be provided in a different setting.

Comment - The Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education Report says “Educational impact of a closure proposal is neutral with no overall educational detriment to the children directly concerned. In such circumstances, if a closure continued to be proposed it would be crucial that any other factors were fully and transparently scrutinised and identified clear overall benefit to the rural communities involved.”

A. Sheena Devlin acknowledged that a different view was being expressed that the educational benefits were considered to be neutral and this will be recorded.

Comment - Now that this proposal paper is out here, if you are thinking of sending your child to school you would read this report and think they do all this at Inchturk and don’t do it at Abernyte when that is not the case.

Comment – This is a slur on the Headteacher at Abernyte.

Comment - English language that we are not understanding that education benefit didn’t mean it was a benefit to education.

Sheena Devlin acknowledged that there was a clear difference of opinion in respect of the educational benefits and this would be recorded.

Comment - Can’t you see that this is wrong and needs to be reworded?

Comment - You are not open to differences and have a biased mind set reading that report.

Comment – It concerns us that you are not impartial.

A. Sheena Devlin refuted that point and advised that the Council Officers are impartial as that’s their job.

Councillor Shiers advised that the Committee have asked the Officers to undertake this work and they are doing so on the instruction of Lifelong Learning Committee.

Councillor Bailey advised that all Committee meetings are published on YouTube and you can see the scrutiny we undergo.

Comment – Good job.

Comment - Rural schools get extra money from Scottish Government.

Comment - My school should be part of the solution. If I was an Inchture parent, I would hope you got that right and thought Abernyte was part of the solution.

Q. Can you explain the costs for running Abernyte being over £300,000?

A. Carol Taylor advised that this was based on an assessment by Property Colleagues for medium term work which would be required upgrade the property in terms of building fabric, mechanical and electrical works, fire alarm systems, heating and hot water pipework, insulation and building fabric improvements. These works are not required immediately but in the medium term which is 2-5 years.

Q. Where will I find that?

A. Carol Taylor advised it was on Page 11 of 4.3 / 4.4 in the Options Appraisal report.

Q What rating is Abernyte?

A. Carol Taylor confirmed that Abernyte was rated Condition B and Suitability A. Suitability is determined by the Heateacher.

Comment - There is misinformation on the Inchture Primary School map. The playing field is not used. The school playing field is only used one day a year. This time of year they can only use the MUGA. The square footage per capita is not shown.

Comment - The fence between the field and the A90 was broken at Inchture so pupils were not allowed to use the playing field until this was fixed. Yes, the playing field is used.

Comment - Abernyte is an Eco school benefitting from an outdoor area. You have not shown the playing field at Abernyte on the map so it looks like Abernyte does not have a playing field when that is not the case.

Q. Do we get access to the minutes to approve them prior to them being sent to Education Scotland?

A. No.

Q. How quickly will the minutes be produced?

A. It is not possible to put a timescale on that at this stage. All documentation will require to be ready to send to Education Scotland before Christmas.

SD thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.