



REPORT TO EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE – 30 MAY 2019

STRACHAN SCHOOL UPDATE

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 Acknowledge the contents of the Options Appraisal for Strachan School (Appendix 1).**
- 1.2 Acknowledge the deadline of 14 June, 2019, for further community suggestions regarding the future of Strachan School.**

2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 At its meeting of 17 May, 2018, the Education & Children's Services Committee agreed to the preparation of an Options Appraisal regarding the future of Strachan School.
- 2.2 A series of engagement sessions has been held with the community council and the wider Strachan community since September, 2018, to gather views from residents as part of the Options Appraisal process. The Options Appraisal is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.3 A further meeting was held at Strachan Village Hall on Wednesday, 1 May, 2019, where officers discussed the findings of the appraisal and the next steps.
- 2.4 As no pupils have enrolled at Strachan School for the 2019-20 session, either as Primary 1 pupils or families with older children wishing to transfer to a smaller rural school, it will be necessary for the School to remain mothballed for the coming school session.
- 2.5 The identified options for the School, with the exception of re-opening with a cohort of pupils, or continuing with a prolonged period of mothballing, would all result in a different use for the school building. Some of the options still involve an education provision, but one that would not be a primary school. In order for any of these alternative uses to be viable, a formal school closure consultation will be required.
- 2.6 In line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, officers informed the community of this, and advised that any further alternatives to closure would still be welcomed. Any further suggestions would need to be submitted by 5pm on Friday, 14 June, 2019.
- 2.7 Officers propose to provide a further report to the Education & Children's Services Committee in August, 2019. This report will include an assessment of any further suggestions received by 14 June, 2019.

- 2.8 Ward members have attended the engagement sessions, and officers have had discussions with them around the Options Appraisal. Updates will also be provided to Marr Area Committee, as appropriate.
- 2.9 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 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.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment has been carried out as part of the development of the proposals set out above. It is included as Appendix 2 and the following impacts have been identified which can be mitigated as described: pupils will be unable to attend their zoned school and travel times may increase. However, parents have made the decision to enrol their children in different schools, through their rights under the Parents' Charter.
- 4.2 There are no staffing implications at this stage. The recommendations of this report will not generate any additional financial implications - all existing expenditure relating to the Strachan School building remains.
- 4.3 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level, 'A Future Fit E&CS Estate'. The Council needs to be assured that the estate will deliver an inclusive and positive environment for learning, working and engagement.
<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/21265/directorate-risks.pdf>

Laurence Findlay
Director of Education & Children's Services

Report prepared by Rachael Goldring, Learning Estates Team Leader
Date May, 2019



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Strachan School

Introduction

On 17 May 2018 the Education and Children's Services Committee approved the preparation of an Options Appraisal on the future of Strachan School and supported community engagement as part of the Options Appraisal process to identify alternative options to consider.

Background / Discussion

Strachan School is a single storey, two classroom school located in the village of Strachan, 4 miles from Banchory. The school has a capacity of 50 pupils, although one of the two classrooms is in a linked temporary unit. The dining room for the school is situated in an annexe building at the rear of the school grounds, up a steep incline that is not accessible for wheelchair use.

Strachan School has been mothballed throughout the 2017/18 session and the 2018/19 session to date. Mothballing is the temporary closure of a school which does not in itself lead to statutory consultation. Reference is made to the report considered by Education & Children's Services on 31 August 2017.

In June 2017, the decision was made to mothball the school for the second time due to a decline in pupil numbers. Towards the end of the 2016/17 session it became clear that the roll of the school would fall to zero pupils. This was due to older pupils moving to secondary school, and out of zone placing requests to other local schools. The decision was made that mothballing the school was necessary. The school had previously been mothballed in 2015.

Community Engagement

The Learning Estates Team met with the community for the following engagements in order to fully inform and explore potential options for the future of Strachan School.

- 5 September 2018 – Meeting with Feughdee West Community Council to outline plans for engagement
- 26 September 2018 – Community Engagement Session at Strachan School to discuss potential options.
- 5 December 2018 – Community Engagement Session at Strachan School to further explore options

Suggestions have been gathered from the community, and will continue be welcome at this stage.



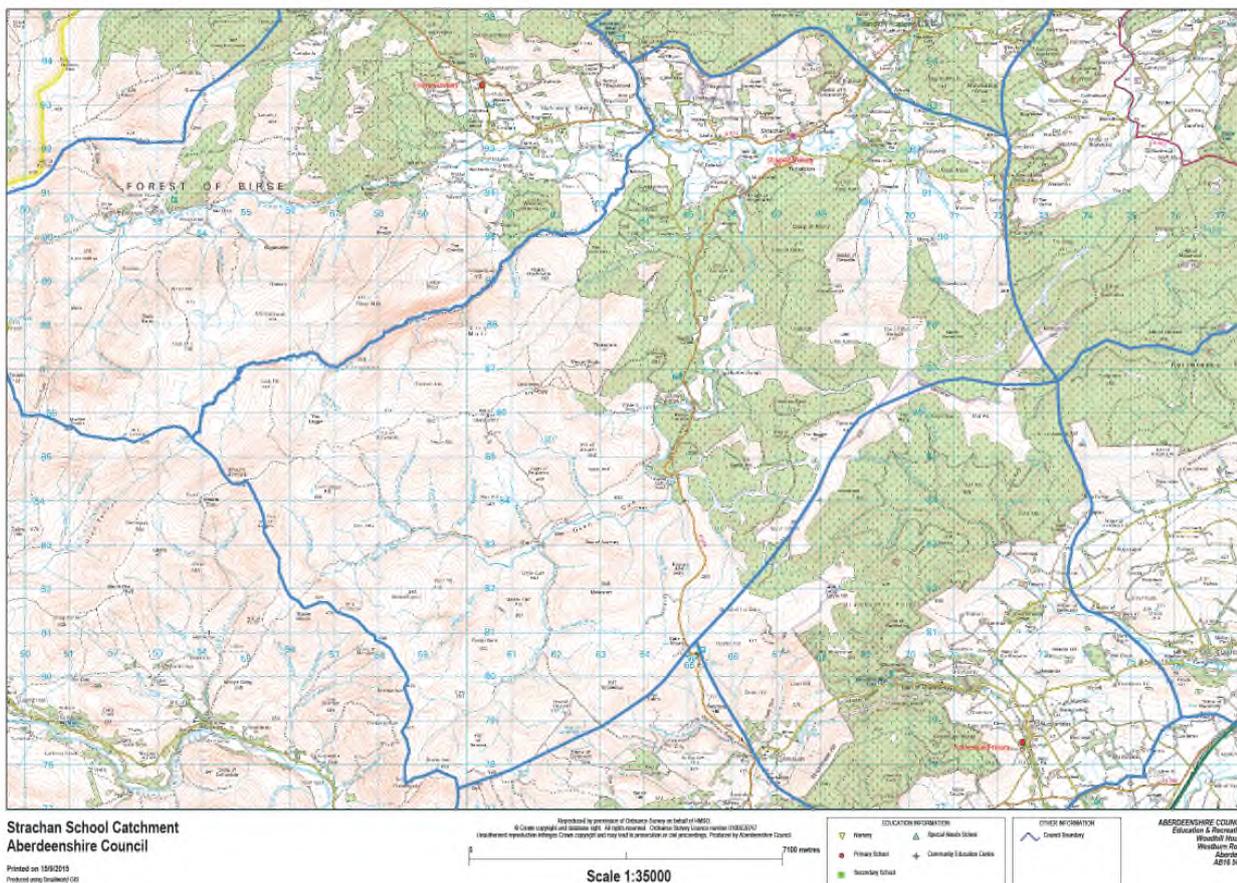
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Options Appraisal

An options appraisal has been undertaken to consider the future of Strachan School. The appraisal considered the current mothballing and the pattern of local pupils choosing to attend other Primary schools in the area.

Strachan and Local Area

Strachan School is a remote rural school which is part of the Banchory Cluster of schools in Aberdeenshire. The catchment area for the school is shown in the map below.



Housing Development

M/ST/H/007 Steading at Bowbutts Farm 7 units under construction with 4 expected for completion in 2019, and the remaining 3 units expected in later years.

M/ST/H/008 Gateside Farm 15 units Full Planning Permission to be built 2020 – 2023)



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Demographics and Pupil Numbers

The catchment area for Strachan currently has 45 children that are enrolled at Primary school with Aberdeenshire Council (SEEMIS). Due to out of zone placing requests these children attend different schools within the network.

Current School	Count
Banchory Primary School	29
Finzean Primary School	5
Hill of Banchory School	11

The below table shows the current spread of stages the catchment zone has

Year / Stage	Count
P1	3
P2	2
P3	6
P4	8
P5	8
P6	12
P7	6

According to the NHS CHI data there are four children within the catchment area that could have enrolled for P1 in August 2019 but officers understand that they have been enrolled at other schools.

Suitability and Condition

Strachan School was assessed on 17 May 2011 and the Overall Condition Rating for the Property was **B**, satisfactory – performing adequately but showing minor deterioration.

The Suitability assessment of Strachan School which took place on 25 April 2017 graded the School as **C**, poor – showing major problems and/or not operating optimally (the school building and grounds impede the delivery of activities that are needed for children and communities in the School). Issues raised within this assessment were:

- The school has no internal facilities for PE. A footpath had been formed from the school to the village hall so pupils could walk to the hall for PE
- The playground is generally unsuitable for outdoor PE
- Security issues highlighted due to lack of reception area



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Pupil Enrolments

Aberdeenshire Council wrote to every property within the catchment area to inform them that applications would be considered at the school for the 2019/20 session, and this information was shared in press releases and on social media.

No families have approached Aberdeenshire Council to enroll their children at the school, either as a new P1 start or as a placing request. Additionally, no families have approached officers to indicate that if there were sufficient other families in a similar position that they would consider moving their children back to the school.

Options for Consideration

Several of the comments proposed that the school reopen. However, that requires families wishing to send their children to the school.

As no new pupil enrolments have been received, the option for re-opening the school for the 2019-20 session is not viable. On this basis the school will continue to be mothballed for the 2019/20 session.

A number of alternative suggestions for the school building have been suggested, some are educational / community based, whilst others would involve commitment from other agencies or private companies. These cannot be implemented or trialed without the formal closure of the school.

- 1- Reopen the school – No pupils have enrolled, therefore discounted at this stage.
- 2- Continue Status Quo – School remains mothballed for a further session and potentially beyond.
- 3- Consider Closing School and rezoning pupils to attend another school in the Banchory network

Legislation

One of the options identified as part of the appraisal is to close the school. This is currently considered to be the only viable option for the school, and therefore Aberdeenshire Council must undertake a statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. As a rural school there is a presumption against closure and Aberdeenshire Council must ensure all other alternatives have been identified and robustly considered prior to undertaking any statutory consultation on this matter.

Aberdeenshire Council would welcome any further options, that would be an alternative to closure for consideration. These must be submitted by 5pm on Friday 14 June 2019. These should be sent in writing to either learningstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or to Learning Estates Team, Gordon House, Inverurie, AB51 3WA

APPENDIX 2

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Stage 1: Title and aims of the activity (“activity” is an umbrella term covering policies, procedures, guidance and decisions).	
Service	Education & Children’s Services
Section	Learning Estates
Title of the activity etc.	Strachan School
Aims and desired outcomes of the activity	To note the contents of the options appraisal on the future of Strachan School, and the deadline of 14 June 2019 for further suggestions.
Author(s) & Title(s)	Rachael Goldring, Learning Estates Team Leadre
Stage 2: List the evidence that has been used in this assessment.	
Internal data (customer satisfaction surveys; equality monitoring data; customer complaints).	School Roll Forecasts School Capacity Information Placing Request Information Housing Land Audit Data Suitability & Condition Surveys
Internal consultation with staff and other services affected.	Discussions with appropriate internal officers including Infrastructure Services
External consultation (partner organisations, community groups, and councils).	Series of public engagement sessions held since May 2018, two postal drops to every property within catchment area. Meeting with Community Council.
External data (census, available statistics).	NHS data, census data

Other (general information as appropriate).	
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Stage 3: Evidence Gaps.	
Are there any gaps in the information you currently hold?	Although the NHS data provides details of the age and postcode of residents to identify those in catchment, the names and addresses of individuals is not held. Therefore it is harder to specifically target parents of young children.

Stage 4: Measures to fill the evidence gaps.		
What measures will be taken to fill the information gaps before the activity is implemented? These should be included in the action plan at the back of this form.	Measures:	Timescale:
	Communications issued to all properties in catchment area as a blanket approach	Already issued two letters, this will be done again as appropriate

Stage 5: Are there potential impacts on protected groups? The protected groups covered by the equality duty are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The duty also covers marriage and civil partnerships, but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination. Who is affected by the activity or who is intended to benefit from the proposed policy and how? Please complete for each protected group by inserting "yes" in the applicable box/boxes below.				
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unknown
Age – Younger Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Advancing equality of opportunity. Promoting good relations among and between different age groups	Yes	Yes		
Age – Older			Yes	
Disability	Yes			
Race – (includes Gypsy Travellers)			Yes	
Religion or Belief			Yes	
Sex (Gender)			Yes	
Pregnancy and maternity			Yes	
Sexual orientation – (includes Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual)			Yes	

Gender reassignment – (includes Transgender)			Yes	
Marriage and Civil Partnership eliminating unlawful discrimination			Yes	

Stage 6: What are the positive and negative impacts?		
Impacts.	Positive (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)	Negative (describe the impact for each of the protected characteristics affected)
Please detail the potential positive and/or negative impacts on those with protected characteristics you have highlighted above. Detail the impacts and describe those affected.	Age – Younger – Pupils within the catchment are experiencing education through parental choice at facilities with larger numbers of peers.	Age – Younger – Pupils within the catchment are unable to attend their locally zoned school, which increases travel times.
	Disability – Strachan School is not accessible to wheelchair users. The nearby schools in Banchory are fully accessible.	

Stage 7: Have any of the affected groups been consulted?	
If yes, please give details of how this was done and what the results were. If no, how have you ensured that you can make an informed decision about mitigating steps?	<p>Engagement has taken place with the community, at meetings open to all members of the community. Due to limited attendance at the first meeting, letters were posted to all properties within the catchment area informing residents of the next two meetings.</p> <p>Officers have been approached directly by some parents to discuss their choices for their children.</p>

Stage 8: What mitigating steps will be taken to remove or reduce negative impacts?		
	Mitigating Steps	Timescale
These should be included in any action plan at the back of this form.	Further suggestions will be fully explored	End July 2019
	If appropriate full statutory consultation will be undertaken to ensure all members of the wider community are informed and given the opportunity to be involved.	Autumn 2019

Stage 9: What steps can be taken to promote good relations between various groups?	
These should be included in the action plan.	Continued engagement with the community. Continued opportunity for parents to speak to officers directly, if they don't want to participate in public meetings.

Stage 10: How does the policy/activity create opportunities for advancing equality of opportunity?	
Discussions/Meetings with parents, community, Community Council and Elected Members. Discussions as the situation arose and ongoing engagement with all persons affected has allowed for the process to be as accessible as possible.	

Stage 11: What equality monitoring arrangements will be put in place? How the EIA will be used to monitor the proposal	
These should be included in any action plan (for example customer satisfaction questionnaires).	The situation has been continually monitored by officers within Education & Children's Services. Regular reports have been presented to Education & Children's Services Committee. If a statutory closure consultation is undertaken, further engagement will be undertaken with the wider community, with Education Scotland involvement.

Stage 12: What is the outcome of the Assessment?		
Please complete the appropriate box/boxes	1	No negative impacts have been identified –please explain.
	2	Negative Impacts have been identified, these can be mitigated - please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen.
	Parents have made the decision to enrol their children in schools other than their zoned school, which has resulted in the mothballed status. No pupils have applied to enrol at the school for the coming school session.	
	3	The activity will have negative impacts which cannot be mitigated fully – please explain. * Please fill in Stage 13 if this option is chosen

* Stage 13: Set out the justification that the activity can and should go ahead despite the negative impact.

As there are no pupils who have enrolled to attend the school in the 19/20 session, the school will require to be mothballed for a further session. Opening the school is not currently a viable option and all alternative uses for the building which could support the community will require the school to be officially closed.

Stage 14: Sign off and authorisation.

Sign off and authorisation.	1) Service and Team	Education & Children's Services – Learning Estates Team	
	2) Title of Policy/Activity	Strachan School	
	3) Authors: I/We have completed the equality impact assessment for this policy/activity.	Name: Rachael Goldring Position: Learning Estates Team Leader Date: May 2019 Signature:	Name: Position: Date: Signature:
		Name: Position: Date: Signature:	Name: Position: Date: Signature:
	4) Consultation with Service Manager	Name: Maxine Booth Date: May 2019	
	5) Authorisation by Director or Head of Service	Name: Position: Date:	Name: Position: Date:
	6) If the EIA relates to a matter that has to go before a Committee, Committee report author sends the Committee Report and this form, and any supporting assessment documents, to the Officers responsible for monitoring and the Committee Officer of the relevant Committee. e.g. Social Work and Housing Committee.	Date:	
	7) EIA author sends a copy of the finalised form to: equalities@aberdeenshire.gov.uk	Date:	
(Equalities team to complete) Has the completed form been published on the website? YES/NO			Date:

