

ANGUS COUNCIL
MOTHBALLING POLICY

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The term mothballing is used, according to the Scottish Government guidance, to refer to a temporary decision to close a school where the current or potential roll is very low or 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.
- 1.2 When changing the status of a school to 'mothballed', the process involves taking into account the current roll and the forecasted roll for future years.
- 1.3 Angus Council previously mothballed Lethnot Primary School when the roll fell to 0 in 2015/16. There are currently no mothballed schools within the local authority area.
- 1.4 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."

- 1.5 Angus Council has a historic 'Process for mothballing a school' which requires updating.

ENSURING EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

- 2.1 While it may seem that having fewer children in a class would allow a teacher to provide more one-on-one attention, there are potential disadvantages associated with very small sizes. These are:
- i. Shared experiences – In a single class setting, a child may be the only pupil at a particular stage. Dependent on the age profile of the class, children may not have peers of a similar age or stage with whom they share learning experiences.
 - ii. Fewer activity options - Some academic activities require a minimum number of participants. Activities such as small group projects, group discussions or peer to peer learning activities may offer less effective learning experiences because there are fewer children to divide into groups, meaning that children experience less opportunity to work with different groups of learners. Large-scale games, may be impossible in single small settings because there are not enough pupils to allow for game play, or due to the wide variation in the age and physical development of the pupils, potentially making an activity unsafe. Participation in activities may require children to be transported to other schools to access these opportunities.
 - iii. Lack of diversity - A smaller class is less likely to represent a diverse cross section of society. Pupils benefit from being members of more diverse classes because they have the opportunity to hear viewpoints that differ greatly from their own.
 - iv. Learner anxiety - Some children prefer and enjoy the anonymity associated with being a member of a large class. For learners of this nature, small classes may be less desirable because in educational settings with reduced pupil numbers they do not have the same opportunity to mix in with their peer group.
 - v. Attendance - A small number of absent pupils can make a big difference in a small class. If there are only five or eight pupils in a class, two missing children represent a much larger percentage of the class population.

vi. Best Value – Aligned to the guiding principles of the School Investment Strategy, and in accordance with duties outlined in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is important that Education and Lifelong Learning adopt a best value rationale that considers the efficient and effective use of Angus Council resources.

CRITERIA AND PARAMETERS FOR CONSIDERING MOTHBALLING OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- 3.1 Long range school roll forecasts are prepared annually. When a school roll is projected to fall to eight or fewer pupils and an analysis of the school roll forecast indicates there will be insufficient in-zone pupils to increase the roll above eight pupils in future years, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning will arrange to:
 - i Engage with parents, parent council (if established) and other families who reside within the defined primary school catchment area, to discuss the position with them;
 - ii discuss the position with the Head Teacher and the staff of the defined school;
 - iii identify an alternative catchment school which will subsume the mothballed school's catchment area on a temporary basis;
 - iv prepare a report for the Children and Learning Committee on the outcome of engagement with stakeholders as defined in (i) and (ii) above and to make recommendations on whether mothballing is the preferred course of action or whether a statutory consultation process on school closure be commenced at this stage;
 - v support those parents who may wish to move their children to the alternative catchment school earlier than the start of the next academic year by applying the subsumed catchment area with regards to assessing transport entitlement;
 - vi review mothballing decisions annually and prepare a report for the Children and Learning Committee on future options for any school that has been 'mothballed' for a period of at least 2 years; and
 - vii ensure that 'mothballed' schools will be maintained on a 'wind and watertight' basis pending their future outcome.
- 3.2 Additional resources will be given to the alternative schools in line with the schools' per-capita formula and normal class configuration assessments.
- 3.3 Any staff deemed to be surplus, following any school being mothballed, will be offered re-deployment elsewhere within the Service. No job losses would arise from this proposal.

CRITERIA AND PARAMETERS FOR CONSIDERING MOTHBALLING OF EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

- 4.1 The process of projecting demand for early learning and childcare (ELC) places is more complex due to the lack of robust data for forecasting. Angus ELC settings do not have catchment areas and as such demand for places may be drawn from anywhere in the local authority area and neighbouring council areas. There are four ELC application windows through the year. Eligibility for these windows is dependent on date-of-birth. Where the projected demand for an ELC setting (based on August intake) is expected to be eight or fewer the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning will arrange to:
- i discuss the position with the Head Teacher and the staff of the defined school;
 - ii offer an opportunity for families in the local area and the parent council (if established) to provide their views on the future of the ELC setting;
 - iii prepare a report for the Children and Learning Committee on the outcome of engagement with stakeholders as defined in (i) and (ii) above and to make recommendations on whether mothballing is the preferred course of action or whether a statutory consultation process on nursery class closure be commenced at this stage;
 - iv offer any families who may have applied for a place at the mothballed setting an alternative place at an Angus ELC;
 - vi review mothballing decisions annually and prepare a report for the Children and Learning Committee on future options for any nursery class that has been 'mothballed' for a period of at least 2 years; and
 - vii ensure that 'mothballed' nursery accommodation is maintained on a 'wind and watertight' basis.
- 4.2 Any staff deemed to be surplus, following any ELC being mothballed, will be offered re-deployment elsewhere within the Service. No job losses would arise from this proposal.
- 4.3 This approach is in accordance with duties outlined in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2002 and the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and enables the Council to adopt a best value rationale that considers the efficient and effective use of its resources