



**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S AND LEISURE SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON 24 NOVEMBER 2021**

**SUBJECT: LEARNING ESTATE - OPTIONS APPRAISAL FOR INVERAVON
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the next steps for Inveravon Primary school.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Council in terms of Section III (D) (1) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to all the functions of the Council as Education Authority.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- i) **supports community engagement as part of the Options Appraisal process to identify future options that should be considered; and**
- ii) **agrees to receive a further report in due course.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Inveravon Primary School is a remote rural school which is part of the Speyside Associated Schools Group (ASG). Children and Young People's Committee agreed on 23 August 2017 (para 9 of the minute refers) to mothball the school from August 2017 as a consequence of the roll falling to zero at the end of the academic year 2017/18.
- 3.2 The term 'mothballing' is used, according to Scottish Government guidance, to refer to a temporary decision to close a school where the roll has fallen to zero. Mothballing is the temporary closure of a school which does not in itself lead to statutory consultation and this provides the opportunity for a school to reopen should circumstances change. There is no legal process for mothballing.

- 3.3 Consultation on mothballing the school took place with parents and interested parties in September 2017. There was no appetite for the school to remain open other than to be available for the local community as a hall for activities. Although all access was prohibited due to health and safety and security concerns soon after the mothballing.
- 3.4 Since the school has been mothballed, there have been no requests from parents to enrol their children at the school during the Primary 1 enrolment periods in January 2018, January 2019, January 2020 and January 2021. Consequently, during this period the school has remained mothballed.
- 3.5 The School Act 2010 states that under normal circumstances the maximum period for mothballing should not exceed 3 years, however, with the COVID-19 pandemic being a barrier to full and effective engagement and consultation the mothballing period has been extended beyond the recommended period. It is now deemed appropriate to consider the long term future of the school. Officers propose that an Options Appraisal is conducted, which will consider all available information.
- 3.6 Following the Options Appraisal, a report will be brought back to this Committee in due course, detailing the outcome of the appraisal and the next steps that will be required.
- 3.7 One of the options identified as part of the appraisal could be to close the school. If this is considered to be the only viable option for the school, then the Council must undertake a statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. As a rural school, there is a presumption against closure and the Council must ensure all other alternatives have been identified and robustly considered prior to undertaking any statutory consultation on this matter.
- 3.8 The Inveravon community must have the opportunity to present alternatives to closure for the authority to consider. Therefore, as part of the Options Appraisal process, engagement with the community will be required to explore all possible options for the future of the school.
- 3.9 A minimum of two public engagement sessions will be held for the Inveravon community, which will take place in the Inveravon area at different times of day. A suitable location for this will be determined and agreed with identified Inveravon community stakeholder groups. Further sessions can be scheduled if it is appropriate to do so, and further dialogue is required. Arrangements are planned to complete initial engagements by end of January 2022.
- 3.10 It is important that the process is not extended for a prolonged period, as this causes further uncertainty for the community. However, it is also imperative that a full conversation can be had with all relevant stakeholders, particularly future prospective parents who may wish to see the school re-open. With this consideration, whilst having no specific end date, the Options Appraisal stage will incorporate the Primary 1 admission period for the 2022/23 school session, which will take place in January 2022. Therefore, the options appraisal cannot be concluded before then.

4. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

This report supports the LOIP outcomes:

Building a better future for children and young people in Moray:

- Healthier Children: children get the healthiest start in life and are supported to achieve the best possible mental health and wellbeing and there is equity for vulnerable groups.

And the aims of the Corporate Plan to:

- Improve health and wellbeing for the people of Moray.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 have been referred to and adhered to and will continue to be during Consultation and Options Appraisal.

Title deeds indicate that the school building is not owned by the Local Authority rather the Owner, Ballindalloch Estate, gave permission to use the building over a century ago. If there is a future decision to close the school it will revert back to the Owner.

(c) Financial implications

There are no financial implications from this proposal.

The Options Appraisal process, recommended in this report, will identify any costs against each option and these will be detailed in a future report.

(d) Risk implications

There is a risk, albeit assumed a low one, that the school may be required to re-open should more than 10 pupils (the current Moray Council policy is to mothball schools with less than 10 pupils) come forward as a result of the community engagement.

Should the school be required to be operational in the future, Property will need to complete a full condition survey to determine any repair and maintenance costs to return to operational status

(e) Staffing implications

The post of Acting HT of the pairing Inveravon/Knockando has been in place since 2017 and will continue until the Options Appraisal is completed and future options for Inveravon confirmed. The postholder currently leads and manages Knockando only whilst Inveravon remains mothballed.

Should the decision be taken to close the school in the future the responsibilities and future pay of the Acting HT would reduce and a cash conservation of 3 years would apply.

(f) Property

Whilst the school has been mothballed, the building has been maintained as wind and water tight. The building has been drained down and regular janitor inspections conducted and any issues, e.g. water ingress, have been addressed.

(g) Equalities

An equality impact assessment is not required at this stage because the Options Appraisal will incorporate an equality impact assessment. The recommendations in this report do not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

(h) Consultations

Corporate Management Team, Head of Housing and Property, Principle Planning Officer, Head of Education, Head of Education Resources, Human Resources Manager, Head of Financial Services , Legal Services Manager and Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report as regards their respective responsibilities.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Committee considers this report in light of the future of Inveravon Primary School and the wider Learning Estate in Moray and agrees the recommendations.

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Background Papers:

Ref: SPMAN-1315769894-191