

Appendix D

Closure of Easterfield School Statutory Consultation Online Survey Results

The statutory consultation period regarding the closure of Easterfield School ran between 5 February 2024 and 29 March 2024. During the consultation period all Fortrie residents, parents/carers, community members and other identified stakeholders were invited to participate in an online survey to express their opinions on the proposal.

The survey provided a summary of the proposal with accompanying maps. The proposal is to discontinue education at Easterfield School, which is currently mothballed, and re-assign its catchment area to either Auchterless School or Turriff Primary School.

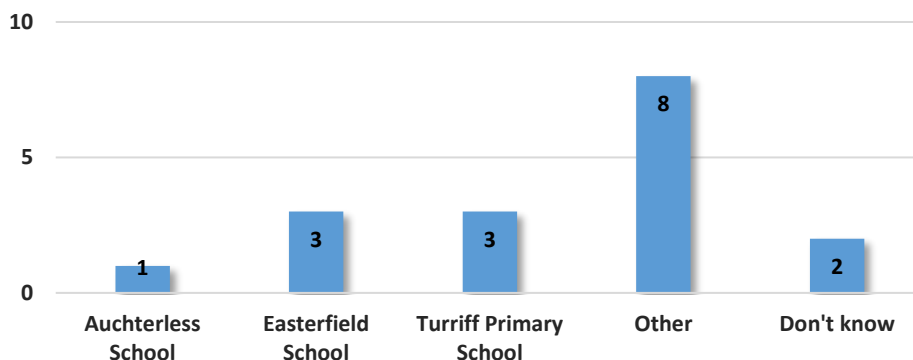
Alternative methods of contact were also suggested for consultees wishing to comment but uncomfortable with completing a survey.

A total of 17 people took part in the survey with 23 comments left regarding the proposal. It is recognised that stakeholders may have more than one child, therefore more than one answer has been provided for some of the questions. Some respondents left multiple comments covering more than one topic and some chose not to leave any comment.

All completed surveys have been analysed below. This report shows a summary of the results received.

Of those who participated in the survey, seven (41%) reside in the areas directly impacted by the proposal. Of those, three respondents live in the Easterfield catchment, three in the Turriff Primary catchment and one in the Auchterless area. Eight (47%) respondents reside in the surrounding areas rather than those directly impacted by the changes and two (12%) were unaware of their school catchment. Chart 1 below shows the results from the question.

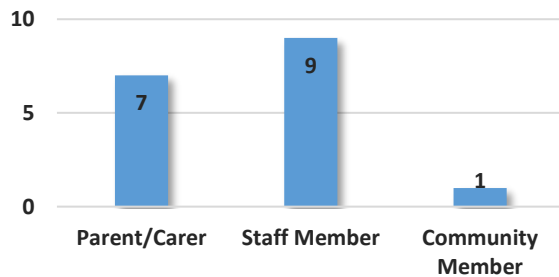
Chart 1



Participants that indicated 'Other' for their residency location reside in the Aberchirder, Banff and Fyvie Schools catchments, amongst others.

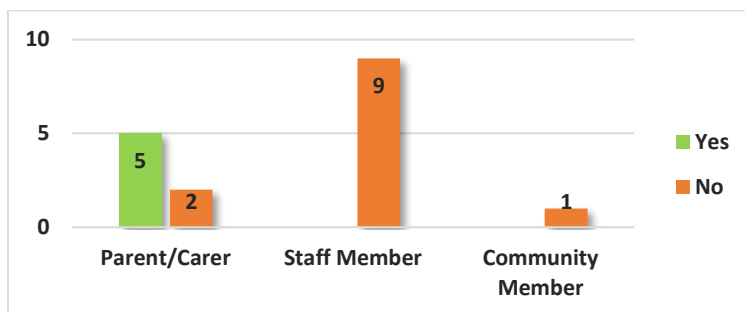
Chart 2 below shows that the highest number of respondents were members of staff. The survey was completed by seven (41%) parents/carers, nine (53%) members of staff and one community member. No pupils took part in this survey.

Chart 2



It appears that only the respondents who identified as parents/carers have school-age children affected by the changes to Easterfield School. The remaining respondents do not have children affected by the proposal. Additionally, it's important that none of the staff members indicated having school-age children affected by the changes. Chart 3 below shows the results from the question.

Chart 3



Of those parents/carers who have children affected by the changes to Easterfield School, there is a relatively even split between the children attending Auchterless School and Turriff Primary School.

Six of the staff members who completed the survey are based at Turriff Primary School.

The primary focus of the survey was whether the respondents support the closure of Easterfield School. 11 (65%) respondents support the closure of the school, four (23%) are in opposition and two (12%) have no preference. This is presented in Chart 4 below.

Chart 4

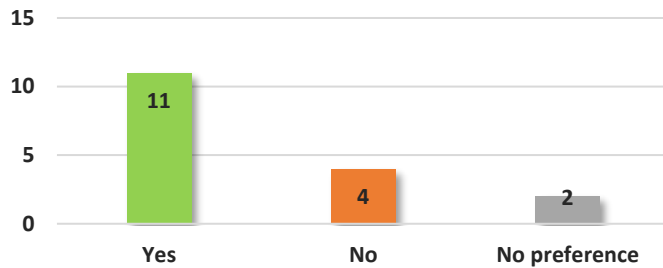
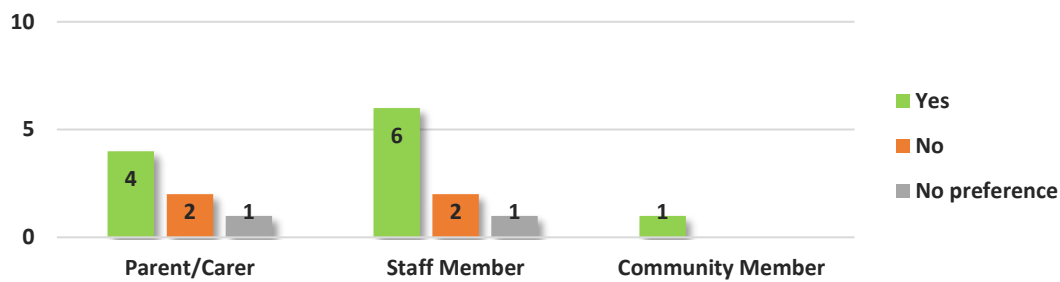


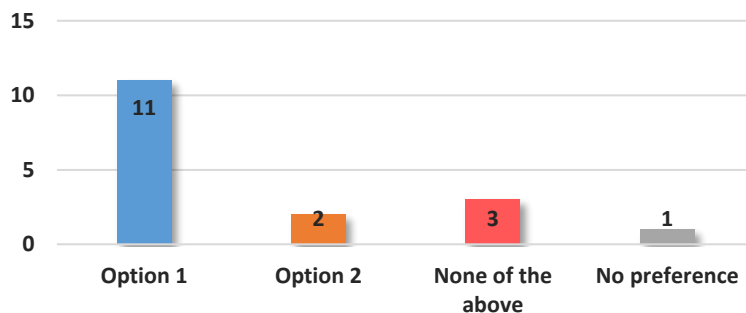
Chart 5 illustrates the voting patterns of individual interest groups on the Easterfield School closure proposal.

Chart 5



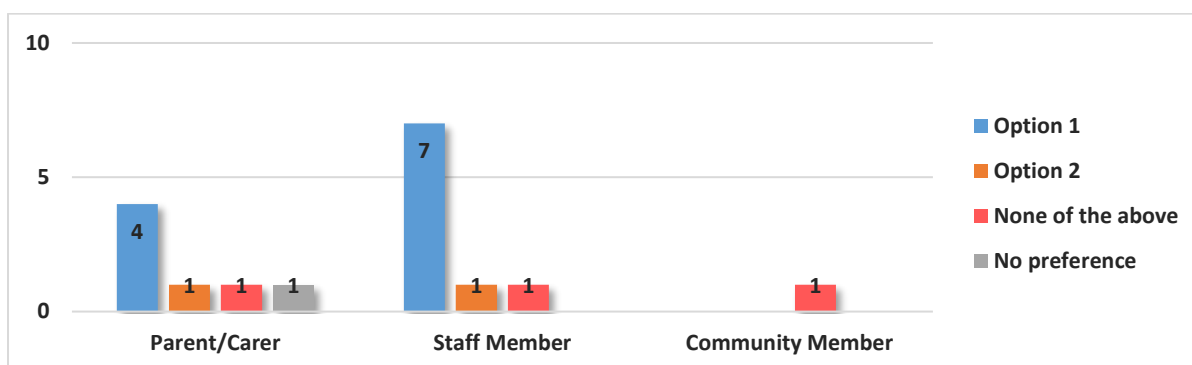
Further, the participants were asked which option they preferred for the Easterfield School catchment area, *Option 1* – realigning the Easterfield School catchment with Auchterless School or *Option 2* – realigning the catchment with Turriff Primary School. The vast majority, 11 (65%) respondents are in favour of *Option 1*, two (12%) support *Option 2* and one has no preference. Three (17%) participants are of the opinion that none of the proposed options are adequate and should not be consulted upon. Chart 6 below shows the results of the question.

Chart 6



The breakdown of preferred options by interest groups is presented in Chart 7 below.

Chart 7



Further analysis of the responses show that out of the seven parents/carers who completed the survey, four (57%) support the school closure, two (29%) are in opposition and one has no preference. Four (57%) voted for *Option 1* and one for *Option 2* while one each had either no preference or thought that both options are inadequate.

Of three parents/carers respondents residing in the Easterfield School catchment, two support the school closure and one has no preference. Two of those parents/carers prefer *Option 1* of the proposal and one is in favour of *Option 2*. The parent/carer residing in the Auchterless School catchment area supports the Easterfield School closure and *Option 1*. No parents/carers residing in the Turriff Primary School catchment area completed the survey.

Out of nine staff members who completed the survey, six (67%) are in favour of the Easterfield School closure, two (22%) are in opposition and one has no preference. Seven (78%) voted for *Option 1*, one for *Option 2* and one is of the opinion that none of the proposed options are adequate.

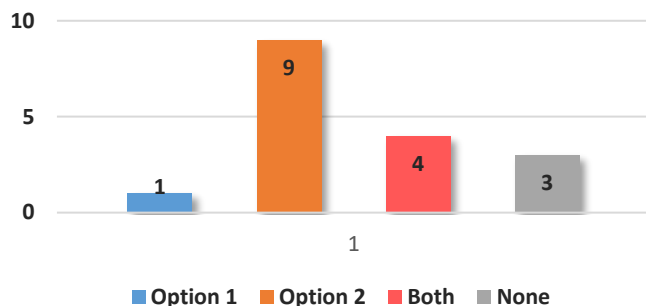
The community member who responded to the survey supports the closure of Easterfield School but holds the view that none of the proposed options should be considered.

Further analysis of all responses broken by the participants' settlement are as follows. Of those seven consultees living in the Easterfield, Auchterless and Turriff Primary catchments, five (71%) support the closure of Easterfield School, one is opposed to the proposal and one has no preference. The vast majority, six (86%) out of seven hold the view that the Easterfield School catchment should be realigned with Auchterless School (*Option 1*).

Of those respondents residing in other than the affected catchment areas, six (60%) support the school closure, three (30%) are against and one has no preference. Five (50%) respondents are in favour of *Option 1* and one in favour of *Option 2*, another one has no preference and three (30%) consultees are of the opinion that none of the proposed options should be consulted upon.

Participants were given an option to comment on whether any of the proposed options should be discounted. Out of all participants, nine (53%) believe that *Option 2* should be discounted, while one voted against *Option 1*. Four (23%) respondents think that both options should be discounted and three (18%) are of the opinion that both options should be consulted upon. This is shown in Chart 8 below.

Chart 8



Respondents provided reasons against options that they thought should be discounted. Those are summarised below:

- Option 1 (Auchterless School):
 - Refusal of school transport to Turriff Primary School.
- Option 2 (Turriff Primary School):
 - Turriff Primary School's large class sizes and stretched resources.
 - Large catchment area and number of pupils at Turriff Primary School.
 - Belief that country children are better served at smaller schools.
 - Concern that Turriff Primary has enough challenging behaviour and children may benefit from a smaller environment.
 - Extended travels to Turriff Primary.
 - Ensuring the viability of Auchterless School and keeping smaller schools open.
 - Increasing the roll and viability of Auchterless School by extending its catchment with the Easterfield School catchment area.
 - Keeping Auchterless numbers up before potential closure.
 - Merging with Auchterless School could provide a smaller but good number of pupils, allowing rural children to adjust to a less busy setting.
- Both options:
 - Short-sighted and counterproductive proposals.
 - Dividing the Easterfield catchment between Auchterless School and Turriff Primary School.

Finally, the consultees provided comments for the Council to consider on whether to permanently close Easterfield School and presented various viewpoints on the matter.

Some respondents believe the school should have never closed. Another view point is that Easterfield School offers alternative education, contrasting with larger schools and provides choice rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. There was one voice expressing a desire to send their children there but they have acknowledged their current satisfaction with another school.

Others thought that closing the school is the best that could happen to the place or debated that it should have been closed a long time ago due to low pupil numbers within the area. Suggestions were made about redistributing resources among other schools in the cluster to save money. An activity provider across the Turriff Cluster schools expressed financial challenges in supporting Easterfield School and the lack

of specialists and suggested that children may benefit more from attending Auchterless School.

In contrast, a comment was made that Easterfield children should go to Turriff Primary School due to available space and potential benefits highlighted in the proposal document.

There were comments about allowing parents to have the freedom to choose between Auchterless and Turriff Primary or merging Fisherford School into Easterfield School.

Conclusion

Opinions on the Easterfield School's closure vary with some welcoming it due to low pupil numbers, while others oppose it emphasizing the unique character of the school.

It is felt that members of the community accepted the situation given the circumstances where the school had found itself; though, emotional attachment to the school within the community can still be felt.

The majority of the respondents are generally in agreement to close Easterfield School permanently and reassign its catchment to Auchterless School.