Minute of meeting held on Tuesday 18 September 2018

7.00pm in Blairingone Primary School

Present
Councillor Caroline Shiers Convener, Lifelong Learning Committee
Councillor Callum Purves Vice Convener, Lifelong Learning Committee
Sheena Devlin Executive Director, Education and Children’s Services
Sharon Johnston Head of Education Early Years & Primary
Karen Robertson Service Manager, Business Services

In Attendance
Councillor Michael Barnacle Perth and Kinross Council
Councillor Richard Watters Perth and Kinross Council
Gareth Findlay Transformation Project Officer
Peter Marshall Strategy and Policy Manager
Stewart Maxwell Education Scotland

Janice Johnstone - Minutes Perth and Kinross Council

12 members of the public.

1. Welcome and Introductions
Councillor Shiers opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public in attendance to the statutory consultation public meeting. Councillor Shiers introduced herself and the Council officers to those in attendance.

2. Format of meeting
Sheena Devlin briefly outlined the statutory consultation process and the proposal. Sheena Devlin advised that attendees of the meeting are encouraged to express their views or concerns which would be recorded and published in the minute of the public meeting. She explained that she would stop at intervals during the presentation to take questions. Members of the public were advised that the Council officers in attendance would be able to provide more specific information regarding parts of the proposal relating to their respective service areas. Karen Robertson advised that 5 October 2018 is the deadline for any representations to be made on the proposal.

3. Presentations
Karen Robertson expanded on the pre consultation work; it is important to explain where the Council is in the process and what will come next. An explanation of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 was given and why this is this legislation that Perth & Kinross Council is following. The only decision which has been taken at this stage is that Elected Members have approved that a Statutory Consultation is to be undertaken.

- A proposal paper has been produced and published including an Education Benefits
Statement.

- The statutory consultation period will run from 27 August 2018 – 5 October 2018.
- A note of questions taken at the meeting tonight will be recorded as representations.

At the end of the consultation period the Council is required to send the consultation documentation to Education Scotland, who then have 3 weeks to consider representations, visit affected schools and speak with staff, parents and pupils.

The Council will then publish the consultation report which will include representations, Education Scotland’s report and responses to any representations that were made. The report must be published for at least 3 weeks before a decision can be taken by the Lifelong Learning Committee which is likely to be March 2019. It was emphasised that these timescales are indicative and purposefully kept flexible should any part of the process require to be extended.

If the decision of Lifelong Learning Committee is to keep the school open then the Council cannot revisit the decision for 5 years. If the decision is made to close Blairingone Primary School then the Council would notify Scottish Ministers by the end of March 2019. Ministers then have 8 weeks to consider the Council’s decision. Representations can be made in writing to Scottish Ministers during the first 3 weeks. If Ministers decide not to close the school then the decision could be referred to the School Closure Panel, who then have a further 16 weeks for consideration.

Sheena Devlin explained that any comments can also be made online. And the purpose of this Consultation is to seek views and representations on the proposal.

The Proposal

Sheena Devlin gave a presentation explaining the proposal and the background to the proposal which outlined the reasons for the proposal. The reasons included the under occupancy of Blairingone Primary School. The likely effect on the local community was also explained. It was noted that Community Council meetings were held alternately in Blairingone Primary School.

Travel/Transport

Karen Robertson advised that a high level assessment had been undertaken to identify how pupils at Blairingone Primary School would be affected by the proposal.

Karen Robertson provided information about the maximum statutory walking distances set out in legislation (2 miles for children aged up to 8 years and 3 miles for children aged 8 and over) for children attending their catchment school. Parents were advised that many primary pupils, including P1 pupils, are transported every day to school in appropriately sized transport and were escorted to and from the transport by school staff ensuring all children arrived and left school safely. It was noted that escorts/supervisors were not normally provided on any mainstream home to school transport.

Educational Benefits

Sharon Johnston provided an overview of how the educational benefits were considered and explained that this did not mean that the education being provided at Blairingone Primary School was not good.
The purpose of the educational benefits statement was not to compare the schools but to demonstrate what benefits could be provided.

4. **Questions**

Q **Will the Council honour any comments made before tonight?**
A All comments submitted from the 27 August 2018 will be formally recorded as part of the statutory consultation. Any comments regarding Blaringone Primary School made before the Council had agreed to commence statutory consultation on a formal proposal, will have to be submitted as part of the consultation as any comments made were prior to a formal proposal being published. Karen Robertson advised parents that the Council wanted to know their views on the proposal; any alternatives and their views on what currently is being proposed. Karen also reiterated these must be submitted no later than 5 October 2018.

There were no other questions pertaining to the statutory process.

Q **Back in March the decision was different, why?**
A Councillor Shiers advised that Lifelong Learning Committee did not proceed with considering the report on Blaringone in March due to Elected Members seeking confirmed information on the Local Development Plan. This was to ascertain what impact there would be in the community regarding new housing at that time. Peter Marshall shared with parents that housing developments have been discussed for the Blaringone area since 1992. The South side of the village is currently being suggested for planning permission for 50 new houses.

Q **How can you predict what the housing market in Blaringone will look like?**
A It is difficult to be exact but evidence from similar locations suggests that the build rate would be slow (5 per year) due to its rural location. Sheena Devlin used Guildtown as an example whereby after building 50 new houses, there were no primary age school children from these houses who attended the local school.

Q **What about childcare? Would a Nursery or Out Of School Care save the school?**
A The Council will record this, but according to the figures and what is known of the demographics in the area according to NHS figures, the number of pre-school pupils living in Blaringone is very low. The data we receive from the NHS is anonymous by postcode area and pupil numbers for school cannot be confirmed until they register for school.

Q **In respect of the work undertaken to seek the views of parents about increasing the catchment area, aside from NHS data, how do you get your figures for pre-school pupils as no-one I knew was asked their views?**
A An email was sent directly to all parents living in the identified area and to the local private nursery to identify potential pre-school pupils who could attend Blaringone Primary School if the catchment area was extended, to which the Council received 4 responses.

Q **Is this all informed guess work? All we need is 5/6 more children to have the school at full capacity.**
A Sheena Devlin advised the current figures:
  - Capacity of School – 25 pupils
  - School Roll 2011 – 11 pupils
  - School Roll in September 2018 – 5 pupils
- 8 pupils living in the catchment area attend other Perth and Kinross schools
- 5 pupils living in the catchment area attend school outwith Perth and Kinross
- The projected pupil roll is expected to remain static over the next 4 years

Q: What is the capacity at Fossoway Primary School and what would happen in an influx of new pupils want to enrol in the next few years?
A: There would be no breach in capacity with the forecast of Blaringone pupils included. Fossoway Primary School currently has 111 pupils as of September 2018 and the full capacity of the school is 150 pupils. The current forecast pupil roll for 2022 is 117 pupils.

Q: What happens if it reaches full capacity?
A: This is very unlikely; the projected pupils from all planned house building has been taken into consideration. The last time Blaringone Primary School was at full capacity was the early eighties.

Q: Why was a QIO asking the children questions, most children found it very upsetting?
A: Consultation with pupils is a requirement as part of the statutory consultation process. The Council is very happy to share the questions that the children were asked and the process followed.

Q: If the decision is made to close Blaringone PS, would the current teachers be made redundant?
A: It was confirmed that no discussion regarding individual members of staff would take place during a public meeting. It was advised that staffing across all schools is fluid dependant on pupil numbers and, as part of the annual staffing exercise, teachers are regularly re-deployed to other schools. This would be the same for Blaringone Primary School if the proposal was to be implemented.

Q: Why hasn’t the school been maintained over the last few years?
A: The school has been graded as category B for both condition and suitability. The suitability and condition of the school is not a factor leading to this consultation as both the condition and suitability of the school are considered satisfactory. The Council has an obligation to be completely transparent. Councils have a finite budget and not every school is maintained to the same degree on a yearly basis. It is a much wider maintenance programme and priorities have to be identified across the whole of the school estate within the budget available.

Q: The savings identified in the report are not correct and are overstated as staff costs have been included but you have confirmed no staff would be made redundant so how can their salaries be included as a saving?
A: It was explained that each school has a budget allocated to it for staff costs and where staff transfer to another school, then that is the budget used to meet the costs of staff employed in that school. If a school had no staff employed, then the budget for that school would no longer be required regardless of whether the staff had moved to a new school location as the staff costs would then be met from the budget for the school they were employed in.

Q: Will the school be sold?
A: Every consideration would be taken into account before the building would be put up for sale in the event of the proposal being implemented.
Closing
Sheena Devlin closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending and their contribution and again reiterated that this is not a ‘done deal’. Anyone who wishes their views to be included is encouraged to make a representation through the consultation process before the closing date.