

Appendix D

Closure of Fisherford School Statutory Consultation Online Survey Results

The statutory consultation period regarding the closure of Fisherford School ran between 5 February 2024 and 29 March 2024. During the consultation period all Fisherford 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 Fisherford School, which is currently mothballed, and re-assign its catchment area to Auchterless School, Rayne North School or to split the catchment between Auchterless School and Rayne North School.

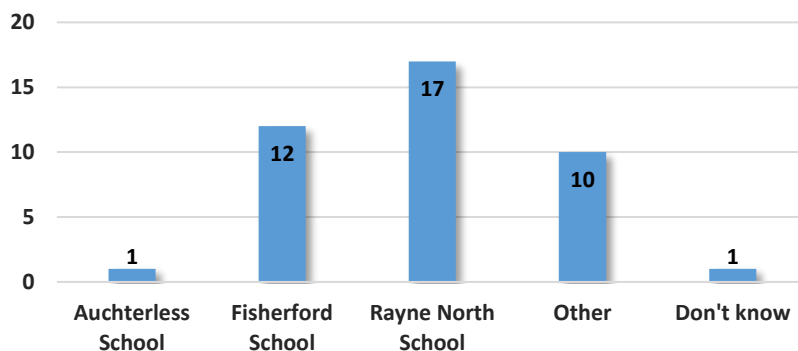
Alternative methods of contact were also suggested for consultees wishing to comment but uncomfortable with completing a survey.

A total of 41 people took part in the survey with 32 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.

The majority of the respondents to the survey, 30 (73%), reside in the catchment areas directly impacted by the proposal. 12 respondents live in the Fisherford catchment, 17 in the Rayne North catchment and one in the Auchterless area. 11 (27%) participants reside in the surrounding areas not directly impacted by the changes and one was unaware of their school catchment area. Chart 1 below shows the results from the question.

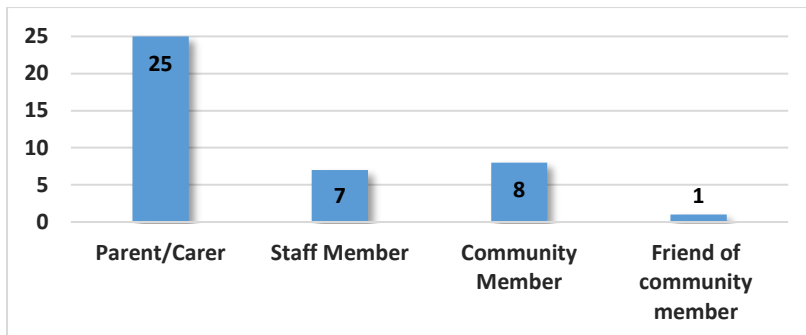
Chart 1



Participants that indicated 'Other' for their residency location reside in the Daviot, Insch, Monymusk and Rothienorman Schools catchments, amongst others.

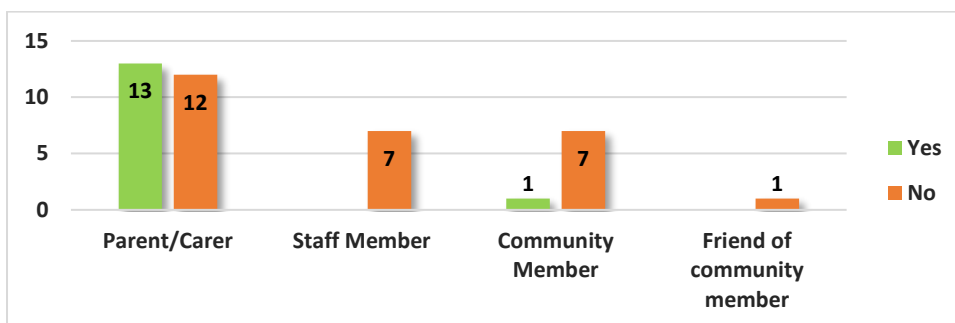
Chart 2 below presents that the highest number of respondents were parents/carers. The survey was completed by 25 (61%) parents/carers, seven (17%) members of staff, eight (20%) community members and one 'friend of a community member'. No pupils took part in this survey.

Chart 2



In total 13 parents/carers and one community member have school age children affected by the changes to Fisherford School. Additionally, it's important that none of the staff members indicated having school age children affected by the proposal. Chart 3 below shows the results from the question.

Chart 3



Of those parents/carers who have children affected by the changes to Fisherford School, the vast majority attend Rayne North School.

Five of the staff members who completed the survey are based at Rayne North School.

The primary focus of the survey was whether the respondents support the closure of Fisherford School. A total of 25 (61%) respondents support the school closure, three (7%) are in opposition and 13 (32%) have no preference. This is presented in Chart 4 below.

Chart 4

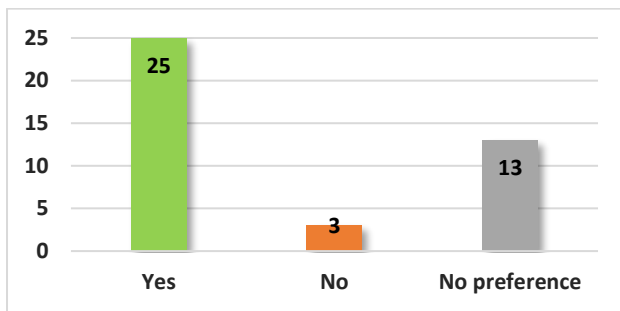
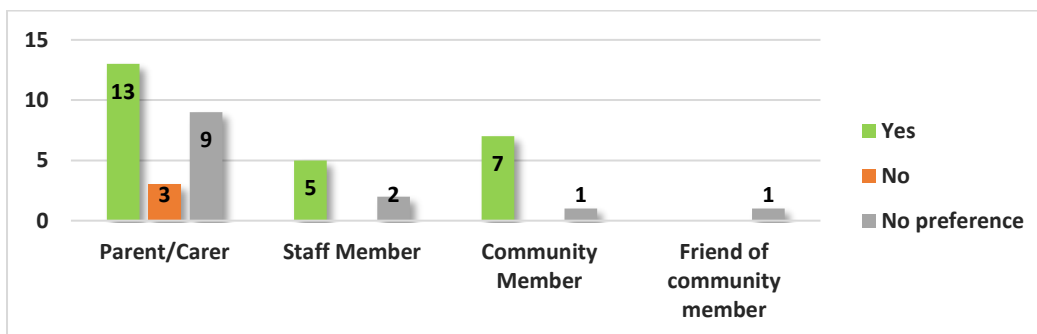


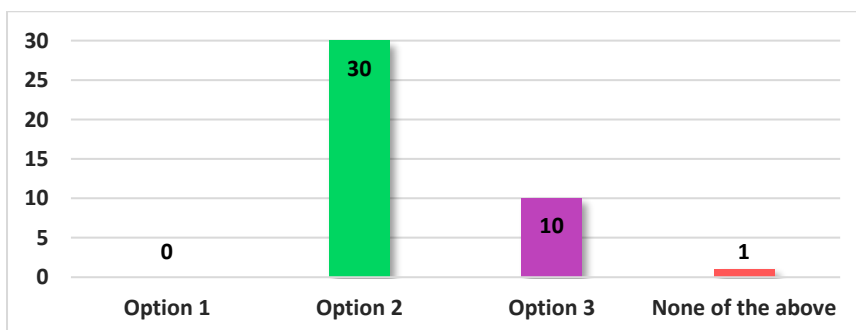
Chart 5 illustrates the voting patterns of individual interest groups on the Fisherford School closure proposal.

Chart 5



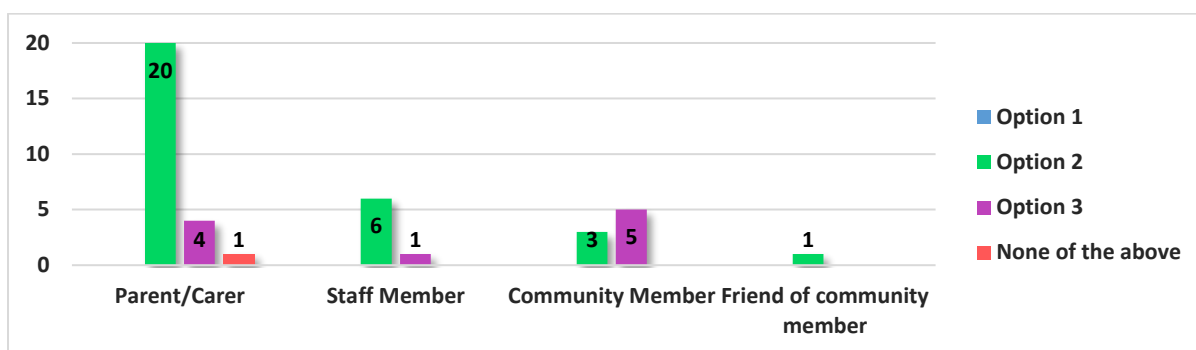
Further, the participants were asked which option they prefer for the Fisherford School catchment area, *Option 1* – realigning the Fisherford School catchment with Auchterless School, *Option 2* – realigning the catchment with Rayne North School or *Option 3* – splitting the catchment between Auchterless School and Rayne North School. The vast majority, 30 (73%) respondents are in favour of *Option 2*, 10 (24%) support *Option 3* and one is of the opinion that none of the proposed options should be consulted upon. It is worth noting that none of the survey participants chose *Option 1*. Chart 6 below shows the results from 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 25 parents/carers who completed the survey, 13 (52%) support the school closure, three (12%) are in opposition and nine (36%) have no preference. 20 (80%) voted for *Option 2*, four (16%) for *Option 3* and one think that all three options are inadequate.

Of seven parents/carers respondents residing in the Fisherford School catchment, four (57%) support the school closure and three (43%) have no preference. Five (71%) of those parents/carers support *Option 2* of the proposal and two (29%) are in favour of *Option 3*.

Of 15 parents/carers residing in the Rayne North School catchment, seven (47%) support the school closure, two (13%) are oppose and six (40%) have no preference. 14 (93%) of those parents/carers prefer *Option 2* of the proposal and one is in favour of *Option 3*.

One parent/carer residing in the Auchterless School catchment area who took part in the survey supports the Fisherford School closure and *Option 3*.

Out of seven staff members who completed the survey, five (71%) are in favour of the Fisherford School closure and two (29%) have no preference. Six (86%) voted for *Option 2*, and one for *Option 3*. It is worth noting that the majority of the staff members, five (71%) is based at Rayne North School and none of the staff of Auchterless School took part in the survey.

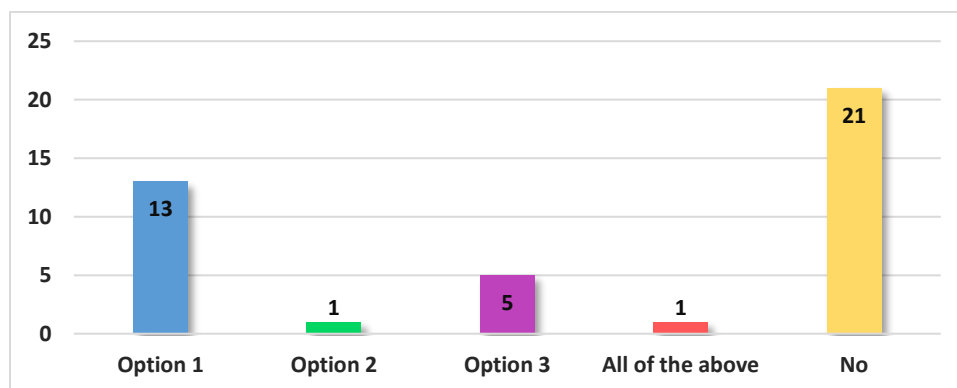
Out of eight community members and a friend of the community member who responded to the survey seven (78%) support the school closure and two (22%) have no preference. *Option 2* is favoured by four (44%) of them and five (56%) support *Option 3*.

Further analysis of all responses broken by the participants' settlement are as follows. Of those 30 consultees living in the Fisherford, Auchterless and Rayne North catchments, the majority, 18 (60%) support the closure of Fisherford School, two (7%) are in opposition to the proposal and 10 (33%) have no preference. *Option 2* is favoured by the vast majority, 21 (70%) of the respondents residing in the affected catchments, while *Option 3* is supported by nine (30%).

Of those respondents residing in other than the affected catchment areas, seven (64%) support the Fisherford School closure, three (27%) are against the proposal and one has no preference. Nine (82%) respondents are in favour of *Option 2*, one is in favour of *Option 3* and one believes 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, 13 (32%) believe that *Option 1* should be discounted, while only one voted against *Option 2* and five (12%) against *Option 3*. One respondent thinks that all options should be disregarded and 21 (52%) believe that all proposed options are viable and 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):
 - Rayne North School has many Fisherford pupils and established links.
 - Bus routes to Rayne North are already in place.
 - Merging with Rayne North would benefit the area, ensuring Rayne North School's viability.
 - Increasing the Rayne North School roll ensures healthy pupil and staff continuity.
 - Proximity to Rayne North is more convenient for Rothmaise residents.
 - Distance to travel to Auchterless School for some pupils.
 - Lack of wrap-around care at Auchterless.
- Option 3 (Auchterless School and Rayne North School):
 - Rayne North School already hosts Fisherford families, providing a thriving environment.
 - Increasing Rayne North School catchment will enable the continuity of healthy school roll and stability for the staff and children.
 - Splitting between two schools may complicate logistics for families.

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

Despite sentiments and reservations about the closure, the vast majority of respondents agree with the proposal. Some individuals acknowledge the need for the decision due to the low pupil numbers and resource limitations, suggesting that the closure may be the best outcome under such circumstances. Some emphasised the importance of ensuring a quick sale of the school building to prevent its deterioration and hoped that the Council would make good use of the school building.

Many members of staff and parents/carers with children attending Rayne North School express their support for merging Fisherford School with Rayne North School. They quote the positive qualities of Rayne North, such as its excellent staff, good Parent Council and generous outdoor space, as reasons for merging the Fisherford catchment with Rayne North. Additionally, the existing school and community links, and established bus routes make Rayne North a practical option for Fisherford pupils. In contrast recognition was given to splitting the Fisherford catchment between Auchterless and Rayne North School, which would have a positive impact on both schools.

There was some support for the implementation of a dual zone for the Fisherford School catchment as this would minimise long bus journeys for children. Others were in favour of splitting the catchment between Auchterless and Rayne North School which as believed would benefit both schools.

Several alternative options have been proposed by the community members. These included revising the proposed catchment area boundaries to realign it with B992 road through The Black Burn up to Culsalmond side, or to realign the catchment with community council boundaries or considering Rothienorman as an additional option.

Concerns have been raised regarding the secondary education prospect for Fisherford pupils, particularly the exclusion of Meldrum Academy as their zoned secondary school, quoting that "this would be potentially detrimental to these pupils who would then be in the position of having to attend a different secondary school from the majority of their peers who would be zoned to Meldrum Academy."

Conclusion

The proposal for the closure of Fisherford School has generated a variety of opinions and suggestions from the community. While some would wish to see the school reopen, the majority of respondents see the merger with Rayne North School as a practical and sustainable solution for both Fisherford and Rayne North communities.

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 vast majority of the respondents are generally in agreement to close Fisherford School permanently and reassign its catchment to Rayne North School.