

APPENDIX A



CONSULTATION REPORT
ON THE REVIEW OF STONEHAVEN TOWN
PRIMARY SCHOOL ZONES

NOVEMBER 2017

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

- Contents –

- 1 THE PROPOSAL
- 2 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
- 3 WRITTEN RESPONSES
- 4 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED ZONING OPTIONS
- 5 EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT
- 6 EDUCATION AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO WRITTEN AND ORAL REPRESENTATIONS
- 7 COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 9(1) OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010 AND CONCLUSIONS

- Appendices –

- Appendix 1 Map of the proposed changes to the catchment areas for Arduthie School, Dunnottar School & Mill O'Forest School
- Appendix 2 Pupil consultation responses
- Appendix 3 Education Scotland Report

1. THE PROPOSAL

- 1.1 Aberdeenshire Council's Education & Children's Services Committee at its meeting on 14 June 2017, gave officers permission to consult on rezoning the three primary schools in the town of Stonehaven. The Proposal Document was issued on 28 June 2017 to those individuals and bodies listed under Distribution within the document. The Proposal Document was also published on the Council website:
<http://aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/education-consultations/>

The Proposal Document made clear to consultees that the consultation period would run from 28th June 2017 until Friday 29th September 2017 – a period of 32 school days in total.

The proposal on which consultation took place was that:

The catchment areas for Arduthie School, Dunnottar School and Mill O'Forest School should be amended with effect from August 2018;

New pupils joining schools within the Stonehaven network should be educated at their newly zoned school with effect from August 2018;

Existing primary pupils within the Stonehaven network should remain at their current primary school for the duration of their primary education and siblings of existing primary pupils in the Stonehaven network, could also attend their currently zoned primary school, so that families are not split between different primary schools.

- 1.1.1 The proposal document provided three options for each primary school in the town of Stonehaven.

1.2 Educational Benefits Statement

The Proposal Document contained an Educational Benefit Statement, which highlighted an imbalance in the capacity of schools in the town. Some schools are operating close to or above maximum capacity, and so have less space available for pupils, restricting delivery of the curriculum. In contrast, other schools are operating below capacity. The proposed changes will largely address the capacity issues across the network and over time will ensure that all pupils are given the same opportunities and access to resources.

2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- 2.1 In 2015, the Learning Estates Team undertook an online survey to assess the opinions of Stonehaven residents on the current school catchments. A total of 223 people responded to the questionnaire. In May and June of 2016, the Learning Estates Team hosted a series of informal engagement sessions in Stonehaven to discuss potential zoning options. These meetings were attended by members of the community, parents and local Elected Members

and the feedback given helped to develop the proposals that were consulted upon.

During the statutory consultation a public meeting was held in Arduthie School on Wednesday 6th September 2017. The meeting was attended by seven parents, staff, elected members and members of the community. A full note of the meeting is available on the Council website at the link provided in 1.1 above.

There were several comments and questions raised regarding:

- Nursery provision – would children attending a school nursery be entitled to continue to P1 at that school? This was addressed at the meeting and it was made clear that nurseries are not zoned and the placing request procedure would have to be followed if a child was wanting to attend a school out with their zone.
- School transport provision – how would siblings be affected by the proposals? It was confirmed by officers that existing transport arrangements would continue for all existing pupils. The out of zone process clearly states that parents must make and meet the cost of any transport arrangements. If there is availability on school transport then children would be able to pay for a privilege pass. Pupils living out with 2 miles from their zoned primary school would be provided school transport.
- A member of the Dunnottar Parent Council noted they were concerned about the loss of the rural element which is currently zoned to Dunnottar but was glad to see it was retained in Proposal 2 in the consultation document. It was reiterated that parents felt very strongly about the rural area of Dunnottar being retained and the strong family ties to the school.
- Placing requests – It was asked if placing request information was taken into consideration when forming the proposals and if this would remove out of zone placing requests. Officers informed the audience that parents will always have the right to submit a placing request.
- How capacities are calculated for each school and would GP spaces be lost - Officers informed the audience that the Scottish Government specifies the number of GP rooms that should be available in relation to the number of classrooms and throughout Aberdeenshire we have a wide range of different shared spaces used for different activities. Each school building is looked at individually.
- Dunnottar capacity – It was noted by a local councillor that Dunnottar School will remain under pressure capacity wise and the arguments will remain for a replacement school to be built.

- How are pupils being engaged in the process? – Officers confirmed that schools have been sent a set of questions and maps to share with pupils to engage them in the process.

2.2 Pupil Engagement

As part of the consultation process, the head teachers from Arduthie School, Dunnottar School, Mill O'Forest School and Mackie Academy posed a short set of questions to pupils about the proposals to rezone the catchment areas. A summary note of responses from the pupils is appended (**Appendix 3**).

3. **WRITTEN RESPONSES**

In all, five written responses were received by email. An overview of this correspondence is provided below.

- (1) E-mail dialogue between Cllr Sarah Dickinson and officers - 11-19/07/2017: asking on behalf of a resident about school transport arrangements after rezoning. It was confirmed by officers that pupils remaining at their formerly zoned school would continue to be provided with school transport for the duration of their education in the school and that this applies to older and younger siblings as long as they are enrolled in the school at the point of change.
- (2) E-mail dialogue between Parent Council Chair of Mill O'Forest School and officers – 29/06/2017: Asking about the timing of the consultation due to it being launched close to the start of the school holidays. Officers assured the PCC that all consultees have been issued the consultation proposal document either through the post or via email already and that the consultation period exceeds the required 30 days term time. The PCC was also assured that officers would be available to answer any queries that may arise from the consultation throughout the summer holidays and that the Council appreciated the efforts of the parent council in ensuring all consultees have the opportunity to comment on the proposals.
- (3) Email dialogue between Cllr Dennis Robertson and officers - 28/06/2017 – 19/07/2017: Asking the council to provide additional information regarding an email he received from the chair of Stonehaven & District Community Council (SDCC). The Chair of SDCC had questions about the base data used in the online survey and was wondering why it didn't reflect our published data. Officers noted that the difference between published and working data was explained in the introductory page of the online survey. Officers explained that working data is used as this is the most up to date information which includes up to date build out rates provided by developers, which are then fed into the school roll forecasts. The Chair also mentioned that the position in his opinion of the SDCC (which has not changed from 3/4 years ago) was that there is demonstrable need to have

Dunnottar as a new-build modern primary school as it currently performs poorly in the annual Scottish Government “Suitability and Condition” reports and will still be over capacity even with the rezoning exercise.

- (4) Email from Dunnottar School - 13/09/2017: asking on behalf of parents if the Glenury Estate will still fall under Dunnottar School’s catchment area regardless of which of the proposals is accepted.
- (5) Email from the Dunnottar Parent Council – 25/09/2017: giving the results of a survey they carried regarding the opinions on the proposed re-zoning. A total of 29 parents responded to the survey and the majority of respondents were in favour of Proposal 2.

In summary, the written responses highlight:

- Support for the proposals to address the school roll and capacity issues.
- Concerns the proposals do not do enough to address the long term issues at Dunnottar School
- A desire for a new build Dunnottar School to address suitability issues
- Support for the proposal which keeps the tradition of all the rural pupils attending the one school in Stonehaven
- Support for the rezoning of the new housing developments
- Mill O’Forest and Arduthie Schools have enough capacity to cope with additional pupils from the new housing developments
- The new housing developments are closer to Mill O’Forest and Arduthie than Dunnottar
- Proposal 2 keeps the zones as close to the current catchments as possible which will mean less disruption for all 3 primary schools.

3.1 Survey Monkey Responses

An online survey was issued to all parents of existing pupils at the primary schools in Stonehaven and Mackie Academy. As well as members of staff, and the wider community. There was a response rate of 91.

Current and proposal maps were displayed for each school and the following questions were asked:

Q1 Arduthie School: Which proposed catchment area do you prefer?

(87 responded, 4 skipped the answer)

Answer Choices	Responses %	Response No.
Proposal 1	28.74%	25
Proposal 2	26.44%	23
Current Catchment is better	11.49%	10
No preference	33.33%	29
Total		87

Ten responses were received in the comments section. A summary of these comments is given below:

- Three comments suggesting a preference to maintain the rural areas within the Dunnottar catchment
- Proposal 1 would still leave Arduthie School under subscribed
- Question regarding the status of siblings after rezoning and also asking about Mackie Academy and Dunnottar School and if there are any plans to improve/replace the schools.
- Respondent noted that they had to put in an out of zone placing request to Arduthie School as the street they lived in (Cameron Street which is just behind Arduthie School) is zoned for Dunnottar School
- Concerns regarding Dunnottar School being over-crowded and not fit for purpose. Should be a new Dunnottar School on the south side of Stonehaven.
- Preference for William Mackie, Redcloak, Lily Loch and Canmore to be zoned to Mill O'Forest School
- Concerns that siblings should be able to attend the same school if the zones are changed.

Q2 Dunnottar School: Which proposed catchment do you prefer?

(81 responded, 10 skipped the answer)

Answer Choices	Responses %	Responses No.
Proposal 1	39.51%	32
Proposal 2	27.16%	22
Current catchment is better	12.35%	10
No Preference	20.99%	17
Total		81

Eleven responses were received in the comments section. A summary of these comments is given below:

- Several comments saying that keeping the rural area to one school (Dunnottar) is better.
- Arduthie School has the largest capacity and the proposal doesn't go nearly far enough
- Comment on the maps being difficult to read and difficult to see the detail
- Comment stating that if the respondent lived in town they would not be happy about having to walk up to Arduthie School. There should be more crossing patrollers
- A comment stating it seems a good idea to keep Dunnottar to a local catchment and spread the rural pupils between the bigger schools
- Proposal 2 would allow Dunnottar School to maintain numbers within its capacity limit and a suggestion that out of zones requests should be refused
- Dunnottar School has old temporary accommodation and something needs to change to allow pupils and staff to work in a suitable environment

- Proposal 2 is better as Dunnottar embraces the variety of backgrounds from which the children come from.

Q3 Mill O’Forest School: Which proposed catchment do you prefer?

(73 responded, 18 skipped the question)

Answer Choices	Responses %	Responses No.
Proposal 1	20.55%	15
Proposal 2	31.51%	23
Current Catchment is better	21.92%	16
No preference	26.03%	19
Total		73

Eight comments were received in the comments section. A summary of these comments is given below:

- Rezoning the town to take away some of the strain at Dunnottar seems sensible
- The locality to the south of Dunnottar should be in the Dunnottar catchment
- Still over population of the school
- Preference for William Mackie and Redcloak to be at Mill O’Forest
- Comments regarding the parking at Mill O’Forest being an issue already. The approach to the school is very narrow and congested with little to no room for bus bays to be created
- Concerns that Mill O’Forest seems overcrowded and short of space already without factoring in the Additional Needs/Enhanced Provision Base.

3.2 Online Survey and Parent Council Survey Combined Results

The parent council of Dunnottar School asked every household in the catchment to complete a survey regarding the Council’s rezoning proposals. The survey was completed by 29 people and the results have been combined with the online survey results and are summarised in the table below.

Combined Survey Results	No. Responses in favour
Proposal 1	75
Proposal 2	91
Status Quo	39
No Preference	65

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED ZONING OPTIONS

4.1 Three broad options regarding the rezoning of the primary schools in the town of Stonehaven were consulted upon, with one option retaining the status-quo.

4.2 **Option 1 – Realign the catchment areas of Dunnottar, Arduthie and Mill O’Forest Schools in Stonehaven and re-distribute some of the rural elements of Dunnottar School to Arduthie and Mill O’Forest**

This proposal would rezone the new housing developments to Arduthie School and Mill O’Forest School. It would remove the rural element of the Dunnottar School Zone, redistributing it between Arduthie and Mill O’Forest. Comments made by consultees suggest that this option would not be the favoured option as it would mean that the pupils who live out with 2 miles of their zoned school and receive school transport would not necessarily all attend the same school after rezoning. Some concerns were raised by parents of Mill O’Forest School of any increased traffic on the narrow road up to the school, should proposal 1 be adopted. The majority of the comments received suggested a desire to retain the rural element of the Dunnottar School catchment and keep all the pupils who are bussed to school together in one environment.

4.3 **Option 2 – Retain the rural element of Dunnottar School and realign the catchment areas of Dunnottar, Arduthie and Mill O’Forest Schools in Stonehaven**

The results of the online survey and parent council survey combined suggest that the majority of consultees who responded, prefer proposal option 2. This option retains the rural element of the Dunnottar School catchment and rezones the new housing developments to either Arduthie School or Mill O’Forest School.

Most of the comments received by the Council asked that the rural element is retained so that pupils who receive school transport can continue to attend the same school.

4.4 **Retain the status quo**

There were no comments about retaining the status quo and this option would not address the capacity issues at Dunnottar School and would mean that pupils are not evenly distributed across the primary schools in the town of Stonehaven. The responses received indicated that retaining the status quo is not an option. The placing request data gathered by the Council would suggest that a change in zones is needed and a rezoning would help

5. **EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT**

5.1 The Education Scotland report is reproduced in full (Appendix 3)

5.2 Education Scotland acknowledges that Aberdeenshire Councils’ proposal to change the catchment areas for the three primary schools in the town of Stonehaven, has the potential to address some of the capacity issues and

protect additional spaces for learning in schools where space is at a premium. Education Scotland also note that the proposal has the potential to further support staff in ensuring children's entitlements to education as expressed in the national expectations of Curriculum for Excellence.

- 5.3 Education Scotland noted that most stakeholders who responded to the consultation online and made comment, welcomed the proposal to keep the children from the rural area in the one school and that this should be Dunnottar School, which would continue the established practice. Parents also welcomed the 'sibling guarantee' which would allow siblings of pupils currently at school to join other family members regardless of the impact of the re-zoning exercise.
- 5.4 Education Scotland noted the concerns of some stakeholders that the proposals did not go far enough in utilising the additional space at Arduthie School. A small number also wanted to see the rural area split across the two larger capacity schools of Mill O'Forest and Arduthie, in order to significantly relieve pressure on Dunnottar.
- 5.5 Education Scotland also noted that almost all parents, staff and young people who met with inspectors, recognised the need to alter the catchment areas and accepted that retaining the status quo was not a realistic option. Parents who met with inspectors favoured proposal two which retained all rural areas in the Dunnottar School catchment. They considered that this proposal would help address some of the pressures on the school roll while also offering the least disruption for families.
- 5.6 There were concerns raised with inspectors by some members of staff that if proposal one was accepted, whilst it would offer a more equal distribution across all three primary schools it would create some difficulties in regard to access to school transport. There were also some concerns raised that the proposals wouldn't meaningfully address the large number of placing requests currently received. The members of staff who favoured proposal 2 recognised the benefit of ensuring all pupils coming from rural areas would continue to be educated in the same school. They also noted that Dunnottar School provided the best and most safe access for school busses involved in transporting children to and from school. Concerns were raised regarding safe walking routes to school for the children living in the Broomhill Croft housing development. Education Scotland suggest that should the Council decide to progress with proposal two, it will need to ensure safe walking routes for all stakeholders and their children, particularly those from the Broomhill Croft housing development.
- 5.7 Education Scotland in their report acknowledge that Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to amend the catchment areas for the three primary schools in Stonehaven is of educational benefit, but only if the Council decide to proceed with either proposal one or two. There is no educational benefit should the Council proceed with option three, the status quo. Education Scotland note that there is likely to be a detriment to pupils' educational experience should the Council not progress with either proposal one or two.

- 5.8 Education Scotland note that the proposal demonstrates the intention to manage the educational implications of the new housing developments in the Stonehaven area and to make the best use of existing capacity in the primary schools in the area. They also note that proposal two presents the best scenario within the options presented, for safe travel and drop off for those children travelling by bus to school.

6. EDUCATION AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO WRITTEN AND ORAL REPRESENTATIONS

6.1 Educational Benefits

For Aberdeenshire Council, Education & Children's Services, education benefit to pupils affected by the proposal is the key issue. Pupils already receiving high quality education at schools within the Stonehaven Network, and parents are happy that their children are receiving quality education in their chosen setting.

Changes to the catchment areas will ensure a more even allocation of school places across the three primary schools in the town of Stonehaven. This will relieve the physical pressure on those schools working at, or near to full capacity, thereby providing better physical environments for learning.

Siblings of existing pupils will be entitled to attend the same school, thus keeping families together. No children attending the schools will be forced to move schools, although some may choose to. Furthermore, the proposal has no impact on nursery placements, and parents may still send their child to their preferred nursery, subject to available spaces.

6.2 School Transport

There were concerns raised regarding the arrangements for school transport after a rezoning. Pupils remaining at their formerly zoned school will continue to be provided with school transport for the duration of their education in the school. This applies to older and younger siblings as long as they are enrolled in the school at the point of a change of the catchment areas.

Some concerns were raised regarding any increase in school transport to Mill O'Forest School should Option One be approved and also issues with parking. There was concern that the road was very narrow and congested at the busy times of the day and could not cope with further traffic from additional busses.

There are currently 28 pupils who attend Dunnottar School and receive transportation. This is spread over 4 contracts with no vehicles being bigger than an 8 seater. If Option One is chosen then based on current numbers, this could mean that there would be slightly more vehicles at Arduthie School and Mill O'Forest School but they would all be smaller vehicles.

All safety issues are taken into account when deciding on school transport requirements. If roads are not suitable for a larger bus to use then only minibuses would be used. This would all be based on the actual numbers of pupils requiring transport at the time.

The Education Scotland report mentions that some concerns were raised by staff regarding safe walking routes to school for pupils living in the Broomhill Croft housing development. For Aberdeenshire Council the safety of all pupils is a priority and routes to school will be assessed in accordance with current policy.

6.3 Suitability

Several concerns were raised regarding the suitability of Dunnottar School. The chair of the Stonehaven & Community District Community Council (SDCC) stated that the position in his opinion of the SDCC has not changed from 3-4 years ago. The SDCC also stated that “there is a demonstrable need to have Dunnottar School as a new build modern primary school as it currently performs poorly in the Scottish Government suitability and condition reports and will still be over capacity even with the rezoning exercise”.

The capacity of Dunnottar School is 195, the roll is currently 200 pupils (as of 09/11/2017) and is forecast to continue to rise due to all the new housing developments in the Dunnottar catchment area. The rezoning exercise should help to ease the capacity pressures at Dunnottar School by redistributing the pupil numbers between the three primary schools.

The new zones if approved, should also help to consolidate what is happening in practice at the three primary schools through out of zone placing requests.

The Scottish Government have committed to expanding funded Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) from 600 hours to 1140 hours per year for 2020. In response to this commitment, Aberdeenshire Council are actively assessing options in Stonehaven to both increase the capacity of places for parents to access, as well as identifying opportunities to further enhance the quality of existing ELC provision locally.

The Scottish Government have reviewed the suitability and condition criteria, and all schools in Aberdeenshire will be reassessed according to these guidelines in the coming year.

7. COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 9(1) OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010 AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 states that:
After the Education Authority has received HMle’s report, the Authority is to review the relevant proposal having regard (in particular) to

- (i) written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the consultation period,*
- (ii) oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting,*
- (iii) HMle's report.*

Officers of the Education Authority have listened carefully to the points made at the public meeting and have considered equally carefully the written representations. The Education Authority's position is set out in this document.

7.2 Conclusions and Recommendation

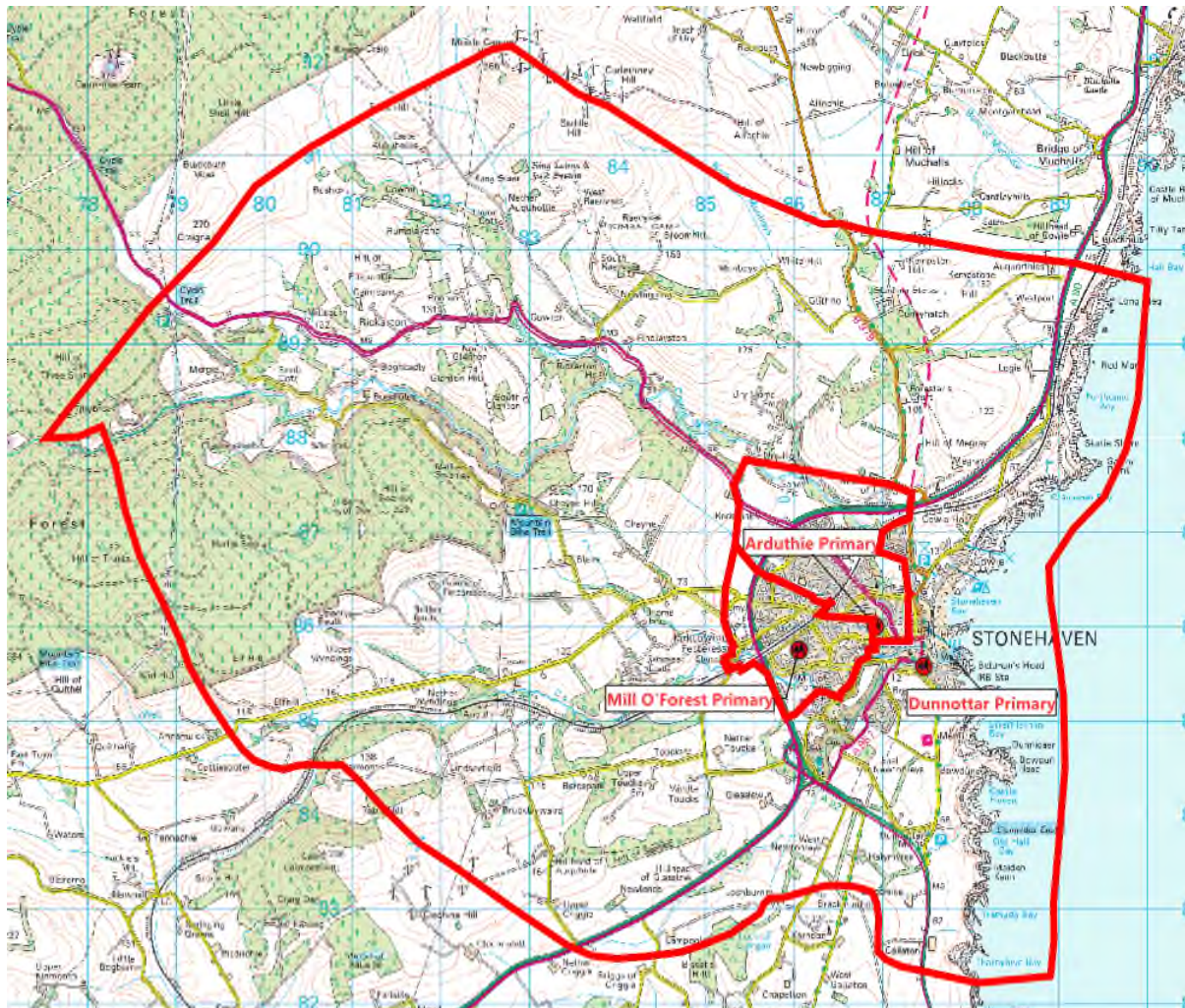
The Council now has 3 broad options with regards to the proposed changes;

- (a) Adopt Option 2 for Arduthie School, Dunnottar School and Mill O'Forest School and implement the revised catchment areas in August 2018;
- (b) Significantly alter the proposed changes in some way and conduct a further consultation;
- (c) Abandon the proposal and maintain the status quo

7.2.1 **The recommendation of officers is that the Council should implement 7.2 (a) above (Option 2), adopting the new catchment areas as proposed.**

The map in Appendix 1 shows an overview of the recommended catchment areas for the three primary schools in the town of Stonehaven.

Appendix 1 – Proposed Catchment Areas for Arduithie School, Dunnottar School & Mill O'Forest School



APPENDIX 2 – Note of meetings with Pupils

Primary Pupil Questions – Stonehaven Rezoning

The school that children go to in Stonehaven (and the rest of Scotland) is decided by which street and sometimes which house they live in. Each school in Stonehaven has a catchment area. A catchment area or zone is a line on a map which shows the streets and houses that are grouped together for that school.

In Stonehaven the catchment areas for schools have not been looked at for a very long time, and a lot of new houses have been built in this area since then. This means that there are some schools with a lot of new houses in their catchment area, and therefore a lot of new pupils. There are also some areas where there used to be a lot of school pupils coming from the houses in the zone, but those children have grown up and not as many new families with school aged children have moved into those areas.

Aberdeenshire Council wants to change the school catchment areas so that all of the schools in Stonehaven have the right number of pupils for the number of classrooms and teachers in the school. This will mean that some of the schools with lots of pupils will have more space, and some of the schools with lots of spare classrooms can have more pupils.

The council have drawn some new lines on the maps, and are asking parents, teachers and pupils what they think about the changes that they are suggesting, and if the catchment for each school is in the right place.

Your teacher will be able to show you a map with the changes for your nearest school.

1. Do you think that your school needs to have a different catchment area – are there too few or too many pupils at the moment?
2. Do you think that the changes suggested for your nearest school are a good idea?
3. Do you think that changing the catchment areas for some of the schools that are full is a good idea?
4. Is there anything that worries you about this?
5. Is there anything that interests or excites you about this?
6. Is there anything that you think the council needs to think about if they do this?

NOTE: no responses were received from Arduthie School

Pupil responses to the questions about the proposed rezoning

School	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Dunnottar	There are too many pupils at the moment. Small classrooms and small playground.		A vote was taken with pupils from P1-P7. Some pupils wanted the rural element of Dunnottar to be retained (proposal 2), some pupils didn't want the catchments to change.	Everyone should be kept together. Some children might get sad as they won't get to come to Dunnottar.	All buses coming to one school would save energy and help the environment. All of the children from the countryside can mix with children from the town. The playground won't be as cramped, people won't get hurt.	The Council needs to think about the houses closest to the school.
Mill O'Forest	Only a small number of pupils thought that Mill O'Forest had too many pupils. Some thought that there are too few pupils as we have a few spare class areas and they thought that the rezoning should happen.	Some pupils were not bothered about the changes. Results from the P7 class are 6 in favour, 8 not in favour and the rest undecided. Pupils thought that it was not a good idea to go to the nearest school and think they should have a choice	Some pupils thought that the changes were a good idea as some of them live closer to Arduthie School and were asking why they attend Mill O'Forest School which is further away.	What if you love your current school? The changes might be confusing to begin with. Arduthie and Dunnottar are not open plan – they might find moving to Mill O'Forest tricky. Vice Versa. Worries about bullying and being separated from friends. Longer commutes Siblings being split up. Would you be able to move school if things were not going well.	Good to have a new start. Would see different teachers Make new friends Good to have someone new joining the school	What would happen if your parents live in 2 houses in Stonehaven? Some parents might not like the change. Is it possible you can request to stay? Council needs to build a new school.

APPENDIX 3 – Education Scotland Report

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to amend the catchment areas of primary schools in the Stonehaven Network.

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to redistribute the primary school catchment areas in the town of Stonehaven with effect from August 2018.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to amend the catchment areas for all three primary schools within the Stonehaven network with effect from August 2018. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools affected; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation

to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others;

- visits to the site of Arduthie, Dunnottar and Mill O'Forest Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- examination of some of the walking routes to the schools named in the consultation.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The consultation took place between 28 June and 29 September 2017 which represented a time period greater than the required 30 term time days. A public meeting to discuss the consultation was held in Arduthie Primary School on 6 September 2017. The proposal built upon an earlier informal consultation where the council gathered stakeholder's views of possible options. Notices about the proposal were placed in the local press and on the council's website. All parents and carers and early years' providers were lettered about the proposal and posters were sent to all schools. Pupil engagement sessions were undertaken in all schools and the proposal was re-issued to all parents in the last few weeks of the consultation period as a reminder. There were 91 responses to the consultation online where consultees were presented with the three different proposals. The proposals included firstly altering and realigning all catchment areas, redistributing the rural elements currently zoned for Dunnottar Primary School to include a rural area for each school; secondly, retaining the rural catchment areas at Dunnottar Primary School and altering and realigning all catchment areas slightly; and thirdly retaining the status quo. Thirty per cent of responses favoured proposal one; 28% favoured proposal two and 15% favoured proposal three with 27% having no particular preference. Additional responses were received from Dunnottar Primary School Parent Council and pupil councils. Statistics provided by the council suggest that proposal one or two would allow it to better manage current and potential capacity at the three primary schools in the Stonehaven town area.

2.3 Stakeholders were positive about the approach taken by the council to gather and listen to their views over time and to use these to shape the existing proposal document. They considered that there had been very good opportunities to engage with the consultation and that the council had worked well with schools to gather the views of children as part of the process. They had, however, expressed frustration at the poor quality and lack of clarity provided in the maps that accompanied the consultation document.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council recognise that existing and future pressures on schools operating close to or beyond maximum capacity imposes restrictions on the quality of learning experience that can be planned and facilitated by staff as part of

the curriculum. The proposal seeks to partly address the inequalities in order to provide greater access to a similar level of resources and opportunities, as far as is practically possible across all schools in the Stonehaven town area. It has, over time, the potential to address some of the capacity issues and protect additional spaces for learning in schools where space is at a premium. It has the potential to further support staff in ensuring children's entitlements to education as expressed in the national expectations of Curriculum for Excellence.

3.2 Most stakeholders who responded to the consultation online and made comment welcomed the proposal to keep children from the rural area in the one school and that this should be Dunnottar Primary School continuing established practice. They were positive about the intention to partly relieve pressure on the facilities at Dunnottar and viewed proposal two as making most sense. They welcomed the 'sibling guarantee' which would allow siblings of pupils currently at school to join other family members regardless of the impact of the re-zoning exercise. A few felt that the proposals were not bold enough and still left Arduthie Primary School undersubscribed. A small number wanted to see the rural area split across the larger schools of Mill O'Forest and Arduthie in order to significantly relieve pressure on Dunnottar. Similarly, a small number expressed concerns about the poor quality access for buses and other vehicles at both Arduthie and Mill O'Forest and felt that to allocate rural areas to these schools would only exacerbate existing difficulties and potentially compromise children's safety.

3.3 Almost all parents, staff and young people who met with inspectors recognise the need to alter the catchment areas and accepted that retaining the status quo as expressed in proposal three was not a realistic option. Parents who met with inspectors favoured proposal two which retained all rural areas in the Dunnottar Primary School catchment. They considered that this proposal would help address some of the pressures on the Dunnottar Primary School roll from the new housing developments while also offering the least disruption for families.

3.4 Staff who met with inspectors were divided in their view. Those favouring proposal one considered that this proposal offered a more equal distribution across all three primary schools affected and took most advantage of the spare capacity in both Arduthie and Mill O'Forest Primary Schools. They accepted that this proposal, should it be adopted, would create some difficulties in regard to access for school buses involved in transporting children to schools from the outlying areas. A few staff further considered that proposal two would not meaningfully address the large number of placing requests which were currently submitted on an annual basis for all schools across the network. Those favouring proposal two recognised the benefit of ensuring that all pupils coming from rural areas would continue to be educated in the same school and that Dunnottar Primary School provided the best and most safe access for school buses involved in transporting children to and from school. They also highlighted that this proposal took best advantage of the close proximity of the new housing developments to both Mill O'Forest and Arduthie Primary Schools respectively. A few staff expressed concern about a safe walking route to Mill O'Forest Primary School for children from the Broomhill Croft housing development. The shortest route involved walking through the very busy Spurryhillock Industrial Estate, which was accessed by heavy vehicles and suffered from unsafe and dangerous parking, restricting safe walking space.

3.5 Children who met with inspectors were overall undecided about their preferred proposal. Children from Dunnottar Primary School however expressed some

concerns about the impact of a rise in the school roll on the already pressurised and limited space available both inside and outside their existing school buildings. All stakeholders recognised that regardless of the proposal which was finally accepted, pressure would remain on the facilities at Dunnottar Primary School.

4. Summary

4.1 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to amend the catchment areas for all three primary schools within the Stonehaven network with effect from August 2018 is of educational benefit but only if the council decide to proceed with either proposal one or two. There are no educational benefits from proceeding with option three, the status quo. Conversely there is likely to be detriment to pupils' educational experience should they not progress with either proposal one or two. Progressing with either proposal one or two will realign school capacities due to continued house building within the town and safeguard pupil rolls for all schools within the Stonehaven network. The re-zoning of the towns three schools will help to re-balance pupil numbers across the three town schools given the current pressures on the roll at Dunnottar Primary School from the new house building and its current functioning at over capacity. The proposal demonstrates the intention to manage the educational implications of the new housing developments in the Stonehaven area and to make best use of existing capacity in the primary schools in the area. Proposal two presents the best scenario within the options presented, for safe travel and drop off for those children travelling by bus to school.

4.2 A few members of staff expressed concerns about the safe walking route from the Broomhill Croft housing development to Mill O'Forest Primary School which would mean children walking through the Spurryhillock Industrial Estate. Should the council decide to progress with proposal two it will need to ensure safe walking routes for all stakeholders and their children particularly those from the Broomhill Croft housing development.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
November 2017**