

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE – 17 MAY 2016

PROPOSAL TO MOTHBALL LETHNOT PRIMARY SCHOOL

REPORT BY MARGO WILLIAMSON, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING

ABSTRACT

This report seeks Committee approval to mothball Lethnot Primary School from August 2016 following consultation. The term 'mothballing' is used, according to Scottish Government guidance, to refer to a temporary decision to close a school where the roll has fallen to zero. Mothballing, rather than closing a school, gives the opportunity for it to reopen should circumstances change. There is no legal process for mothballing.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Approve the mothballing of Lethnot Primary School from August 2016
- (ii) Agree to the proposals outlined in section 5 of this report.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/COPORATE PLAN

This report contributes to the following local outcome(s) contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

Our children and young people are confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Lethnot Primary School is a remote rural school which is part of the Brechin cluster of schools.

3.2 The Scottish Government has issued statutory Guidance under the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010 which can be found at the following link: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00477028.pdf>. Paragraphs 63 to 65 of the Guidance deals with the issue of mothballing as follows:-

“Mothballing

63. In considering alternatives to closure, authorities may choose to consider “mothballing” a school (or a stage of education or a nursery class at a school). This is a temporary closure which does not lead to a consultation under the 2010 Act. It is only appropriate in very restricted circumstances. When a school roll falls very low, the authority and/or community may consider that the school is not presently viable but do not wish to close it immediately because there is a reasonable prospect that the number of pupils in the area will increase such that it should be re-opened in the future.

64. It is vital that this flexibility to close a school for a temporary period is not used to undermine the requirements under the 2010 Act to consult on all school closure proposals. Mothballing is only appropriate for a temporary period and should be subject to regular review, at least annually, against the same requirements which led to the original decision to mothball the school (or stage of education). The maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote. The condition of the school building and cost of maintaining the mothballed provision will also be relevant.

65. A school can be mothballed where the school roll has fallen to zero and continues to be zero. It may also be appropriate where the roll or potential roll is very low and the authority considers the only other option to be closure. However, in circumstances where a school is mothballed rather than closed and some children and young people remain in the catchment area, this decision should be taken in consultation with the parents involved, and the possibility should be raised as early as possible, in order to ensure that families can understand the options open to them. Mothballing should not be a way of denying parents access to the statutory consultation process required under the 2010 Act and if the majority of parents oppose mothballing, it would be appropriate to move to statutory consultation on closure as soon as possible.”

- 3.3 Report 74/16 requested Committee approval to consult with parents regarding the potential mothballing of Lethnot Primary School. This request was approved and came about as the result of the school roll naturally following to zero by the end of school session 2015/16. During session 2015/16, there have been four pupils at Lethnot Primary School which has no pre-school class, three P7 children and one P5. One P7 pupil moved school in November 2015 and the remaining two primary seven pupils will be leaving Lethnot Primary School to move into Brechin High School in August 2016. The P5 child’s family have recently relocated to another area in Scotland. There are no other younger children living in the school catchment area.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Following Committee approval, views of families living in the school’s catchment area were sought. The letter in appendix one was sent to all known parents/carers living in the catchment area of Lethnot Primary School regardless of age of child/ren and whether they attended or had attended Lethnot.
- 4.2 In addition the Council’s communications team published a news release on the Council’s website and highlighted the presence of this information through the Council’s social media channels. Some of the local press highlighted our request for comments.
- 4.3 There have been no comments, queries or concerns fed back to the Council about the potential mothballing of Lethnot Primary School.
- 4.4 There are no current enrolments or placing requests for children to attend Lethnot School from session 2016/17.

5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 We propose to mothball Lethnot Primary School from the end of school session 2015/16.
- 5.2 The decision to mothball will be reviewed in December 2016. This will include an analysis of any demand at the time that would necessitate the re-opening of Lethnot Primary School. In the meantime the delineated area for Lethnot Primary School will be temporarily re-aligned to Edzell Primary School.
- 5.3 In line with the Council’s approved process for mothballing a school (appendix two), the intention to mothball Lethnot Primary school will be shared with the Scottish Government and arrangements will be out in place to manage staff relocation to other schools. Arrangements will also be made to secure and monitor the school building.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Currently there are no children residing in the catchment that wish to attend Lethnot Primary School. Over 2016/17 should a child move into the area, arrangements will be put in place to transport them to the nearest school. Depending on where pupils live, there are likely cost implications in terms of transporting pupils to Edzell School rather than Lethnot. Should this occur, this will be fully explored and met from existing transport budgets.

No significant additional financial implications for the Council are expected to arise as a result of the recommendation in this report. Some costs will be incurred in securing the school building and keeping it wind and watertight and some additional staff travel costs may arise from redeployment but these are not expected to be significant and will in any event be met from existing budgets. Any costs incurred will be partially offset by savings in other running costs from the school being mothballed.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1: Consultation Letter

Appendix 2: Process for mothballing a school

APPENDIX ONE

CONSULTATION LETTER

29 February 2016

Dear Parent/Carer

POTENTIAL MOTHBALLING OF LETHNOT PRIMARY SCHOOL

You are receiving this letter because you live in the catchment area for Lethnot Primary School and have pre-school and/or school aged children in your household.

At Angus Council's Children and Learning Committee on 23 February 2016 it was agreed to consult with parents and carers on the potential mothballing of Lethnot Primary School. This situation has come about as a result of the school roll naturally following to zero. By summer 2016 there will be no children attending Lethnot Primary School and we are currently not aware of any potential pupils.

The term 'mothballing' is used, according to Scottish Government guidance, to refer to a temporary decision to close a school where the roll has fallen to zero. Mothballing, rather than closing a school, gives the opportunity for it to re-open should circumstances change. There is no legal process for mothballing; however Angus Council has an approved process which I have enclosed for your information. Further information on national policy related to the issues of mothballing and school closures is contained in the Schools' (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 which can be found at the following link: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00477028.pdf>.

Any decision to mothball requires to be reviewed. This includes an analysis of any demand at the time that would necessitate the re-opening of the School. In the meantime, the delineated area for Lethnot Primary School will be temporarily re-aligned to Edzell Primary School.

Please send any views, queries, comments by email to PEOPLE@angus.gov.uk for my attention by Friday 25 March 2016.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Stephen

Head of Schools and Learning

APPENDIX TWO

ANGUS COUNCIL – CHILDREN & LEARNING DIRECTORATE

PROCESS FOR MOTHBALLING A SCHOOL

1. Committee approval to consult:

Roll naturally falling to very low numbers/zero

2. Consultation process including alternative schools, re-alignment to delineated areas, (primary and secondary), transport requirements, commitment to honour existing placements. Maintaining integrity of school building and criteria to re-opening. Review period in less than one year.

3. Report back to Committee.

4. Scottish Government approval – not part of statutory process, only temporary.

5. Confirmation of Council approval.

6. Advertise notice to temporary mothball school locally.

7. Redeployment of staff – LG/Teaching – TUPE.

8. Inventory of resources to go elsewhere, retain or redeploy to schools.

9. Meeting with Property regarding security, weather protection, signage, interim community use. Ongoing maintenance inspection.

10. Water, rates, power, IT informed of change and re-charge.