

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL 12 NOVEMBER 2015

STARRED ITEMS FROM COMMITTEE MINUTES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 3 NOVEMBER 2015

2. **HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL** 2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Children and Young People proposing changes to the status of Hobkirk Primary School in that it be mothballed for a temporary period and that the decision to do so be reviewed within 12 months. The report outlined the background to the falling pupil roll at Hobkirk Primary School, which had resulted in placing requests from parents of the last seven pupils attending the school being granted, leaving no pupils at the school. Arrangements for accommodating the pupils within Denholm Primary School were described in the report and included transport, staffing and the educational and social benefits to be achieved through the process. The Statutory Guidance issued pursuant to the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 recognised that on occasions a Local Authority might consider it appropriate to mothball a school. This decision did not need to be subject to the formal requirements of that Act. However, the guidance emphasised that mothballing was temporary and any decision to do so must be kept under review. The Service Director Children and Young People, Ms Donna Manson, advised that parents had identified a number of concerns relating to the size of Hobkirk School and the effect on their children's education. Their children had been attending extra curriculum activities at Denholm Primary School and enjoyed the socialisation of these group events. As a result of discussions all parents made placing requests, all of which had been granted. Arrangements were then made for the children to attend Denholm Primary School. Engagement with parents of pre-school children had also taken place in Hobkirk and their preference was for their children to attend Denholm Primary School. Ms Manson continued that the new Curriculum for Excellence had an impact on the parents' choice. In answer to Members' questions, Ms Manson clarified that transport for the seven children to Denholm Primary School had been agreed as a management exception as an interim measure and officers would re-engage with those parents of pupils who had already transferred previously. However, transport would not be provided to schools outwith the catchment area. During the interim period the Headteacher would be undertaking a large amount of management tasks, therefore the dual headship role would continue for the time being. In respect of pupils attending Secondary schools there was approximately a 50% split between Jedburgh and Hawick High Schools, with placing requests being used by parents to send their children to the school of their choice.
- 2.2 Mrs Aitchison, Parent Representative, made a comparison between Hobkirk Primary School and Ednam Primary School which were not dissimilar. Mrs Aitchison highlighted the significant impact on communities when the village school no longer existed and expressed concern that in providing free choice for some parents the choice for other parents was denied. When a school was identified as being at risk then engagement with the community should take place at the earliest opportunity to identify ways of sustaining the school. Members discussed the report and referred to Hobkirk Primary School's roll which had reduced from 39 pupils in 2010 to seven pupils in 2015. It was suggested that the small schools policy may need to be reviewed to allow for earlier intervention to support some village schools. Ms Manson further advised that in a mothball situation the legislation stated that the decision should be reviewed at a maximum of three years but good practice suggested a review within one year. The Executive Committee in January 2015 had considered details of the development of a School Estate Strategy and this included a review of the school estate, with further details due to be considered by the Executive Committee in the new year. The Deputy Chief Executive (People) clarified that all parents would be consulted as part of the review of the school estate. The Chairman advised that all the Committee's comments would be included in the review as it went forward. Members agreed, with reluctance, to approve the recommendations.

DECISION

AGREED:-

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- (a) to recommend to Council that Hobkirk Primary School be mothballed with immediate effect for a temporary period;
- (b) to review the status of the school within the next 12 months; and
- (c) in the interim that transport be provided to Denholm Primary School for any new pupils moving into the area.