

FIFE COUNCIL – EDUCATION AND CHILDREN’S SERVICES – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PROPOSAL TO CLOSE MILTON OF BALGONIE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND TO REZONE THE CATCHMENT AREAS OF COALTOWN OF BALGONIE, PITTEUCHAR EAST AND THORNTON PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Q	Why is this consultation taking place now?
A	<p>The last session for the school to have pupils enrolled was session 2018/19. In August 2019, the school roll was 0 pupils. The school was formally mothballed in January 2021 and there has been no request from parents/carers seeking the reopening of Milton of Balgonie Primary School for academic sessions 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23 and for 2023/24. For 2023/24, all 12 primary aged pupils living in the Milton of Balgonie Primary School catchment area have either enrolled at Coaltown of Balgonie Primary School; the catchment denominational primary school or made placing requests to attend other schools.</p> <p>On 26 January 2024, Milton of Balgonie Primary School will have been mothballed formally for three years, although the school has not been operational since August 2019, which is a period covering five academic years. Continuing to mothball the school for a further period, without progressing with a full stakeholder Consultation process, is contrary to the statutory guidance published by the Scottish Government.</p>
Q	Who will be involved in this process?
A	<p>A range of individuals and organisations require to be consulted as part of the process. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/carers of children who live within the catchment area for Milton of Balgonie Primary School; • Parents/carers of children who attend Coaltown of Balgonie, Pitteuchar East and Thornton Primary Schools; • Parent Councils of all affected schools. • Community Councils; • Pupils • Staff within each of the affected schools. <p>The Headteachers of Coaltown of Balgonie, Pitteuchar East and Thornton Primary Schools have also been included in this process.</p>
Q	What is the timescale for this consultation?
A	<p>It can normally take about 5 months from start to finish. The Education Service is required to seek approval from the Cabinet Committee to undertake a consultation. This meeting was on 11 January 2024. The formal period of consultation will be at least 30 school days, not including pupil holidays or in-service days. There will be involvement from Education Scotland and they require 3 weeks to review the proposal and consultation process. If the timescale stays on track, it is hoped that a decision will be made by the Cabinet Committee on 6 June 2024.</p> <p>The closure aspect of this proposal is subject to a Scottish Government 8-week call in. However, any approved changes to catchment areas could be implemented for new pupils from 19 August 2024.</p>
Q	Have these decisions already been made and the consultation process is just a sham?
A	<p>No. The only formal decision that has been made to date by elected member is the mothballing of the school in January 2021. No decisions have been made by elected members to close the school. The Education Service is required to complete a statutory consultation and as part of this process there are key aspects that we must adhere to for a</p>

	<p>proposal of this type. The proposals presented are the first step of a consultation process with parents, staff and pupils and other interested stakeholders. We cannot pre-empt decisions by a future committee of the council.</p> <p>Currently, at this stage, there is only agreement to consult with the public on the proposals. The consultation process will last 6 weeks, including at least 30 normal school days, after which a report on the consultation will be prepared, which will include a report from Education Scotland.</p>
Q	Are the drop-in sessions part of a statutory consultation process?
A	<p>No. We are not required to hold drop-in sessions as part of the statutory consultation process, but we know that people find these informal sessions useful to find out more about the proposal and to inform their view on it. It is also an opportunity for people to have their say on the proposal by completing a Consultation Response Form.</p> <p>As part of the consultation process, the Council is required to have one public meeting. For this consultation, the Council has scheduled 4 public meetings, at the three affected primary schools and Milton of Balgonie Village Hall.</p> <p>Our experience has shown that some parents/carers prefer to have 1-2-1 conversations with officers at drop-in sessions as these sessions may suit parents/carers as they are normally held straight after the school day. For the avoidance of doubt, the discussions with Officers at the drop-ins are not recorded in the same way as oral representations made at the public meetings and if people wish to have their views recorded they can complete the Consultation Response Form or otherwise submit their views in writing by emailing sustainableschoolestate.enquiries@fife.gov.uk and/or attend one of the public meetings.</p>
Q	What will you do with all the feedback from parent/carers?
A	<p>All comments received on consultation response forms, entered online or written comments submitted will be included in a report to Education Scotland. The report from Fife Council will assist HMI Education Scotland in reviewing the educational benefits of the proposal and will be included in the Consultation Report and taken account of by Officers in consideration of their recommendation on the proposal following consultation. This Consultation Report will be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet Committee.</p>
Q	Are you planning to talk about any plans with pupils?
A	<p>As part of the Statutory Consultation process we consult with pupils at the affected schools. We plan to talk to around 20% of P4-P7 pupils in each of the primary schools. Pupils will be asked if they want to participate, and parents will be asked to give their consent to these discussions.</p>
Q	When is the close of the consultation process and what will be the next stage?
A	<p>The end of the consultation period is Tuesday 12 March 2024, and the Education Service will accept any consultation response forms or comments on this day. The feedback from these forms, any written representations submitted, and the minutes of the 4 public meetings will be forwarded to HMIE Education Scotland to allow them to draft their report. The entire consultation process takes approximately 20 weeks from start to finish. It is expected that the Consultation Report will be published the middle of May 2024 and this report submitted to the Cabinet Committee on 6 June 2024 for a decision.</p>
Q	Will the new catchment schools have sufficient space for pupils from the current Milton of Balgonie Primary School catchment area?
A	<p>Yes. The small number of catchment pupils from Milton of Balgonie Primary School have been factored into projected numbers at Coaltown of Balgonie Primary School, to assess this.</p>
Q	Have you considered the impact which closing Milton of Balgonie Primary School will have on the local community?

A	We carry out a full impact assessment for every school that is proposed for closure. This will include community impact assessments. An initial assessment has been done for schools classified as rural.
Q	Have you considered the impact of new houses being built in Milton of Balgonie? Would there be sufficient capacity for future pupil numbers?
A	Future roll projections have been calculated and any known future or potential build in the area has been considered. Our report shows that there is, and will continue to be, capacity in the schools. However, if during the consultation any further information becomes known, this will be recorded within the consultation report and will be considered as part of the decision-making process. The one allocated housing site within the Milton of Balgonie Primary School catchment area has not yet received planning consent. If planning consent is granted this year, it is not expected that new pupils will all arrive at once.
Q	Will the Council still maintain the existing Milton of Balgonie Primary School building?
A	The building is currently being maintained by the Council. There are regular checks to ensure the building is wind and watertight.
Q	Who makes the final decision about the closure of Milton of Balgonie Primary School?
A	The Consultation Report, which details Officers' recommendations and the feedback of the consultation process, will be submitted to the Cabinet Committee of Fife Council. The elected members who are members of that committee will make the decision.
Q	Why is there an educational benefit statement?
A	Any proposal that is being considered is required to include educational benefits for each of the affected schools. An educational benefit statement would form part of the report that HMIE are required to complete, which forms part of their analysis of any consultation on school closure.
Q	What happens to the pupils who currently attend one of the affected schools, if catchment changes go ahead?
A	Children who currently attend these schools will be unaffected by the proposed changes.
Q	If rezoning goes ahead, what will happen to children in the same family not yet at school, where their brother or sister currently attends either Coaltown of Balgonie, Pitteuchar East or Thornton Primary School?
A	For children from the same family, parents can make a "placing request" to attend the same school. For nursery aged children due to start Primary One in August 2024, they will continue to enrol in January-March 2024 in their existing catchment school.
Q	Will my child be given free transport to another school?
A	In line with the council's current policy, all primary children are entitled to free transport to their catchment school where the school is more than one mile away from home.
Q	If you change the catchment area for the housing at Lochtyview and Westwood Park, how do we know if the walking route is available?
A	As part of any proposal, officers will look at all aspects. Walked Route Assessments will be carried out during the consultation process to identify available walked routes from Lochtyview to Thornton Primary School and Westwood Park to Pitteuchar East Primary School. These assessments will be carried out in accordance with approved criteria.
Q	After the consultation is complete, what happens next?
A	Following this process, the final report will be taken to the Cabinet Committee, in early June 2024, in order that elected members can look carefully at the findings of the consultation and make the decisions on whether to implement the proposal in full or in part. If a decision for closure/change is taken by the Cabinet Committee, the report is forwarded to the Scottish Government which will, in turn, carry out its own review of the consultation process and decide whether to call in the council's decision (within an 8-week period).

Q	Is the Council decision the final decision or can this decision be called in under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010?
A	<p>The decision by the Cabinet Committee is subject to a call-in by elected members. If this is the case, the consultation report would be heard by the Fife Council Committee.</p> <p>If the Fife Council Committee approve the report, it then becomes the final decision of Fife Council.</p> <p>The closure element of this proposal can be called in by the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government has 8 weeks (to call-in a decision by a local authority) from the date they are notified by the Council of a decision.</p>