

# Appendix

## SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

### POLICY AND CRITERIA FOR MOTHBALLING A SCHOOL

#### BACKGROUND

There is currently not a statutory process for mothballing a school, however the Statutory Guidance that accompanies the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (the **Act**) makes specific mention of mothballing.

The Statutory Guidance provides that mothballing is only appropriate in very restricted circumstances i.e. when a school roll is either zero or very low and the Authority and/or the community consider that while the school is not presently viable, there is a reasonable prospect that the number of pupils in the area will increase, to allow the school to re-open in the future.

It is vital that this flexibility to close a school for a temporary period is not used to undermine the requirements of the Act, which requires statutory consultations on proposals to make a permanent change to a school or stage of education. It should be noted that the Act contains a presumption against closure of rural schools and contains special provisions regarding rural schools to ensure that the consultation and reasons for closure are examined as thoroughly and rigorously as possible. As 36 (61%) of SBC's primary schools are classified as rural the provisions of the Act should always been considered when looking at making a change to a rural school. It is therefore recommended that the provisions of the Act regarding rural school proposals are considered in a mothballing scenario.

As mothballing is only appropriate for a temporary period, it should be subject to regular review, at least annually, against the same requirements which led to the original decision to mothball the school (or stage of education). The maximum duration for mothballing will depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to reopen a school there, but is unlikely to exceed 3 years in areas that are not remote.

While an increase in pupil numbers and the demand for re-opening will be a critical part of the decision making process, the condition of the school building and cost of maintaining the mothballed provision will also be relevant considerations.

In circumstances where a school is mothballed rather than closed and some children and young people remain in the catchment area, this decision should be taken in consultation with the families involved and the possibility should be raised as soon as possible to ensure that families can consider all issues and options. The preparation of an Options Appraisal by SBC should assist this process.

It should be noted that the Statutory Guidance states that if the majority of families oppose mothballing, it would be appropriate to move to a statutory consultation on closure as soon as possible.

Prior to engaging with the parent body there should be discussions with the Parent Council, staff and Elected Members where opinions and comments can be considered and questions answered.

#### OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Prior to engaging with the families and the community it is recommended that an options appraisal regarding the School should be prepared

The Options Appraisal should be based on the requirements of the appraisals required in the Act; ensuring that the Educational Benefit implications are considered along with the impact on pupils and the community. It would be useful to also provide details of the current roll, projected roll and the placement requests out of the catchment zone to assist consideration of potential catchment zone amendments.

The Options Appraisal should include:-

- Identifying the key issues facing the School and requiring to be addressed by SBC – these will include falling roll, projected roll, curriculum concerns, concerns about opportunities and experiences, staff recruitment and retention
- Identification of reasonable alternatives to mothballing e.g.
  - consideration of catchment zones, other ways to boost roll
  - Encouraging or supporting community initiatives to attract employment, development or migration to the area
- Analysis of options, to include consideration of:
  - Likely Education benefits
  - Likely community impact
  - Likely effect of different travelling arrangements
  - Where possible the financial implications.

This Appraisal should assist engagement with the community and contain accurate data that is consistent, robust and able to withstand close scrutiny.

### **ENGAGEMENT – FAMILIES, STAFF AND COMMUNITY**

Once it is clear that this might be a mothballing situation, all families within the catchment should be engaged with, not just those with pupils currently attending the School. This should take place as early as possible in the process to take full account of views, alternative options and opinions and also to provide clarity regarding the process and the next steps.

Staff and unions should also be engaged with at this time as should Elected Member and the Community Council(s).

The engagement should seek to cover:-

- Families' views regarding the School;
- Current and projected roll;
- Initiatives to increase roll;
- Identify alternative school for temporary catchment change;
- Discuss current placement request position;
- The School's role in the community;
- The implications of mothballing – maintaining the School; future use of the building;
- Annual Review process and timelines for re-opening or taking next steps

### **CONSULTATION WITH ELECTED MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS**

From an early stage there should be engagement with the Elected Members in the area and liaison with the Community Councils. Given the nature of these schools and their role and position in the community any proposals regarding temporary or permanent changes should not be a surprise to families or the community.

## **REPORTS TO EDUCATION EXECUTIVE AND COUNCIL**

If it is determined that the appropriate course of action would be to mothball the School a report should be prepared. If timing allows, a paper should firstly go to the Education Executive Committee, recommending that a proposal to mothball, followed by a paper seeking approval to the mothballing to Council.

## **SCHOOL BUILDING**

In the event that the decision is taken to mothball a School, the building must be maintained to ensure that the School can be re-opened in the event that there is demand in the community for it to re-open and that there are adequate numbers of children on the roll to ensure the viability of the School. A key consideration is the Educational Benefits to the children.

Any temporary use of the School is only allowable on the basis that this would not be an impediment to re-opening the School and all arrangements must be terminable with short term notice e.g. 30 days.

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

If the School is to be mothballed a formal review period for the School should be established. Guidance states mothballing should not be more than 3 years. The status of the School should be reviewed at least annually and all enquiries about the School should be logged to ensure that the demand is identified.

The review will analyse the number of children in the catchment, projected pupil numbers in the catchment and details of any actual and proposed housing development in the catchment area. Discussions should be held with Elected Members and the Community Council to establish the demand in the area to establish what the roll could be if the Schools was re-opened. Consideration should also be given to undertaking an online survey with the families and community regarding the future of the school. A report on the status should be prepared for the Executive Committee on an annual basis, detailing the current status of the School roll and projections. All reasonable options regarding the School should be revisited at during the review process.

If it appears that the School is unlikely to reopen, the Options Appraisal should be updated before any proposal for a permanent change to the School is progressed under the Act.