



EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

APPENDIX 1

**CONSULTATION REPORT REGARDING
THE CLOSURE OF CLATT SCHOOL**

2025

**This Consultation Report has been issued by
Education and Children's Services of Aberdeenshire Council in
accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

**If you have difficulty reading this document please contact
Learning Estates Team on 01771 676600
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared following a consultation on the proposal to discontinue education at Clatt School, which is currently mothballed and re-assign its catchment area to either Kennethmont School or Rhynie School.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 on the above proposal. The objective of this report is to:
- Provide a record of the total number and a summary of written and oral responses received during the statutory consultation period;
 - Provide a statement of the Council's response to those written and oral representations;
 - Provide the full text of Education Scotland's report and a statement of the Council's response to this report;
 - Provide a statement on how the Council reviewed the above proposal following the representations received during the statutory consultation period and the report from Education Scotland;
 - Provide details of any omission from, or inaccuracy in, the proposal document and state how the Council acted on it;
 - State how the Council has obeyed Section 9(1) and 11A to 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 when reviewing the above proposal;
 - Provide Officers' conclusions and recommendation.

2 The Consultation Process

- 2.1 The requirement for consulting on a relevant proposal relating to schools is set out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 2.2 At its meeting on [29 August 2024](#), Education and Children's Services Committee authorised the launch of a statutory consultation regarding the closure of Clatt School.
- 2.3 The proposal document made clear to consultees that the consultation period would run from 4 September 2024 until 8 November 2024. This adequately covered the required minimum of 30 days term time consultation.
- 2.4 On 4 September 2024 copies of the proposal document were distributed to:
- Parent Council of Kennethmont School and Rhynie School
 - Parents/Carers of pupils at Kennethmont School and Rhynie School
 - Pupils at Kennethmont School and Rhynie School
 - Parents of pre-school age children living within the Clatt School catchment area
 - Staff at Kennethmont School and Rhynie School
 - Trade union representatives of Kennethmont School and Rhynie School staff
 - Tap O'Noth Community Council

- Local Early Years Partner Providers
 - Clatt School catchment area residents
 - Regular users of Rhynie School
 - Education Scotland
- 2.5 The consultation proposal was posted to all residents in the Clatt School catchment area and emailed to all other consultees.
- 2.6 Kennethmont and Rhynie Schools were provided with spare copies of the proposal, along with maps and a launch poster which contained information regarding the public meeting and how to complete the online survey.
- 2.7 Clatt Village Hall and the Marr Area Office were provided with spare copies of the proposal and the poster to be displayed at their establishments during the consultation period.
- 2.8 Local Early Years Partner Providers were emailed with a copy of the proposal to be distributed to their parents/carers and the poster to be displayed at their setting during the consultation period.
- 2.9 The proposal document was also published on the Council website: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/> and a copy of the document was available on request from the Aberdeenshire Council's Learning Estates Team.
- 2.10 An online survey through the Engage Aberdeenshire platform was available throughout the consultation period.
- 2.11 In addition, relevant information was published on the Engage Aberdeenshire project page. Communication regarding the consultation and public meeting was published on the Council's website and Facebook.
- 2.12 The consultation was also advertised in The Huntly Express on 17 September 2024 and it included details of the public meeting.
- 2.13 A public consultation meeting was held on 1 October 2024 at 6.30 pm at Clatt Village Hall.
- 2.14 The consultees were given the option to submit their comments on the proposal via email to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or posted to: Learning Estates Team, Gordon House, Blackhall Road, Inverurie, AB51 3WA.
- 2.15 Education Scotland received a copy of the proposal document and attended the public meeting. At the end of the consultation period, they were sent all written representations received by the Council. HM Inspectors then held meetings with Kennethmont School, Rhynie School as well as with Tap O'Noth Community Council. Following their involvement, Education Scotland prepared a report on

the educational aspects of the proposal. This aspect is covered in more detail under Section 8 of this report.

- 2.16 In line with the statutory requirement, this consultation report will be published on the Aberdeenshire Council's website on 7 February 2025, prior to the Marr Area Committee and more than three weeks prior to the Council taking the decision on whether to implement the proposal.

3 The Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal document included as Appendix A to this report, was issued to those individuals and bodies listed under 'Distribution' within the proposal document. The proposal document was also published on the Council website: <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations>

- 3.2 The schools affected by this proposal are:

- Clatt School
- Kennethmont School
- Rhynie School

- 3.3 The proposal on which the consultation took place was:

To discontinue education at Clatt School, which is currently mothballed, and re-assign its catchment area to either Kennethmont School or Rhynie School.

- 3.4 The proposal document gave two options for realigning the Clatt catchment area either in full to Kennethmont School or in full to Rhynie School. Five further options for realigning the catchment were discounted, and three alternatives to closure were identified as being to reopen the school either with its current catchment area or an extended catchment area, or for Clatt School to remain mothballed.
- 3.5 The proposal document stated that the Clatt School catchment area would be reassigned to one of the neighbouring primary schools: Kennethmont School or Rhynie School.
- 3.6 The proposed changes, if approved, would take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.
- 3.7 All existing primary age pupils living within the Clatt School catchment would continue their education at the schools they are currently attending. Any siblings of those current pupils would be able to join their brother/sister(s) at the same school.
- 3.8 The proposal document confirmed that all pupils within the Clatt School catchment area would be entitled to school transport should they choose to

attend the designated school.

- 3.9 If Clatt School was to be permanently closed, then there would be no requirement for the building to continue as a school. Education and Children's Services would declare the building surplus to requirement.
- 3.10 The options appraisal process has identified a number of alternative uses for the school and Aberdeenshire Council would be happy to work with the local community to see whether the school building could be suitable for community use. This would have to be fully assessed following the Asset Disposal Procedure and subject to an Asset Transfer Application.
- 3.11 There will not be any staffing implications relating to the proposal if implemented. The school has been mothballed since August 2022 and all staff were either relocated or are no longer employed by the council.

4 Educational Benefits Statement

- 4.1 The Proposal document contains within it an educational benefits statement. This statement is replicated here for reference.
- 4.2 That statement drew upon the current positive educational experiences that pupils living within the catchment area are having at other local schools. These are in contrast to the experiences that would be available with a roll of fewer than six pupils, should parents wish to enrol their children at Clatt School again.
- 4.3 The educational benefits are considered below for pupils if either of the identified options is adopted.
- 4.4 If Clatt School was to re-open, with a reduced number of pupils over a greater age range, there would be increased challenges in ensuring that all children develop the four capacities of Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors.
- 4.5 A small school roll made up of one or a few year groups significantly diminishes the sustainability and viability of a school and offers fewer opportunities to learners which results in a negative impact on their educational and social development.
- 4.6 There are real concerns that pupils' educational development may not be as successful as it could be if opportunities to work closely, regularly and frequently with peers of the same age are limited.
- 4.7 Isolation for some pupils, due to no connection with peers of the same age or sex in a school with an extremely small roll may have a negative impact on their social development.
- 4.8 The proposal would provide improved opportunities for children to develop skills

for learning, life and work e.g., increasing opportunities for working with others of a similar age and stage which are very limited in schools of less than eight children in a multi-composite setting.

- 4.9 While it may seem that having fewer pupils in a class would allow a teacher to provide more one-on-one attention, in this case, fewer means limited pupils' learning experiences. Classes low in pupil numbers have disadvantages, which are further compounded when a school has a single class, potentially with only one or two children at each year stage.
- 4.10 While one or two pupils absent from a large class is not a major issue, a small number of absent pupils can make a significant difference in a small class. If there are only eight pupils in a class, two missing pupils represent a much larger percentage of the class population, making it more difficult for the teacher to continue with planned lessons.
- 4.11 This will significantly impact the class dynamics and learning experiences of children in the single class setting, with the likely consequence that a child may be the only pupil at a particular stage. Thereby having no other child to share their learning experience with and benefit from those interactions.
- 4.12 A smaller class is less likely to represent a diverse cross section of society. Pupils benefit from being members of diverse classes because they have the opportunity to hear viewpoints that differ greatly from their own. While some small classes do have a diverse array of members, many are relatively homogeneous in nature and, as such, do not offer pupils the opportunity to learn in a diverse setting.
- 4.13 Some academic activities require a minimum number of participants. Activities such as small group projects, group discussions or peer to peer learning activities are much harder to implement in a small class because there are fewer pupils to divide into groups, limiting pupils' options. Other options, such as large-scale games, may be impossible in single small settings because there are not enough pupils to allow for game play, or due to the wide variation in the age and physical development of the pupils, potentially making an activity unsafe.
- 4.14 Some pupils enjoy the anonymity associated with being a member of a larger class and school. These pupils are uncomfortable in the spotlight and prefer to blend in with the crowd as they move through the process of learning. For pupils of this nature, small classes are far from desirable because in educational settings with reduced pupil numbers, they do not have the same opportunity to mix with their peer group.
- 4.15 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil

being enabled to be part of an age-appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form.

- 4.16 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the modern school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Kennethmont and Rhynie Schools have sufficient pupils to allow the children to work collaboratively on various topics and activities. The class teachers will work with both individuals and groups at each stage of the curriculum, and group working allows pupils to develop different skills from those that are developed during individual work.
- 4.17 Within larger schools, pupils will have the opportunity to develop wider relationships and friendships which will see them better prepared to meet the social and learning opportunities and challenges ahead in the context of a secondary school with a roll of around 700 - 800 pupils. This is important in terms of developing their education through their school journey.
- 4.18 Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.
- 4.19 Pupils at both Kennethmont School and Rhynie School regularly work in cooperative learning groups. A cooperative learning strategy normally involves four pupils of roughly the same age group working together collaboratively. If Clatt School re-opened with a low roll that would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static and there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. The pupils may not be of a similar age and could be spread across P1-P7. A low roll would further limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
- 4.20 A larger school roll offers children from the Clatt School catchment area an increased possibility of participating in teams in a range of games. These educational, cultural and sporting activities provide a number of benefits for children in terms of both academic and social development and support the process of transition towards the larger and more varied educational setting of a secondary school. The children from Rhynie School and Kennethmont School participate in rugby and cricket festivals. There is also an extra-curricular netball club at Kennethmont School, who participate in the local tournaments throughout the year.
- 4.21 Pupils at Rhynie School and Kennethmont School can participate in various activities and events across the year such as school shows, Christmas concerts, sports day, art exhibitions. There are opportunities for educational visits which support learning. Kennethmont School have arranged visits to the Wild West Village at Forgue, HM Theatre and Orbs Bookshop in Huntly who have previously visited the school with a Pop Up shop which was also open to

the local Mother and Toddler Group. The school host a bake sale linked with the school library and have held various events for World Book Day. The school often organise for workshops to be held in the school such as Travelling by Tuba, a science workshop during British Science Week by a lecturer from NESCOL and various others throughout the school year. Rhynie School have organised various day trips with the most recent being to the Lecht Ski Centre and Macduff Aquarium. The school also organises charity coffee shop mornings, organises author visits for World Book Day and hosts a monthly community café.

- 4.22 A larger school roll can afford children the opportunity to participate in a range of groups such as Rights Respecting School groups, Eco-Committee, a buddy system and playground leaders. Kennethmont School have a library working group, playground leaders and an informal buddy system. The children at Rhynie School can participate in Community Café groups, Pupil Council, a Librarian group, Rights Respecting School group and can be Play Leaders.
- 4.23 Some of the educational benefits arise not from larger pupil numbers (e.g. to form teams of similar age and size), but also because a larger staff and parent body increases the likelihood of interested adults leading a range of activities.
- 4.24 It is Aberdeenshire Council's view that the pupils from the Clatt School catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at the larger neighbouring schools. Formalising the current arrangements would provide several such benefits, judged against both the Aberdeenshire and National criteria set out above.
- 4.25 The vast majority of pupils from the Clatt catchment area currently attend other schools nearby in the Huntly Cluster. No adverse effects for those pupils are expected to arise from the permanent closure of Clatt School.

5 Public Engagement

5.1 Public Meetings

All parents/carers, community members and stakeholders were invited to the public meeting to discuss the proposal, which was held at Clatt Village Hall on 1 October 2024 at 6.30 pm.

During the week commencing 16 September 2024, the public meeting was advertised in The Huntly Express and on Aberdeenshire Council's social media platforms.

The meeting was attended by council officers, the Chair of Education and Children's Services Committee and an Education Scotland representative. Six members of the public attended the meeting. A note of the meeting is attached as Appendix C. There was a lively discussion about the impact of the closure on the community and a feeling of disappointment that it was happening. There was also a recognition that a school cannot operate without pupils and a

resignation that the closure was therefore inevitable. There were also some comments regarding positive experiences that children are having at neighbouring schools.

Online Survey

During the consultation period parents/carers, community members and stakeholders were invited to take part in the online survey to express their opinion on the proposal.

The survey provided a summary of the proposal and the identified options. Participants were also given the opportunity to leave comments regarding the proposal.

Out of the 23 survey participants, nine (39.1%) were parents/carers, eight (34.8%) were community members, five (21.7%) stated 'other' which included former pupils, an owner of a property near the school and one was a local elected member. The survey revealed that 13 (56.5%) respondents supported the closure of Clatt School, while eight (34.8%) opposed it, and two (8.7%) had no preference. Regarding proposed options if the closure went ahead, eight (34.8%) supported Option 2 (closing Clatt School and merging with Rhynie School), while three (13%) preferred Option 1 (closing Clatt School and merging with Kennethmont School). Nine (39.1%) participants had no preference and three (13%) felt that none of the proposed options were suitable.

The summary of online survey responses has been provided in Appendix D. Appendix E provides an extract of all comments received to the survey. These have been redacted where necessary to prevent the identification of any individuals.

5.2 Discussion with Pupils

As part of the consultation process, the Head Teacher at Rhynie School discussed the proposal regarding the closure of Clatt School and re-assigning its catchment to either Kennethmont School or Rhynie School with children from both Rhynie and Kennethmont Schools.

In general, pupils from both schools welcomed the proposal and had no objections to Clatt children joining their school but did raise concerns about how busy the playground could get with more children. The pupils identified a range of potential advantages and disadvantages associated with both small and bigger schools.

Full details of feedback received from both schools have been provided in Appendices F & G.

5.3 Staff Engagement

As Clatt School has been mothballed since August 2022, all staff previously based at Clatt School have been employed at other establishments and

some are no longer employed by Aberdeenshire Council. Staff within Kennethmont School and Rhynie School have been given the opportunity to discuss the proposal and respond to the consultation. Survey respondents did not identify themselves as being staff above being a parent or community member.

6 Written Responses

- 6.1 During the consultation period between 4 September 2024 and 8 November 2024, representations were invited from statutory consultees and interested parties. No additional written responses to the consultation were received.

7 Education Authority Response to Written and Oral Representations

- 7.1 Comments received during the consultation period have been carefully considered and the Council response is provided below. The comments from the online survey can be found at Appendix E.
- 7.2 One respondent asked about a dual zone. Creating a dual zone would be against the Aberdeenshire Council Learning Estates Strategy, which states that no dual catchment areas will be created due to additional transport costs and vehicles, increase in vehicle emissions as well as difficulties in the planning of school places and staffing for secondary schools.
- 7.3 Some of the comments made reference to the loss of a small rural school and did not agree with sending the children to a larger school. The schools proposed are less than five miles from the village of Clatt and are all classed as 'Remote Rural Areas' according to Scottish Government classifications. Clatt School has a capacity of 50 pupils which equates to two classes if at full capacity. Kennethmont School and Rhynie School are both classed as 'small schools' with under three classes capacity.
- 7.4 Aberdeenshire Council value rural education and it is important that we retain rural education in small schools, however we cannot sustain all buildings. Ensuring the educational and social benefits of all children in Aberdeenshire schools are a key priority.
- 7.5 There were some questions about what happens to the building and equipment if permanently closed. Aberdeenshire Council has an Asset Disposal procedure which must be followed when buildings become surplus to requirements. If a decision is made to permanently close Clatt School, there would be no requirement for the building to continue as a school. The Service would intend to declare the building surplus to requirement and other council services will be approached to express an interest in the site. This would be assessed through the Asset Disposal procedure. Thereafter any surplus council sites can be subject to an Asset Transfer Application. Following the Place and Wellbeing Assessment, there was a wish to consider other viable

options for the continued use of the school building. Conversations have already begun with members of the community and the Marr Area Team regarding the next steps for the building.

- 7.6 Respondents questioned why some parents were allowed to move their children to other schools when the roll at Clatt School was low and said that it is indicative of government policy that decimates communities by giving parents the choice to put pupils to any school they wish. Aberdeenshire Council are legally required to accept placing requests into and out of schools where there is capacity in the receiving school to do so. All parents are entitled to apply for any school in Scotland and they are not required to give a reason.
- 7.7 One comment asked about the General Purpose space that was added to the school and if it had been fully paid for. All properties within the Aberdeenshire Council education estate are owned by the Council and not leased.
- 7.8 Aberdeenshire Council welcome the comments from respondents who mentioned that the children from Clatt had settled in well in their respective schools and have more opportunities to participate in team sports/activities with a larger group of peers.

8 Education Scotland Report

- 8.1 In line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, a report was produced by Education Scotland on the educational aspects of the proposal.
- 8.2 Education Scotland attended the public meeting held on 1 October 2024 regarding the Council's proposal.
- 8.3 Education Scotland undertook visits to the site of Clatt, Kennethmont and Rhynie Schools and met with relevant stakeholders.
- 8.4 The Education Scotland report is reproduced in full as Appendix H.
- 8.5 The Education Scotland report is summarised below:
- HM Inspectors agree there are educational benefits to this proposal. Children who were at the school when it was mothballed are settled and happy in their new schools, having more opportunities to work with and learn alongside peers that are at a similar stage of learning. This helps their team working and social skills. HM Inspectors note that demographic information for the Clatt catchment area indicates that there is unlikely to be any substantial increase in children living in the area over the next few years.
 - HM Inspectors visited Kennethmont and Rhynie Schools and had discussions with the children, parents and staff. The children who were attending Clatt School previously enjoyed the opportunity to walk or cycle to school and felt they benefitted from a higher level of personal support. All the children

attending Rhynie School from the Clatt catchment expressed a wish to see the school re-open however recognised that since moving school they have gained more interpersonal skills and friendships. All of the children said they are happy in their current school.

- Parents and staff expressed their sadness of the potential loss of Clatt School but also understood the need for efficient use of education resources and want to ensure the sustainability of rural schools in the Huntly Cluster for both children and communities.
- All parents and almost all staff told HM inspectors that Option 2, to close Clatt School and rezone the catchment area to Rhynie School would make more sense. They agreed that as Rhynie School has a nursery, this could help with a smoother transition to Primary 1.
- Education Scotland recognises that Aberdeenshire Council have given the alternative options to closure due consideration.
- HM Inspectors noted that the council have committed to exploring alternative uses for the building further with members of the community. Stakeholders feel that the mothballing and potential closure of the school is a significant loss to the community. Clatt School provided a venue for some community events and this would be lost if the building is closed permanently. If the proposal is agreed, the stakeholders are concerned that the building and equipment within it may be left to deteriorate and would ideally like to see the building used for educational purposes but recognise this may not be possible. Alternatively the community would like the building to be used to support small businesses in the area. The previous pupil council members mentioned they would like clarification on the use of funds remaining in their bank account.

8.6 The Council welcomes the Education Scotland report and accepts its findings. In response to the findings contained within the report, Aberdeenshire Council's response is as follows:

- The Council values small rural schools, such as Rhynie and Kennethmont Schools which have been proposed as an option. However, Clatt School with fewer than six pupils is considered to negatively affect pupils' educational and social development and wellbeing.
- The Council acknowledges the community's concern about the future of the school building. Should the proposal go ahead, any alternative use of the building would have to be fully assessed following the Asset Disposal procedure and subject to an Asset Transfer Application.
- The Council understands the importance of continuity of education. The council will continue specific school transport arrangements for families affected by the mothballing for the duration of their primary education.

- If the proposal is agreed the Council will work with stakeholders to consider the future use of the site and any resources that remain within the school building and playground.
- In response to the query regarding the remaining funds, the Parent Council were informed in May 2022 by the Head Teacher of Clatt School that they would be spent before the school was mothballed. The funds were used for two school trips and the Head Teacher arranged a party for the children.

9 Alleged Omissions or Inaccuracies

- 9.1 Section (10)(3) of The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out a requirement on the Council to provide details of any inaccuracies or omissions within the proposal document which has either been raised by the consultees or identified by the Council itself. The Council must also provide a statement on the action taken in respect of the inaccuracy or omission, or, if no action was taken, to state that fact and explain why.
- 9.2 Officers are required to publish their response to representations made during the consultation period within its final Consultation Report.
- 9.3 One comment from the online survey suggested that the bus numbers, school roll figures and CO2 figures were incorrect in the proposal document. The school roll figures, and transport numbers quoted in the proposal are subject to change and were accurate at the time of preparation. The CO2 figures used are based on the average energy consumption at each school over a set period and did not include school transport.

10 Compliance with Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

- 10.1 Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 states that: After the Education Authority has received HMIE's report, the Authority is to review the relevant proposal having regard (in particular) to:
- (a) written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the consultation period,
 - (b) oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting,
 - (c) HMIE's report.
- 10.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by Officers and all the questions and comments raised were considered in detail. Data and factual information were checked where required and advice and input were sought from other Council Services where needed to consider the issues raised. This

ensured that the Council met the requirements to review the proposal under Section 9(1) of the 2010 Act.

- 10.3 Officers of the Education Authority have considered equally and carefully all written representations.
- 10.4 The Education Authority's position is set out in Section 8 of this document.
- 10.5 The proposal was reviewed to consider whether any of the representations led the Council to reconsider other options as being reasonable alternatives to the proposal to close Clatt School and rezone to Kennethmont School or Rhyne School. None of the representations led Officers to conclude that any of these options should be reconsidered as reasonable alternatives.
- 10.6 The educational benefits were reviewed in respect of the Education Scotland report and representations made. There were no factors included in the Education Scotland report or representations made requiring any aspect of the educational benefits to be reconsidered.
- 10.7 Having reviewed the feedback from consultees, Officers conclude that the basis of the original proposal remained the best solution to provide appropriate and effective education provision for children residing in the Clatt School catchment area.

11 Compliance with Sections 11A to 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

- 11.1 Clatt School is a remote rural school, and the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires the Authority to have special regard to the following factors:
 - (a) the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal,
 - (b) the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal.

As Clatt School is a rural school, special regard was paid to the rural school factors. These were considered fully in the Options Appraisal stage and set out in the Proposal Document. Prior to launching the statutory element of the consultation, opportunities were provided to all members of the community to either suggest ways to make the school viable again or alternative uses for the building that would benefit the community.

The loss of the school, use of the building, impact on the community and likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements as well as its environmental impact have been set out in the Options Appraisal and proposal documents.

The Council has further reviewed the proposal and the review considered whether our assessment of the rural school factors to be appropriate considering representations received. The Council's updated assessment is

detailed further below.

11.2 Likely effect on the local community

Loss of the school as a focal point for the community

Members of the community mentioned the loss of the school may impact on the elderly population as the school was a focal point for some community events. Some of the activities the school organised, such as jumble sales, bake sales, coffee mornings helped to socially galvanise the local community. Concern was raised around how that common link would be maintained if the school is permanently closed. Clatt however does benefit from a well organised and fully functioning village hall a short distance from the school which also serves as a focal point for community functions.

During its operation, the school did not offer breakfast or after-school clubs. The limited community use during the time it was operational as a school suggests the loss of the building can be mitigated.

Clatt School has been mothballed since 2022 due to a falling roll. The data held regarding pupil numbers indicated that there were families living in the area but that they were not attending the local school. It is clear that families living in the catchment area are travelling to access education as well as other services, such as shops, post office, health care and other facilities.

If the proposal is approved and the catchment area is reassigned to either Kennethmont School or Rhynie School, it will be important for the community of Clatt to be included in future school events.

Use of the building after permanent closure

A Place and Wellbeing assessment was undertaken in June 2024 and involved discussion with stakeholders in the Clatt community and various partners in Aberdeenshire Council. The report and all recommendations can be viewed in full as Appendix I.

Discussions involved what happens to the building if permanently closed and several recommendations were made including:

- The Marr Area Team will liaise with the wider Local Community Planning Group and stakeholders to identify current provisions in Clatt and surrounding areas to build an understanding of where residents access services and support.
- The Marr Area Team will initiate discussions with the Clatt community around the potential to develop a business case for an asset transfer of the school building, in preparation for the possible closure to ensure the local community are prepared to act swiftly once a decision is made.

There is a desire by residents in Clatt to have a role to play in contributing to the wider surrounding communities. It is recognised by the community that whilst none of the small villages in the area offer residents all facilities and services required, each village does offer something, in terms of service or support, and so has a contribution to make to the wider community. Clatt residents saw the school as being part of that network of offering and so without the school they are keen for there to be an alternative in Clatt, but they are unclear what that could be.

11.3 Likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements

Travel arrangements

Aberdeenshire Council provides home to school transport for around 11,000 pupils daily to schools across Aberdeenshire. There are already pupils transported by the Authority to Kennethmont School and Rhynie School. This includes pupils from the Clatt School catchment area.

The travel distance and travel time between Clatt School and Kennethmont School or Rhynie School is not considered to be unreasonable. It is not uncommon for pupils to travel greater distances to reach their school and travelling for primary school education is common across Aberdeenshire because of the geography of the area.

Further information on the likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements has been set out in Section 12 of the Proposal Document.

Environmental impact

The negative environmental impact due to travel arrangements of primary age pupils living in the Clatt area is minimal, due to the very small number of children and short distances involved and will be offset by the closure of a dated and underutilised school building.

The Marr Area Team will support the Clatt community to explore opportunities to repurpose the school grounds for food-growing projects, (linking with similar initiatives in Aberdeenshire, such as those in Tarland, for learning) to address food insecurity and foster community connections. This could also support the biodiversity of the space.

There are also opportunities to support the ongoing development of a resilience hub within Clatt, potentially in the village hall, by helping to make connections with other rural communities in Aberdeenshire that have successfully implemented similar projects to enhance preparedness for climate-related events.

12 Representations to Scottish Ministers in terms of Section 15 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

- 12.1 If the Authority makes a final decision to implement the proposal, it will be required to notify the Scottish Ministers of that decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and consultation report. This must be done within six working days of that decision. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal.
- 12.2 Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process is known, the Authority cannot proceed to implement the proposal.
- 12.3 If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, they must refer the proposal to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels who may refuse to consent to the proposal or grant their consent to the proposal subject to conditions or unconditionally.
- 12.4 It should be noted that the legislation allows for any person to make representations to Scottish Ministers within three weeks of the Council taking their final decision to implement a closure proposal.
- 12.5 Aberdeenshire Council will make the decision on whether or not to implement this closure proposal at its meeting on **24 April 2025**. If the decision is taken to implement the closure proposal, any representations to Scottish Ministers, therefore, in this context need to be with the Ministers within three weeks of this date. Therefore, any representations must be made to Scottish Ministers **by 15 May 2025**.
- 12.6 Anyone wishing to make representation to Scottish Ministers during the three-week period referred to above should do so by email to schoolclosure@gov.scot or in writing to:

The Scottish Government
School Infrastructure Unit
2A (South) Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

13 Conclusions

- 13.1 In review of the oral and written submissions to the formal consultation and survey results, it is clear that there is support for the proposal to close Clatt School but also opposition from members of the local community.
- 13.2 Officers have carefully considered the opportunities, issues and challenges identified by stakeholders during both the informal engagement and formal consultation processes.

13.3 The Council now has four options, namely:

- (a) Adopt the proposal; or
- (b) Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt; or
- (c) Amend the proposal significantly and undertake a further consultation exercise on a new proposal; or
- (d) Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo.

13.4 Each option is discussed below.

(a) Adopt the proposal

If the Council chooses to adopt the proposal and close Clatt School on a permanent basis then one of the two options for merging Clatt School outlined in the proposal document would also need to be chosen.

The most popular option amongst respondents was *Option 2*, to close Clatt School and merge with Rhynie School. This option is supported by eight (34.8%) respondents, out of all 23 responses to the survey. 13 (56.5%) respondents to the survey support the closure of Clatt School. The majority of stakeholders who spoke with Education Scotland also chose *Option 2* as preferred to help ensure the sustainability of rural schools across the wider area.

If the Council adopts the proposal, it would be on the basis that the educational benefits set out in the proposal document would materialise and a period of uncertainty for the community would come to an end. Children will have access to greater learning opportunities and experiences and increased socialisation through being part of a larger school. Opportunities to participate in peer support, classroom learning, learning groups across stages and between classes and opportunities to engage at lunchtime, after school and team events will be increased. The projected numbers of children within the Clatt catchment area are insufficient to make the school viable. Significant factors in this are parental placing requests to other schools and the declining population in rural areas. Kennethmont School and Rhynie School have the capacity to accommodate additional children. The proposal will assist the Council in delivering "Sustainable Learning Estate" by maximising its occupancy and 'Best Value' by making more efficient and effective use of its resources.

In summary, the key points that have been highlighted during the consultation period are as follows:

- The report from Education Scotland recognised that there are educational benefits for pupils as outlined in the Council's proposal. Children who were transferred to other schools have settled well and enjoy learning alongside their peers.
- The Council, having had special regard to the rural school factors, does not consider that the proposal will adversely affect the sustainability of the community. Indeed, there may be a positive opportunity for the Clatt School

building to be utilised for community use if it ceases to be used as a school.

- The proposal has generally been supported by the parents/carers and some members of the community who responded to the proposal.
- A number of pupils already attend Kennethmont School or Rhynie School, some as the result of successful placing requests prior to the mothballing of Clatt School. Pupils who are currently out of zone, but who become in zone as a result of the closure will be provided with free home to school transport.

(b) Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt

There are no minor amendments that have been proposed to the Council during the consultation.

(c) Amend the proposal significantly and undertake a further consultation exercise on a new proposal

No significant changes to the proposal have been suggested during the consultation period.

Having reviewed the Education Scotland report and feedback from consultees, officers concluded that the basis of the original proposal continues to be the most appropriate response to the unsustainable roll of Clatt School.

(d) Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo.

This option would be to continue to mothball Clatt School. Maintaining the status quo would continue the uncertainty for the community. The repeated attempts to seek enrolments to school and the fact there are no planned housing developments suggest that it would be difficult for Clatt School to re-open with a viable roll in the near future.

Withdrawing the proposal, the Council would be failing to recognise or respond to the educational and social benefits for the children living in Clatt. Education Scotland has recognised that the proposal would lead to clear educational benefits for Clatt pupils.

As it is unlikely that the school would re-open based upon current data, there may require to be a further full statutory consultation at a later date to close the school. Allowing for appropriate governance the process can take in the region of nine months to complete.

It is considered to be unreasonable to go through another lengthy statutory consultation process. The uncertainty surrounding the future of the school has impacted the community and it is hoped that this statutory consultation to close Clatt School will give clarity to the community and a sense of certainty regarding their children's education.

14 Recommendations

- 14.1 On the basis of the feedback received during the consultation period and taking account of the educational and social benefits of the proposal, it is concluded that the recommendation in Section 14.2 is the most reasonable, appropriate, sustainable and viable option.
- 14.2 The recommendation of the officers is that the Council should adopt the proposal to permanently close Clatt School and re-assign its catchment to Rhynie School.**