

Online Public Meeting Minutes
Statutory Consultation for the Closure of Kinneff School
Wednesday 4 February 2026, 6.30pm
Microsoft Teams

Aberdeenshire Council Officers Present: Councillor Keating (Chair of Education & Children's Services Committee), Susan Smith (Head of Education) Maxine Booth (Quality Improvement Manager, Learning Estates), Rachael Goldring (Learning Estates Team Manager), Kelly Tennant (Learning Estates Officer, minutes), Melanie Fowler (Head Teacher of Catterline/ Former Head Teacher of Kinneff School), Fiona Thomson (Quality Improvement Officer),

1. Welcome and introductions

Councillor Keating introduced himself and the Officers to the meeting, gave an overview of the format of the meeting and welcomed everyone attending. He explained that the meeting will be recorded for minute purposed which will be made public as part of the consultation and passed over to Susan for the overview of the consultation which is being considered.

2. Proposal Overview

Susan Smith explained that in February 2024, a decision was made to temporarily mothball (temporary closure) Kinneff School from August 2024 by the Director of Education & Children's Services, Laurence Findlay. This is part of the policy and procedures as the school roll had reached the number which is lower than the mothballing threshold. Since, the school has remained non-operational and only one family have expressed an interest in attending Kinneff School since it has been mothballed.

Susan stated that Officers have completed options appraisal for the future of the school. The Kinneff community were given the opportunity to present alternatives to closure and to present their views for the authority to consider. Those have been thoroughly analysed. Any potential alternative uses identified by the community cannot be considered at this time as they would require the building to be discontinued as a primary school, which requires a statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. This is a requirement of the process as we cannot assume the closure at this stage. So, these uses will not be dismissed and can be revisited if a decision to permanently close the school is taken under this stage of the process. And Councillor Keating has explained we will have another opportunity for a face to face meeting.

Susan continued to say that Officers took into account many factors when carrying out the options appraisal and preparing this proposal.

Susan explained that this consultation proposes to discontinue education at Kinneff School and re-assign its catchment area to either Bervie School or Catterline School. This proposal would apply to the primary school stages (P1-P7) of education in the current catchment area of Kinneff School. The proposed changes, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures. Susan then passed onto Maxine to present the options for the proposal.

3. Proposal Options

Maxine Booth informed the group that the proposal consists of two options for stakeholders to consider:

Option 1 – Close Kinneff School and merge with Bervie School

Option 2 – Close Kinneff School and merge with Catterline School

Maxine explained that it is important that the proposal does not have a negative impact upon any children currently attending schools affected by this proposal and that they have continuity in their education. Whichever decision is taken, no existing pupils will be required to change their school. This will also apply to any younger siblings of those pupils, they can remain to go to the same school their older siblings goes to.

Maxine passed to Councillor Keating to open the meeting for questions.

4. Chair to open the floor to questions

Councillor Keating opened the meeting to questions, asking attendees if they have a question, to raise the hand icon on your screen, introduce yourself and their interest in the meeting.

Community Council Member: I'm a member of Catterline, Kinneff and Dunnottar Community Council and I also have a child at Catterline School. What is the reason that Bervie has been ranked higher than Catterline as a choice?

Rachael: When we do the options appraisal process, we look at a range of factors in terms of what the buildings can offer, the number of children that are there, things like community expectations, whether it's a more rural provision or if it's a change to being a more town provision. The reason why Bervie has scored higher than Catterline in that process is more about the opportunities that the Bervie building can provide in terms of the accessibility of the building and it having a changing place hoist and shower for pupils with additional support needs. So from that perspective, the building is slightly better than Catterline. In terms of the education that is provided at both schools, they would come out equally. We recognise that it's quite a change in provision whilst Catterline is a small rural school, similar to Kinneff; Bervie is a much bigger school with more children.

Maxine: We offered both of these schools to the children who were already at Kinneff at the time that the school was mothballed and the majority of the children chose to go to Catterline. So although the options appraisal, as Rachel's described, came out slightly higher for Bervie, people's choice was to go to Catterline.

Community Council Member: So, is that reflected in the proposal document?

Rachael: It should be, yes

Community Council Member: But Catterline has a lower suitability grading?

Rachael: It does, and that is predominantly because of the fact that there's a couple of steps to get into Catterline, so it reduces the accessibility of the building compared to Bervie.

Community Council Member: And is that despite the ramp at the back door that the kids use to go in normally.

Rachael: Yes, because if you're approaching the school as a parent and you come to the front door and come to reception, then that is less accessible if have to go to the back of the building to enter via the ramp. All of our schools are assessed on the same basis. That's why the suitability of Catterline is slightly lower.

Community Council Member: I don't think that's reasonable grounds to rank Catterline lower.

Maxine: If you are interested in seeing more information about the suitability core facts we've got all the documents on the Aberdeenshire Council HQ Engage page. All schools across Scotland are assessed in the same way.

Councillor Keating: We do apply a standard set of rules and that's important for the way we do these things. But I think I understand the point you're making.

Community Council Member: The other thing which stood out to me in the report is if I looked at this with no emotional attachment to it or any attachment in any way, you would look at it and think the logical thing to do is close both Kinneff and Catterline, just shove everyone to Bervie because it has capacity. But, it's clear in what's been done in the document that it's not trying to drive that, but if Inverbervie was to be chosen as the catchment area, I think we would be quicken the demise of Catterline School. To keep this rural community together and to have everyone attend the school that's within the Community Council zone as well.

Councillor Keating: We are not proposing that. There are two options, slight difference in scoring for the reasons mentioned, but the options are both on the table and that's what we're consulting on. So Kinneff to Catterline is very much one of the two things we're looking at.

Councillor Evison: Just listening to that exchange there and I think the important point to emphasise is that this is in fact a consultation and you've got the criteria there and the weighting and what's come up in looking at the documents. But an absolute important part of this is the fact that it's a consultation and local voices are heard. At the last community council, I was hearing different views expressed, well, mainly the same view as expressed here, and urged people to actually fill in the consultation, to put their ideas forward, because this matters, and we do want to hear local voices and see what happens. I think a key bit though, we have representation from Kinneff, Catterline, and Dunnottar Community Council here. I think the very existence of

that Community Council, maybe it reflects on how the communities see each other as well. But the key point is, of course, that the local voices need to be heard so everyone needs to put in their responses to the consultation.

Community Council Member: It was said earlier in the meeting, that if a family has chosen for their children to go to Catterline now, even if their home was rezoned into Bervie, that there would be grandfather rights, as it were, for other children to go to go into Catterline. That could still lead to a situation where, next door neighbours would be split, and the community would be split. So, I think it would be a far cleaner cut if the zone did go fully to Catterline School.

Councillor Keating: Neither of the options splits a zone, so it's going to one school or the other, but obviously absolute parental choice rights.

Community Council Member: This could end up with a potential seven-year at least where you could have the community split.

Councillor Keating: At the end of the day we have parental choice and therefore if neighbours choose to send their children to different places, one in zone, one out of zone then they are within their right.

Community Council Member: That's true but that affects transport, we've seen that through the mothballing, what I would call an absolutely illogical decision to not provide children in the Kinneff catchment zone with transport to Catterline if they chose to leave earlier. The very fact that it's been mothballed has, in effect, combined the two zones until such time that it's permanently rezoned. That's caused a lot of issues that have been raised at the Community Council.

Councillor Keating: I know what you're saying but we haven't merged the two zones, they are two separate schools until we complete this consultation. But yes, I understand the point you're making and I recognise it.

Community Council Member: Are there any factors that could be brought into play that would strengthen the case for the merging of Catterline and Kinneff rather than Kinneff and Bervie?

Councillor Keating: I think Alison kind of gave you the key point. We're here consulting with the community and therefore the more people that fill in the responses, and I'll come to this in a minute, that weighs heavily when we're making our decisions.

Rachael: From what we've heard so far in the pre-engagement and in terms of the decisions that the families at Kinneff made at the point of mothballing; we really haven't seen or heard anything that would be pushing us towards choosing Bervie over Catterline. So far, the majority of the communication that we've had is pointing towards Catterline. Obviously, we're still in the consultation process, we're still listening and need to see what else may come out of it. We've given Bervie as an option because we need to give alternatives and there might be people who want Bervie and they just haven't commented that yet. I don't feel that it's a particularly popular suggestion so far. When we have been through these processes with other schools in the past, the feedback that comes out from the consultation is what sways our officer recommendation in the final report. This is what goes to each of the committees for a decision. We would be very unlikely to recommend the exact opposite of what our stakeholders have said. That's not the way that we work. We listen to the

feedback that we get and then take everything into account and make a recommendation based on that.

Community Council Member: The most obvious indicator is what did the seven children do when the mothballing occurred? I think that should have been far more put forward in the proposal. I find it odd, as I've raised already, that Catterline was scored lower and was put here as option two, when realistically it should have been obvious that children going to Catterline is what the community wants.

Susan: Yes, and I would maybe just want to reassure you, that there's no pre-empting of an outcome with that. It is just that national standard that we have to do an options appraisal against, because it is a national standard of evaluating the suitability of buildings. But the whole point of this consultation is to hear the local voices, and you're right, I'm very aware that the families and the children were very keen to move across to Catterline. So we need the consultation to back that up. And again, you've got a key role and appreciate you coming along tonight. I know you said at the start of the call, you're here to represent the community council so I think that's an important point that, we really want to hear people's views. That is what's taken into account amongst all the factors. I understand what you're saying about the document and the way it was presented, but it is just a standard approach. The consultation is the important part to feed into that.

Community Council Member: Is there a legally compliant way or a strong way in which we, the Community Council, can gather signatures, names and addresses and so on, of individuals that sign on to a letter that we can present in a one-er? One of the things I'm concerned about is that if we ask members of the community to sign up, that yes, they would say they would do so, but may not get round to it. Whereas if we were able to gather that information and have them sign on to something and present that to you, would that be accepted as evidence if we were to go round the community and bring you 100 signatures?

Rachael: Yes, absolutely. We have that in previous circumstances as well. If you were to do that and bringing us a response which was signed by 100 people then we would say we have had 100 responses saying this.

Community Council Member: What is the minimum standard for that, would it just be name or would you need a name and address? What would you need on there?

Rachael: Name and postcode would be helpful. If they don't want to respond individually or if they don't have the time to respond individually.

Community Council Member: The main thing is, we want to make it as easy as possible.

Maxine: We've got the survey that Kelly has put into the chat. So, following the information that's from there, we like to know whether they are a parent or whether a community member because sometimes we'll get people from outside of the actual area responding. And we like to say how localised the people are. Everybody's got their voice and we represent them. If you get 100 signatures from people of the postcodes that are from your area, then they are going to mean more than people that would have a postcode from Edinburgh. So that's why it will be important to find out where the people are from so we can represent their responses in that way.

Councillor Keating: But if there is such a letter, we wouldn't expect to know the connection of the person, just the signature and the postcode is what we would accept. But if people want to put across exactly who they are and how closely linked they are, I think an individual response would be better.

Community Council Member: It's great to see the Catterline Head Teacher here showing an interest. She's been wonderful to our kids at Catterline, she's been great for the community and bringing things together and it really does stand out that.

5. Next Steps

Councillor Keating highlighted that there will be a further face to face meeting on Tuesday 3rd March 2026, 6pm at Kinneff & Catterline Village Hall, where the original meeting was planned for.

The proposal regarding the closure of Kinneff School is subject to consultation between 12 January and 6 March 2026. This adequately covers the required period of 30 days of term time consultation.

Any letter or comments anyone wishes to make on the proposal need to be submitted by 4pm on Friday 6 March 2026. Comments can be submitted by email to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or in writing to Learning Estates, Unit 15, Harlaw Way, Inverurie, AB51 4SG. Councillor Keating highlighted that he would encourage all to take part in the consultation and give your opinions via the online survey which is within the chat box as well as link to the Education Consultation page, where the documents can be found and the contact details of the Learning Estates Team. All information is within the proposal document.

In addition to the community, we are also involving pupils in our discussions, and Head Teachers will be asked to work with pupils to gain their views on the proposals.

Once the consultation period is over, all written submissions, minutes of both meetings and pupil discussions will be provided to His Majesty's inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) for their consideration. HMIE will produce a report on the consultation. A final report on the consultation will be presented at three committees, those are: Kincardine & Mearns Area Committee for consideration and comment, which Councillor Sarah Dickinson and Councillor Alison Evison are part of. Then onto Education & Children's Services Committee for a recommendation of which I am the chair and take into account the consideration and comment from Kincardine & Mearns Committee then finally to Full Council with all 70 Councillors for a decision.

Following the Full Council meeting, the Council will enter an eight-week call-in period when members of the public can ask Scottish Ministers to call in the decision. If the decision is not called in the Council will be able to the implementation process. If the proposal is called in the School Closure Review

Panel will consider the proposal. This may take up to 16 weeks. If the panel grants consent to the proposal, the Council will then commence the implementation process.

6. Close the meeting

Councillor Keating did one last check if there was anyone raising their hands, which there was not so thanked everyone for attending and highlighted importance of gaining feedback regarding this meeting.