

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

24 May 2016

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report proposes changes to the status of Eccles/Leitholm Primary School in that it is proposed the school be mothballed for a temporary period and that the decision to do so be reviewed within 12 months.**
- 1.2 The report outlines the background to the falling pupil roll at Eccles/Leitholm Primary School, leaving 3 pupils at the school for school session 2016/17. Arrangements for accommodating the pupils within Scottish Borders Schools are described and include transport, staffing and the educational and social benefits to be achieved through the process.
- 1.3 The Statutory Guidance issued pursuant to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 recognises that on occasions a Local Authority might consider it appropriate to mothball a school. This decision does not need to be subject to the formal requirements of that Act. However, the guidance emphasises that mothballing is temporary and any decision to do so must be kept under review.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Executive Committee agrees:-**
- (a) **To recommend to Council that Eccles/Leitholm Primary School be mothballed with immediate effect for a temporary period; and**
 - (b) **To review the status of the school within the next 12 months.**
 - (c) **In the interim that a decision be taken to provide transport to Coldstream Primary School for any new pupils who move into the existing catchment of Eccles/Leitholm area.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In August 2013 the roll at Eccles/Leitholm Primary was 29 pupils in 2 classes. There is no Early Learning and Childcare, ie nursery provision and no 4 or 5 year old children in the catchment area.
- 3.2 In Session 2014-15 the roll dropped to 14 pupils despite only 3 Primary 7s from the previous session transferring to Secondary School. 6 placing requests were made to other schools and 6 pupils left the area.
- 3.3 Session 2015-16 started with a roll of 8 which decreased to 5 by April 2016. With 2 Primary 7s ready to transfer to Berwickshire High School in August and no enrolment of pupils for Primary 1, the new session (2016-17) would start with just 3 pupils.
- 3.4 The placing requests year-on-year are to a range of neighbouring schools:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Placement Requests</i>	<i>School Roll</i>
2013-2014	4 Requests – 1 to Broomlands PS	29
	1 to Duns PS	
	2 to Edenside PS	
2014-2015	6 Requests – 3 to Duns PS	14
	2 to Ednam PS	
	1 to Swinton PS	
2015-2016	5 Requests – 1 to Coldstream PS	8
	2 to Duns PS	
	1 to Edenside PS	
	1 to Swinton PS	
2016-2017	Not Applicable	Projected roll of 3

- 3.5 Pupil Roll
The roll in May 2016 at Eccles/Leitholm Primary School is currently 5 pupils:

Primary 4	2 pupils
Primary 5	1 pupil
Primary 7	2 pupil

- 3.6 Staffing
The staffing complement in Eccles/Leitholm Primary School is currently 0.5 Headteacher, 1.07 FTE class teachers, 1 cleaner/playground supervisor and a member of staff who serves as classroom assistant and administrator.
- 3.7 Community Use
Eccles/Leitholm Primary School building is used by a Sunday School. Discussions have taken place with the representatives and they can provide the Sunday School in the Village Hall.
- 3.8 **Consultation**
(a) Following concerns raised by Officers about the children’s learning experiences at Eccles/Leitholm Primary this school session, a meeting took place between Scottish Borders Council Officers and local Councillors. They recognised the challenges in providing a positive school experience for the pupils and supported Officers’ view that parental opinion should be sought.

- (b) Parents recognised a number of issues relating to the size of Eccles/Leitholm and the effects on their children's education. These include: difficulty for children to find a wide friendship group with similar interests; anticipated difficulties with transition to Secondary School; lack of opportunities for games and team sports and lack of links into wider network of clubs and activities. The parents also identified a number of educational benefits, should their children be able to attend a larger Primary School; greater opportunities to experience the skills and abilities of a wider staff group; greater opportunities for social learning and collaborative learning; greater opportunities for participation in team activities.
 - (c) There was also an acceptance from parents that their children were not able to participate fully in the Curriculum for Excellence due to the requirement for collaboration and peer working among learners and this is difficult to achieve with very small numbers at each stage.
 - (d) During discussions, parents requested individual placing requests to a Primary School of their choice. The 3 individual requests were for Coldstream Primary School, Duns Primary School and either Broomlands or Edenside Primary School.
- 3.9
- (a) As there is capacity within these schools to accommodate an extra pupil, the Service Director, Children & Young People Services, under delegated authority, would be able to grant these requests. The Service Director recognises the educational benefits for the children. Moreover, Section 28A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 requires that a placing request be granted unless specific grounds detailed in Section 28A (3) apply. There would be no grounds for refusing the placing requests.
 - (b) The majority of parental placing requests out of Eccles/Leitholm Primary School are to a variety of Primary Schools, therefore parental preference is being responded to in granting the places requested for the existing 3 pupils.
 - (c) Eccles/Leitholm Primary School became a partner school to Coldstream Primary School under Transforming Children's Services and as such the Headteacher works across the 2 schools. Pupils from Eccles/Leitholm already access facilities and activities in Coldstream Primary School on a regular basis. The distance between the 2 schools is 6.6 miles on main routes.
 - (d) Both schools are in the same secondary catchment area and work in the same Learning Community. Improvement plans are aligned across the 2 schools, as are curricular programmes and teaching plans. This will support an easy transition for the Eccles/Leitholm pupils into classes in Coldstream with continuity and progression in learning effectively supported.
 - (e) In school session 2016/2017 and prior to the review of the permanent status of Eccles/Leitholm Primary School, any pupils who move into the existing Eccles/Leitholm Primary School catchment area will transfer into the appropriate classes for their individual year groups at Coldstream Primary School. Transport will be arranged for the pupils

transferring.

- (f) If a placing request is made for any pupil who moves into the area, then it will be considered under the Placing Request Guidance and within the delegated authority of the Service Director, Children & Young People.
- (g) HR procedures and policies will be implemented in managing next steps for the staff currently employed at Eccles/Leitholm Primary School.
- (h) It is important to note that during the pre-consultation of the School Estates Review we have engaged with school communities who currently have a pupil roll of less than 20 pupils regarding future sustainability. These ongoing discussions will be represented within the report going to Council in June 2016.

4 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 As a result of the granting of Placing Requests to all of the children who were on the Eccles/Leitholm Primary School roll, the school roll from August 2016 would be zero. Scottish Borders Council being in this position has considered the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 and proposes that Eccles/Leitholm Primary School be mothballed as from Thursday, 30 June 2016. The Statutory Guidance states that "mothballing" is a 'temporary closure which does not lead to a consultation under the 2010 Act'.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 Statutory Guidance, the decision to mothball the school will be formally reviewed within a 12 month period of this arrangement being implemented.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

Whilst there may be slight financial implications relating to transport, it is anticipated that this be offset by savings relating to utilities at Eccles/Leitholm Primary School.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

- (a) Building Deterioration
There is a risk that the empty building falls into a state of disrepair when unoccupied. To mitigate this, there will be a caretaking arrangement undertaken to provide regular checks on the building and maintain it to appropriate standards.
- (b) Transport
The rural location of the journey to Coldstream will be mitigated through the use of approved providers and journeys being undertaken on main routes.
- (c) Financial
As an interim measure this does not present any financial pressures. Longer term finances would be considered as part of any future statutory consultation process.

- (d) Staff
If mothballing is approved that creates a redundancy situation in terms of the Employment Rights Act, all steps will be taken to find suitable redeployment for the staff at the school, and they may be eligible for a disturbance payment. If staff cannot be successfully redeployed, the Council's Redundancy Policy will be followed. We have met with staff to share the contents of this report.
- (e) Stakeholders
Whilst the number of pupils transferring is too low to have any significant impact on the school, we have met the Coldstream Parent Council and informed them of this proposal. They were positive and raised no issues.
- (f) Any existing parent/grandparent/community volunteers who currently support children at Eccles/Leitholm Primary School would be encouraged to continue as part of the Coldstream Primary School Community.
- (g) We have advised the Eccles Community Council of the new arrangements. They were understanding and supportive.

5.3 **Equalities**

It is anticipated that there are no adverse impact due to race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion/belief arising from the proposals in this report.

5.4 **Acting Sustainably**

There are no significant impacts on the economy, community or environment.

5.5 **Carbon Management**

There are no significant effects on carbon emissions arising from the proposals contained in this report. We expect a carbon neutral position. Although there will be travel to the new school for all children, there will be significant reduction of existing travel activities, eg Headteacher visits between schools.

5.6 **Rural Proofing**

While this report does not propose any new Policy or Strategy, the Service Director, Children & Young People has considered the impact of the proposal in light of the Council's rural proofing policy. There are no children living in the area who intend to enrol in Eccles /Leitholm Primary 1 Class in August 2016 and there have been no Primary enrolments for the last 2 years. One community group makes use of the school facilities and are happy to re-locate to another venue within the Village Hall. It is therefore considered that the proposal does not create any negative rural impact.

5.7 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes to be made to either the Scheme of Administration contained in this report.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.
- 6.2 A meeting has taken place with the Councillors for Mid Berwickshire, individual meetings with existing parents, discussions held with the Community Council, a meeting held with the Parent Council of Coldstream Primary School and a meeting held with school staff.

Approved by

Donna Manson
Service Director Children & Young People

Signature

Author(s)

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Background Papers: Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Previous Minute Reference: N/A

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Donna Manson can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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