



**Perth & Kinross Council
Education & Children's Services
Statutory Consultation Public Meeting**

**Minute of Meeting Held on Thursday 9 January 2020
At 7.00pm in Bertha Park High School**

Present

Councillor John Duff
Sharon Johnston
Karen Robertson

Vice Convener, Lifelong Learning Committee
Interim Head of Education
Service Manager - Business Services

In Attendance

Dr John Laird
Caroline Nash – Minutes

Education Scotland
Perth and Kinross Council

18 members of the public

Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Duff opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public in attendance to the statutory consultation public meeting and introduced himself and the Council Officers to the members of the public.

Format of Meeting

Sharon Johnston explained the format the meeting would follow and how other similar events had been undertaken.

The Proposal

Sharon Johnston explained the consultation proposal to the attendees:

The Council proposes that subject to the outcome of this consultation:

To make a limited variation to the School Admission Policy for Perth and Kinross Council schools from session 2020/2021. The limited changes relate to ensuring pupils living in Perth and Kinross are awarded appropriate priority for school places and pupils transferring to secondary school from feeder primaries are awarded appropriate priority.

Statutory Consultation Process

Karen Robertson outlined the process of the statutory consultation. She highlighted that the process is strictly determined by legislation to ensure thorough and robust processes across all authorities in Scotland. The legislation sets out how and when the Council must undertake certain activities. The process started with the consideration by Lifelong Learning Committee on 4 September 2019 which granted permission to undertake a statutory consultation.

Karen Robertson emphasised that no decisions regarding the changes to the School Admission Policy have been made. The Council must first seek the views of statutory consultees and report back to Committee with recommendations.

The Proposal Paper, including an educational benefits statement, was published on the Council's website and statutory consultees were written to. Public notice adverts and social media were used to publicise the consultation to all interested parties. The period of consultation will run from Monday 2 December 2019 to Friday 24 January 2020, which includes a period of 30 school days. The purpose of this consultation is to seek representations from interested parties.

Anyone who wishes to make their views on the proposal known to the Council can do so. There are a number of ways they can do this, by an online form, in writing or in person. Any representations made at the public meeting are minuted and will be included as verbal representations.

Karen Robertson outlined the process of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act. She advised that at the end of the consultation period, all documents and representations are submitted to Education Scotland and they then have 3 weeks to review the educational aspects of the proposal. Education Scotland will undertake visits with staff, pupils and parents / carers. Education Scotland is required to produce a formal report. The Council must have regard to that report prior to implementing any changes. The Council is required to prepare and publish a Consultation Report which is published for 3 weeks prior to any decision being taken. A report including recommendations will then be submitted to Lifelong Learning Committee on 18 March 2020 for a decision.

Vision

Comment - It's very close to the cut off point for this year.

A. Sharon Johnston advised that the Council must make its decisions regarding placing requests by 30 April 2020 so a decision by Lifelong Learning Committee on 18 March 2020 would allow this timescale to be met.

Sharon Johnston outlined the Council's vision to enhance the quality of life, make the best use of public resources and ensure continuously improving services.

It aims to optimise the educational experience for every pupil by providing

- A range of social and emotional experiences
- An enriched and broad learning experience and
- The best possible education which meets the needs of all learners

The reasons for the proposed changes was presented to Lifelong Learning Committee on 4 September 2019 seeking permission to undertake statutory consultation on the School Admission Policy.

Background

Karen Robertson provided background information that most pupils attend their catchment school and most schools are not oversubscribed.

Therefore, the proposed changes will not affect most pupils or schools. The limited changes relate to ensuring pupils living in Perth and Kinross are awarded appropriate priority for school places, and pupils transferring to secondary school from feeder primary schools are awarded appropriate priority. On 2 December 2019, the formal consultation process commenced on the proposal to vary the Council's School Admission Policy in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. This public meeting is being held as part of the formal consultation process. The Proposal Paper has been published on the Council's website – www.pkc.gov.uk

Current Admission Arrangements

There are currently 3 categories for determining priority:

- Resident in the catchment area
- Placing request with a sibling already attending the school
- Placing request with no sibling already attending the school

Within each of these categories, priority is determined by distance from the requested school. In denominational schools, priority in each category is given to those pupils who are baptised Roman Catholic.

Q. With the new proposal relating to priority 1c, what if there are 10 pupils all from feeder schools applying for one place?

A. Priority for the place would be determined by length of time in attendance at a feeder primary school. If these are all the same for all 10 pupils, then it would be determined by distance from the school with those living closest being highest priority.

Q. Is nursery attendance taken into consideration?

A. Nursery attendance is not a consideration for priority at school. Children attend a range of different settings for nursery which are delivered within a school.

Q. If a pupil attends a feeder school but doesn't live in the catchment area or in Perth and Kinross, they would be priority 5?

A. Pupils living outwith Perth and Kinross would be placed after those who live within Perth and Kinross. They would be priority 4 if they had a sibling already at the school or priority 5 if they did not have a sibling already attending the school.

Q. If a pupil attends a feeder school for a denominational school, however are not baptised, will they be given a higher priority?

A. Pupils who are baptised Roman Catholic will have priority for places in denominational schools. The proposals would ensure that a higher priority is given to those pupils who attend a feeder denominational primary school than is currently the case.

Comment - This is an issue at the minute with uncertainty whether a child will get a place. The child is worrying they will not get to move on with their friends.

A. The proposals would ensure that a higher priority is given to those pupils who attend a feeder primary school than is currently the case, giving pupils in P7 a better chance of being able to move to secondary school with their friends.

This is why the Council is proposing to make the changes to the School Admission Policy to try to reduce the number of situations, wherever possible, that P7 pupils in Perth and Kinross do not get to transfer to secondary school with their friends.

Q. This makes it worse. We live in Perth and Kinross near to Clacks and Fife. Have we made the wrong choice in sending our child to a Clacks primary school instead of Kinross Primary School, which has now been upgraded, as priority will be based on attendance at a feeder primary school to attend Kinross High School?

A. Your child is a Perth and Kinross resident and, therefore, they will be a priority for attending their catchment secondary school. The Council tries to ensure that all pupils can be accommodated in their non-denominational catchment secondary school. No catchment pupils have not been admitted to Kinross High School as part of the transfer to secondary arrangements and it is not considered that will change.

Q. Kinross Primary School is already full and there are more houses being built. What if we wanted to move our child to Kinross Primary School?

A. Kinross Primary School is not full. There are currently no spaces in P5, and this can occur during the school year in any school where parents are seeking to move pupils mid-session. Each year a staffing review is undertaken with Headteachers to consider the pupil intakes for the new school session, the structure of classes and what staffing is required etc. The Council works to prioritise its resources to ensure, wherever possible, that children can attend their catchment schools.

Q. I have a child in Kinross High School, a one in Muckhart Primary School. Even though I can walk to Kinross High School, will I now be at a disadvantage due to time attending a feeder primary being a consideration?

A. Pupils living in the catchment area of Kinross High School will not be disadvantaged as a result of the proposal. Priority 1c would only be implemented in cases where all catchment area pupils could not be accommodated. This is likely only to be required for denominational schools. The implications and costs to the Council of not being able to accommodate catchment pupils in secondary schools outwith Perth city is significant, and the Council works hard to ensure this does not happen.

Q. Does the Council publish what space is available for placing requests for each school?

A. No. Parents have a legal right to make a placing request for any school regardless of how many spaces there might be available. The number of spaces which are available for placing requests can vary significantly on an annual basis. The available spaces are determined by considering how many catchment pupils have enrolled, what levels of staffing are to be allocated to each school from the annual budget allocated in April, class structures and reserved places required which can only be done once the final numbers of pupils registered to attend each school is known.

Comment. With the catchment for Bertha Park High School and all the new houses being built at Bertha Park, Huntingtower etc, my daughter is at Ruthvenfield and I want her to go to secondary school with her friends. I am concerned as the pupils from the new houses would be in the catchment for Ruthvenfield and Bertha Park High School leaving no space for those currently attending Ruthvenfield from outwith the catchment area.

A. The Council works with Planning colleagues regarding build out rates for the new houses and projections of pupils likely to come from new house building to ensure the management of the expansion of the secondary school is in line with the increased catchment pupils in that area. It has been planned that this is the way that Bertha Park High School will grow with pupils and staff and it will not stay the size it currently is. There will be capacity for 1100 pupils to accommodate the pupils from the strategic house building sites at Bertha Park, Perth West and Almond Valley.

Comment - If catchment areas were to be changed, I would be in the catchment area. I know the catchment areas are not being changed.

A. This proposal does not include any plans to amend school catchment areas as part of this consultation. The proposal sets out how the Council will prioritise placing requests going forward. The proposal would benefit pupils who are not living within the catchment secondary they wish to attend by awarding priority to those pupils in feeder primary schools which is not currently a priority category.

Educational Benefits

Sharon Johnston detailed a summary of the key Educational Benefits which are set out in detail in the Proposal Paper. There are educational benefits to support transition of pupils into secondary school and an educational advantage for pupils attending denominational schools to support these pupils in continuing school at a denominational secondary school. The proposal, if implemented, will ensure pupils living in Perth and Kinross will always be given appropriate priority for school places. In certain schools, over 25% of the school roll are pupils who live outwith Perth and Kinross Council area.

Q. The decision announcement date of 30 April 2020 means there is a lot of uncertainty among peer groups for that time. Will that remain under the new proposal?

A. Yes, this deadline will remain. It is a statutory requirement that all parents who have submitted a placing request must be advised no later than 30 April 2020. Perth and Kinross Council considers the allocation of places from the legal closing date of 15 March to ensure all parents have their decision letter before 30 April each year.

Q. Can you tell us which schools are oversubscribed? I have one child at Inchview nursery as Kinnoull Nursery has shut down, one child at Inchview Primary school and one child at RDM. How do I drop off 3 kids in 3 different locations?

A. The schools with classes which are oversubscribed can vary from year to year and it is not the case that the same schools are oversubscribed each year. It is dependent on how many children live within the catchment area, how many catchment pupils choose to attend other schools, how many pupils are leaving in P7, staffing levels and class configurations. These can all change annually.

Parents must consider how they will manage to get their children to and from school if they do not attend their local catchment schools

Q. If the criteria for distance is the shortest walking route as the crow flies, then that would be over the railway line?

A. Distances are not measured as the crow flies. The distance measured is the shortest available walking route. It is likely the Council would not consider the railway line as a safe walking route to and from school.

Q. Is Inchview Primary School oversubscribed?

A. In some years some classes have been oversubscribed and other years they have not. Registration for P1 places for August commences on Monday 13 January 2020 and only once registrations have been completed by 15 March will the situation regarding available places for out of catchment pupils be known.

Q. If a pupil is refused a placement in a High School, do I need to apply for another school?

A. The Council will write and inform you if your placing request has been successful or not. If it is not successful, then you can choose your catchment school or can make a placing request application for another school.

Q. How long will it take to get a decision on a second choice application?

A. The Council tries to process 2nd choice applications as quickly as possible.

Q. How can my child go on transition days if we don't know if he has got a place?

A. Pupils cannot attend transition days unless a place at the school has been granted. The Council's proposal will prioritise pupils attending a feeder primary school, wherever possible, to reduce the number of pupils who cannot attend transition days whilst awaiting appeal hearings.

Q. We have 2 schools in the catchment area, if he is not accepted for his first choice and has no idea or information of the other school, will he be guaranteed transition period in this school, will he have assistance?

A. Yes. Schools will continue to work to support pupils with transition where they have been unable to be granted a place in their secondary school of choice.

Comment. A child with depression if put in this position it will put big pressure on the child's mental health.

A. It is recognised that transition is an anxious time for young people and their parents. The Council's proposals are seeking to improve the current situation to prioritise pupils to attend secondary school with their peers wherever possible.

Q. Is there a timescale when all school places are confirmed?

A. The decision for all August intakes must be confirmed to parents by 30 April 2020. If a placing request is refused, then parents have up to 28 days to appeal up to the end of May 2020. Once appeals are submitted, the hearings need to be arranged and papers issued so this usually takes place mid to end of June. This year some appeals ran in to the summer holidays.

Q. What are the statistics if there are 10 appeals. How many are successful?

A. The majority of appeals are not successful. The Appeal Committee considers whether a legal ground for refusal exists and whether the Council has followed the legislation and policy in awarding and refusing requests.

Q Why is there only one option for a school on the placing request form? Why can't we have a second choice on the form?

A. You can put in a second form with your second choice. However, second choice applications will only be considered once all first choice applications have been dealt with. In cases where a placing request has been refused, then further documentation is issued to parents regarding next steps.

Q. If you go down the appeal route and the appeal is not heard until into the summer holidays, where do the pupils do their transition days?

A. Pupils will do their transition days at their catchment school if they have no other school place confirmed.

Comment - My option B is looking unfeasible and so I am now working on option C for my child.

Q. Do Headteachers know what sizes the P1 classes will be?

A. Registration for P1 is just commencing next week. Until the catchment pupil numbers are confirmed and staff exercise is completed, Headteachers will not know their class configurations for August.

Q. P1 classes must be getting bigger with all the additional houses?

A. There are approximately 1500 P1 pupils each year and 1500 S1 pupils transfer to secondary school each year. Not all additional houses generate the same numbers of additional pupils of the same age at the same time.

Q. When will we know if this proposal will go through?

A. The Council is required to publish a Consultation Report at the end of the consultation and this will contain recommendations. This report will be published for 3 weeks before a final decision is taken.

Q. Could this proposal be in place for the end of April 2020?

A. Yes. It is intended that Lifelong Learning Committee will make a decision on 18 March 2020.

Q. How many Councillors are on Lifelong Learning Committee and how many are in agreement with this new proposal?

A. At this stage the proposal has not been granted or agreed. The only approval which has been given is for officers to undertake formal consultation and seek views on the proposal.

Councillor Duff informed that the consultation closes on 24 January 2020. The Committee wishes to enhance the process and provide appropriate priority to support children and young people in considering school places for children and young people.

Lifelong Learning Committee will take a decision on 18 March 2020. The paper will go public a week prior to the Committee meeting. There are 13 Elected Members, Parent Council Representatives, Religious Representatives and Young People Representatives that sit on the Committee. However, only the Elected Members vote.

Q. Had this policy been in place last year for S1 pupils, would there have been a benefit to S1 pupils?

A. Based on the situation for session 2019 / 2020, there would have been 15 pupils that would have benefitted from the proposed limited variation to the school Admission Policy.

Q. Would you know where you were on the waiting list?

A. Yes, the Council maintains waiting lists for schools where pupils have been refused places and these are in place until the start of the school session. The Council can advise you where your child was placed on the waiting list.

Q. Are there any catchment pupils that have not benefited as they didn't get into their catchment school?

A. There are very few pupils who are not able to be enrolled in their catchment school. No secondary pupils have not been able to be accommodated in their non-denominational secondary school. This proposal will provide further criteria for assessing catchment pupils wishing to attend a denominational school.

Q. This consultation is excellent and it will benefit a lot of people. However, what about the scenario that pupils are moved in P7 to a different primary school in order to get their child into the secondary school of their choice?

A. There is a possibility that some parents may try to make placing requests to move their child in P7. However, if there was no space for placing requests then the placing request would be refused, and the child would not be able to move. Legally, the Council must accept placing requests if they have spaces and where no other legal ground for refusal exists.

This is an area that the Council recognises is a concern and would welcome thoughts as part of the consultation on how this situation could be fairly managed.

Q. Does it not say in the proposal paper that those that have been in a feeder school longest get priority?

A. Yes it does.

Q. If you are not in a feeder school are you in a lower priority category?

A. Yes that is correct.

Q. Is that not detrimental to a child if you move them to another school for 6 months to get them into the preferred secondary school?

A. Yes, it could be considered detrimental but parents have the legal right to make a placing requests at any time for their child. The Council will need to manage any instances of increased numbers of placing requests being made for P6 and P7 pupils.

Comment - My child is at RDM and I would move them in P7, so they didn't get bullied on the bus to secondary school.

Q. When choosing a primary school, is there information for parents specifying if you chose a particular primary school this is the path for secondary school. With the new system will you get placement in the associated secondary?

A. The Council publishes information online which advises parents of their catchment primary and secondary schools. Each primary school handbook provides details of the associated secondary school for the school where pupils would normally attend. Places cannot be guaranteed for pupils making placing requests but this proposal will ensure that where there are available spaces, it will be possible to prioritise pupils in a feeder school which currently does not happen.

Q. How many applications would be received for each category?

A. It is difficult to say with any certainty as it can change from year to year. For session 2019/20, there were approximately 450 placing requests submitted.

Q. If my child is in a small denominational school but are not baptised Roman Catholic, will they get priority to attend St John's Academy?

A. In denominational schools, baptised Roman Catholic pupils are awarded the highest priority. The proposal would give award priority to those pupils in a feeder school which is not currently the case.

Q. Can you go and get your child baptised?

A. That would be a matter for parents to discuss with the Roman Catholic Church. However, it is not as straightforward as booking a date for a baptism. There are requirements of the Roman Catholic Church which require to be met before consideration may be given to children being baptised in the Roman Catholic faith.

Q. What is the latest date that you must have an address in the catchment area to get into a secondary school in August?

A. You would need to provide proof of permanent address or proof of purchase contract for the house prior to August 2020 to be considered as having a permanent address within the catchment area for the new school session. At that point, it is likely that there may only be reserved places which can only be awarded to catchment pupils and these will only be awarded to permanent addresses within the catchment area. The Council is updating its guidance on the checks that will be undertaken by the Council regarding temporary addresses and attempted fraudulent enrolment and the evidence which will be necessary to provide proof of residency in any school catchment area.

Q. If refused a place, when is the deadline to buy a house in the catchment?

A. Proof of purchase would need to be provided to the Council prior to August 2020 for a pupil to be considered for a place at the start of the new school session.

Sharon Johnston thanked everyone for attending. The meeting was then closed at 8.50pm.

