

**REPORT TO EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE –  
7 OCTOBER 2021**

**FISHERFORD AND EASTERFIELD SCHOOL**

**1. Reason for Report/Summary**

- 1.1 To inform members of the decision to mothball Fisherford and Easterfield Schools from August 2021.

**2. Recommendations**

**The Committee is recommended to:**

- 2.1 Note the mothballing of both Easterfield and Fisherford Schools.**
- 2.2 Instruct the Director of Education & Children's Services to provide an update report to the Education & Children's Services Committee in May 2022**

**3. Purpose and Decision-Making Route**

- 3.1 Mothballing of schools is an operational decision, that can be made by the Director of Education & Children's Services.
- 3.2 A decision to temporarily mothball the school from the start of the new term, August 2021, was taken by the Service in May 2021. Mothballing is the temporary closure of a school which does not in itself lead to statutory consultation. This is in accordance with the Scottish Government's statutory guidance contained in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act of 2010. The relevant sections can be found at Appendix 1, the full guidance can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00477028.pdf>

**4. Discussion**

- 4.1 Turriff Cluster consists of nine Primary Schools, Auchterless, Crudie, Easterfield, Fintry, Fisherford, Fyvie, King Edward, Monquitter and Turriff Primary Schools. Each of these schools are in the catchment area for Turriff Academy.
- 4.2 Easterfield School has capacity for 25 pupils. Under the Scottish Government guidelines, it is classed as a remote rural school (areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes but less than 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more).
- 4.3 Fisherford School has capacity for 30 pupils and is classed as an accessible rural school (areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more).

- 4.4 Officers have closely monitored the school rolls for both schools for a number of years.
- 4.5 On the 25 May 2021, officers were informed that due to families moving out of catchment for Fisherford school there was to be a decrease in the roll and this decrease would leave the school with a roll of 3 pupils for the start of the academic year 2021/22. When officers looked at the roll for Easterfield, this too was decreasing to 8 pupils for the start of the new year. Officers met with Ward members to discuss the possible options for these schools due to the rolls. Schools with rolls as low as these prompt an assessment around the viability of the school and the educational benefits for the remaining pupils.
- 4.6 Should mothballing continue, younger siblings who have yet to start school, will also be guaranteed a place at the school of choice, transport will be provided to one of the dedicated schools.
- 4.7 Some of the schools listed below are not within the Turriff Academy catchment area. This will not prevent them having a place at Turriff Academy, however, if mothballing continues their child would be guaranteed place at the cluster Academy.
- 4.8 Meetings were held with the staff and the parents of each school on 27 May 2021 to inform them of the intention to mothball both schools. At this point information was shared regarding the relocation of staff and also which schools would be made available to pupils with transport provided.
- 4.9 Pupils from Fisherford School were offered a place at either Auchterless, Largue, Rayne North or Rothienorman Schools.
- 4.10 Pupils from Easterfield School were offered a place at either Auchterless, Forge, Largue or Turriff Schools
- 4.11 Individual meetings with each parent were held on both 31 May 2021 and 1 June 2021 to discuss individual circumstances and to give support to each family.
- 4.12 All pupils are now enrolled in their chosen schools and all staff have been appropriately relocated.
- 4.13 School Roll forecasts as shown in table 1 and 2 below do not show a large increase at these schools within the next 4 years.

Table 1

<b>Fisherford School</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
Total Roll	3	2	6	8

Table 2

<b>Easterfield School</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
Total Roll	6	6	4	3

- 4.14 The situation is being monitored by officers, and an update will be provided when appropriate, this will need to take into account any in-zone applications during the year due to families moving into catchment and those received for P1 pupils in February 2022.

## 5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

### 5.1

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Education Health & Wellbeing
Our Environment	Infrastructure Resilient Communities
Our Economy	Economy & Enterprise Estate Modernisation

This report helps deliver the Strategic Priority “Education” and “Health and Wellbeing” within the pillar “Our People”, and the “Economy and Enterprise” within the “Our Economy” pillar, securing continuous improvement in outcomes for ALL children and young people and ensuring better, integrated working arrangements in pursuit of improved outcomes for children and young people.

- 5.2 This report helps deliver against: Scotland’s Learning Estate Strategy Connecting People, Places and Learning and Aberdeenshire Council’s Learning Estates and Accessibility Strategies.

- 5.3 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			X
Staffing			X
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			X
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing			X
Health and Wellbeing			X
Town Centre First			X

- 5.4 As this is an update paper, and no decisions are to be made by the Committee, there are no implications from the recommendation.
- 5.5 An Integrated Impact Assessment is being prepared for any future recommendations that may subsequently be made for these two schools. The recommendations in this report do not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 5.6 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level: ACORP007 Social risk (demographic change). [Corporate Risk Register](#).

- 5.7 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:
- ECSR002 To secure continuous improvement in outcomes for children and young people [Directorate Risk Register](#). The Council needs to be assured that the estate will deliver an inclusive and positive environment for learning, working and engagement.
  - The strategic risk ECSR003 to have improved business support and resource management arrangements in place across ECS has also been identified. The Council needs to be assured the estate matches demand.

## **6 Scheme of Governance**

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and they have no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section E.3.3 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to the statutory functions of the Council under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 including those relating to approval of Proposals, and the requirement for authorities to conduct a pre-consultation in relation to potential rural school closures and in terms of Section E3.4 as it relates to overseeing the functions of the Council under the Education (Scotland) Acts and all other relevant legislation and regulations.

**Laurence Findlay**  
**Director of Education & Children's Services**

Report prepared by Maxine Booth, Quality Improvement Manager Learning Estates & Rachael Goldring, Learning Estates Team Leader  
Date 23 September 2021

## APPENDIX 1

### Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 – Statutory Guidance

#### **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.