Aberdeenshire COUNCIL Education & Children's Services

Statutory Consultation
Public Meeting
Closure of Tullynessle School
Tullynessle and Forbes Community Hall
Monday 29 September 2025, 6.00 pm

Aberdeenshire Council Officers present: Laurence Findlay (Director of Education & Children's Services), Rachael Goldring (Learning Estates Team Leader), Matthew Smart (Shaping Places for Wellbeing Community Link Lead), Anna Zadka-Labus (Learning Estates Officer, minutes), Donna Crawford (Head Teacher, Keig School), Elaine McGowan (Head Teacher, Alford Primary School)

Elected Members present: Cllr David Keating (Chair), Cllr Andrew Hassan

HMI Inspectors present: Simon Gallon

The meeting was attended by 17 members of the public.

Apologies: Cllr Louise McAllister, Cllr Geva Blackett, Cllr Jeff Goodhall

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Keating introduced himself and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He introduced the Aberdeenshire Council Officers and Elected Members present.

Cllr Keating laid out the format of the meeting. He stressed that everyone should have a chance to be heard. He emphasised that the meeting is convened to consider the proposal to close the primary school. Such decisions are guided by the educational benefits of the school itself. It was recognised and acknowledged that there is significant local concern about the mothballed nursery. However, participants were asked to remain focused on the proposals regarding the school when it comes to the community discussion. It is really important to allow all views on the proposals for the primary school to be heard and discussed.

Cllr Keating informed that the meeting will be minuted and the minutes will be made public as part of the consultation.

2. **Proposal Overview**

Laurence Findlay welcomed everyone and gave an overview of the consultation proposal. He reminded that the consultation will run until the end of October and all the feedback gathered during the consultation period, tonight and online surveys will be taken into consideration.

In May 2024, a decision was made to temporarily mothball Tullynessle School from August 2024. It was triggered by the declining school roll and reaching the threshold. Since then, the school remains non-operational. There were no in zone and out of

zone enrolments since the school has been officially mothballed. No families expressed an interest in their children enrolling at the school for the session 2025/26.

Laurence reminded those present that this consultation is about Tullynessle School, the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting is not part of this consultation. Any proposal in relation to the ELC setting will be the subject of a separate consultation.

Laurence talked about the options appraisal for the future of the school. The Tullynessle community have been 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. They would require the building to be discontinued as a primary school, which requires a decision under the statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. This is a requirement of the process as the closure cannot be assumed at this stage. These uses will not be lost and can be revisited if a decision to finally close the school is taken. The final decision sits with Full Council. Officers took into account all feedback received from members of the public during the informal engagement. Three alternatives and eight options have been taken into consideration.

Laurence explained that this consultation proposes to discontinue education at Tullynessle School and re-assign its catchment area to either Alford Primary School or Keig School. This proposal applies to the primary school stages (P1-P7) of education in Tullynessle. The proposed changes, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

3. **Tullynessle Options**

Rachael Goldring outlined that the proposal consists of two options for stakeholders to consider and pointed out that maps of both options are displayed in the hall.

Option 1 – permanent closure of Tullynessle School and merger with Alford Primary School
Option 2 – permanent closure of Tullynessle School and merger with Keig School

She stressed 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, provided they remain at the same primary school.

Rachael explained that continuation of the mothballing has also been considered; however, there is no strong evidence to suggest that the school will be viable in the long term. Therefore, this option has been discounted. If the closure does not go ahead, the school will remain mothballed.

4. **Questions from the floor**

Cllr Keating welcomed questions from the floor and asked participants to state their name and interest in the meeting to aid the minute-taking process.

Mary Walters (former parent) - What happened to the option to use Tullynessle and Keig Schools together?

R Goldring – This option has been considered, but the decision was made that this was not the best option to take forward. We have recently merged two schools, one over and one under capacity. But there will be sufficient capacity at Keig school, so this option was discounted.

Carys Steven (parent of Keig School) – Keig currently sits at 49 pupils, with a large portion of the Tullynessle catchment already at Alford School. How would you house them all at Keig School? Keig did not cope with the transition. I chose this school over Alford, but now it has a huge detrimental impact on my children and other children. Bookcases had to be moved to fit in more desks. The Keig roll has never been at this number. How are you going to fit all the children in Keig? It was not in the best interest of the children and their education. The decision to place 25 pupils in one classroom was made for financial reasons. Composite class P1-P2 of 25 pupils and P1-P4 of 25 pupils are very different to ensure they are meeting the curriculum and other aspects. I have huge concerns.

Nicola Eddie (parent of Keig School) – Last year Keig lost 7 children, that would be 49 plus 7. I don't know where those children would go, compared with the numbers you published, 43.

Emily Carter (parent of Keig School, Keig PC, Tullynessle Resident, Tullynessle nursery) – My daughter is in P4, and P4 has been split into two classes, so there are three P4 peers in her class. Aberdeenshire Council is failing to keep my daughter within her peer group. If you get one P1 to P3 child, you will have to move one P4 child to the upper stage and you will have one P4 child down in that class. It will have a huge detrimental impact on my daughter's or other children's wellbeing. How are you going to manage that?

Lorna Reeves (Tullynessle parent) – My children used to go to Tullynessle School, but have finished. So, there is no room at Keig to have full classes?

R Goldring – We had new enrolments recently, and we only have two classrooms. We had a long discussion about potential arrangements if another family moved into the area. One of the arrangements would be that we would get an additional member of staff.

E Carter – Is that minuted? If we get another child, Keig would get another teacher? My issue is about the impact on P4 children.

D Crawford – At the moment, we have a P1-P4 class with 25 children. If we get one more child, there is no space in that class and one P4 would have to go to the other class. If it happens, there will be a discussion with myself and the officers. Looking at

the peer group situation, this would have to be managed carefully with the formula. If we went over 50, like 52, we would have to be creative with our space.

E Carter – But we need this solution now. If anybody could give a clear answer.

M Walters – How many pupils are in P4?

E Carter – Seven.

M Walters – My child was in a group of six or seven in their year and they are still together now at university.

D Crawford – We try to get them together as often as we can. We have our friendly afternoons.

E Carter – But my daughter feels like she has been left behind, so does Robbie. They feel like they are not clever enough to move up.

N Eddie – Robbie is really upset about being in E class. It was always a big class, now he is in E class.

C Steven – It is important to point out that the five pupils who would be P5 this year and moved out were in zone.

M Walters – So why was joining the schools not considered?

L Reeves – We moved to Tullynessle in 2015 and applied for my child to go to Alford School and we were told that there was no space. Why is there space now? There was no space for one child, and there is no space for the entire Tullynessle catchment? What happens if in a couple of years it is back up again?

R Goldring – There were quite a lot of houses built over the last 10 years, and that resulted in a peak in the roll, but now we see a drop. We have gone from 50 to 60 pupils per year group and now go down to 30. So, the roll is declining because the peak of the massive housing has passed.

L Reeves – Those houses are still there, what if it changes and there is a peak again?

R Goldring – Large house building development generates a large peak, because of new families moving into the area. There are now families and there is a peak of children coming there. But after that, it stops; another peak is not going to happen anytime soon, because those houses become part of the overall housing stock, where not everybody moves on, people stay there until they retire, so there are no more children coming from those houses. So, a large peak will not happen until there is another large amount of housing coming forward.

L Findlay – Across the board of Aberdeenshire in the next five years, we are predicting to see about a 10% decline in the primary population based on NHS data.

L Reeves – At that point, when you planned Alford, you did not look at all at the numbers to make it big enough, and you did not add in the whole other catchment area.

L Findlay – At the point we did not think that Tullynessle could be mothballed, there were 38/39 pupils on the roll. People make choices.

E Carter – In Tullynessle and Montgarrie, there are at least 10 house plots for sale with approved planning permission. What happens if children come into that? When you have done your projections, and it is said in your document, there are no planned house builds, but you have not looked at the farms that are selling land with permission attached. So those potential families and children have not been counted at all. I would imagine those families would want a rural lifestyle, including rural education, and you are taking away their right to choice. Also, when are you going to come back to us with an answer, because lots of things have been noted, and there have never been any answers.

L Findlay – Everything will be responded to in the consultation report as a part of the consultation process.

Lindsay Mavor (former Tullynessle parent, nursery) – Mr Findlay, you said that you take five years of NHS data for Alford.

L Findlay – Across Aberdeenshire.

L Mavor – Why was that not the case for Tullynessle, as we were told that two-year projections are used, not five? I have two children, and we are not included in those numbers, and I know more that were born since then.

R Goldring – when we were talking about two years, it was about the future viability of the school for mothballing. If they are not of school age, they are not a viable school population at that point. For the School Roll Forecasts, we use five years of NHS data. In the document, we could not provide the numbers precisely because of GDPR. Any numbers below five must be removed to protect confidentiality.

M Walters – There is a planning application next to me, which is a three-bedroom house, zoned to Tullynessle School.

R Goldring – It will not be included in projections if it does not have a planning permission yet.

M Walters – They can come here very quickly, so how quickly can it be changed? There used to be a bigger roll, and it changed and you were just watching it happen. This was detrimental to the educational estate and caused issues in other schools where people want to move to. What haven't you addressed that?

L Findlay – Because people have the right to choose.

M Walters – Yes, but you need to find out why families do not want to go to that school and try to address that.

Cllr Keating – When we receive an out of zone application, we ask for a reason, and if there was something that we could address, we would address it.

M Walters – So you saw a school roll massively declining and you did not think to sort it out.

E Carter – Under the Schools Consultation Act, for a rural school, that is exactly what should happen. You should try protecting a declining roll.

L Findlay – There is a presumption against a closure of a rural school, that is why we must go through this consultation process.

M Walters - Why didn't you look and decide to do something about that?

D Crawford – If people apply to leave a school, we have to accept that.

R Goldring – There are many reasons why families apply for an out of zone place, and we cannot refuse them unless there are capacity pressures.

M Walters – Not refuse them, but to find out what encourages that.

R Goldring – There are many reasons why people choose not to attend their zoned school: needing after school care, their work circumstances, driving past another school that they want to attend, where their grandmother lives, a child not having friends at the school or they fell out with friends.

N Eddie – There are planning applications and housing for sale. What will happen if there are families with kids wanting to go to their local school? There are 49 children currently at Keig, and only 18 are zoned for Keig. I was told that Tullynessle was not viable for us, as my child has additional support needs. I chose not to enrol him at Tullynessle, as I was working there. That is why my children are not at Tullynessle. At the point we were told that we could go to Keig, that's it. I did not want a small school. My other child went to Keig and they had fantastic first two years. But the last two years have been incredibly difficult. My oldest child lost his best friend, he found another friend, other children do not want to play with him, he is told to avoid playing with other children because they trigger him. It is difficult to have a bigger peer group in a smaller school.

Cllr Keating – I am sorry to hear that

N Eddie – I asked to go to Alford and I was told 'No'.

L Findlay – Can you tell me who told you that you couldn't go to Alford? We can discuss after the meeting if you would prefer.

C Steven – One of the reasons why Tullynessle struggled for numbers was that there was no after school club. Some families chose Alford because they needed the after school care. Also, post-COVID working arrangements changed. One parent said that she was not coming to the public meeting as she was told she was part of the problem because they moved their children to Alford. But if she was choosing now, she would choose Tullynessle, having a more flexible working life now. And that has not been considered. When we removed our child from Alford, we did not consider Tullynessle as there were no children her age at Tullynessle. If it was brought up, then Tullynessle would have a healthy roll and Keig would have a manageable roll. You are saying Alford has space, but five years ago they turned a corridor into a classroom.

E McGowan – Five years ago there were 14 classes and we used our shared learning area. Now we are back to 13 classes, taught in 13 classrooms. Our two P1 classes are sharing space, because we are doing play-based approach. And they have a separate teaching area and outdoor space.

Joanna Grieve (parent of Alford child who attended Keig) – We are zoned to Alford, but we moved our child to Keig, where his needs would be best met. But over the last year the education at Keig has changed drastically, so we decided to move him back to Alford. At that point, we would have been part of the overcapacity that year, and he would have potentially been in the corridor.

M Walters – Based on these comments, the merger of Tullynessle with Keig should be discounted. My child had a great education at Tullynessle and wrote a submission to your consultation how amazing education he had, in a small school. Younger ones were playing with the old ones, because there are only a few of you, you cannot choose. They learnt great life skills and tolerance.

Florence Thomson (former Tullynessle pupil) – I went to Tullynessle School with my six cousins and two second cousins. My cousins never went to another school, but I did, to Alford, Inverurie. My teaching career was in small rural schools. I don't know a lot about bigger schools, but small schools have a wonderful family atmosphere. There were coffee mornings, community cafes, and children helped to bake and serve.

L Findlay – We know that we must find a way of sustaining rural education. The population is declining and ageing. Primary and secondary populations are dropping. Within the next five years, it will be about a 10% decline and most of that decline is going to be in rural areas. The Learning Estates Team are reviewing each cluster and preparing recommendations for changes. They didn't get to Alford yet. Every generation brings changes. We have huge capacity issues. There is Inverurie, where more people are moving to, and there are areas that are declining. So, we have to address those changes by undertaking rezoning, looking into zones, etc.

L Reeves – When we moved back, my daughter went from a really big school to Tullynessle, and she settled brilliantly by the end of the week. She knew all the kids by the end of the week. Small schools are great. Keig is not suitable anymore. Rezoning to Keig is not a good option. I also disagree with rezoning Tullynessle to Alford.

E Carter – If you rezone to Alford, you are taking away from rural families the right to choose. Rural schools are what a lot of people who live in rural areas want. If you rezone to Keig, your margins are incredibly low. It is detrimental to teachers, pupils and communities. Why was there not more research, whether or not the merger would work with us with the communities? If you reopen the nursery at Tullynessle and have P1-P3 at Tullynessle and P4-P7 at Keig, you will have two very healthy school numbers. It would not bother me driving between the two schools, because I made 1000 extra miles to travel to Towie over the last year. I have emailed you about it. Most of the parents in our community would support this option.

Multiple participants spoke at the same time. Key points could not be captured in the minutes. The discussion took place about previous arrangements at Tullynessle School, with Tullynessle ELC being located at the portacabin and two primary classrooms in the main building.

Lindsay Mavor (former Tullynessle parent, nursery) – Seven years ago, there were 52 kids when I left Towie. There were no other houses built in Towie other than ours. It was awful. We were already in the area with children. Why not split Tullynessle into Keig and Alford, half and half, if the option is that the school building is not getting used?

R Goldring – This option was considered as a possibility, but geographically, there was no appropriate place to divide the Tullynessle catchment between Keig and Alford.

C Steven – Keig school is wonderful and being a part of this community is wonderful, but for a family from Tullynessle that has to travel miles, do they feel part of the Keig community? If the closure is the answer, that needs to be considered.

Two attendees felt that their questions were not answered. There was a discussion about the possibility of reassessing options again. Offering only Alford does not give the rural school an option. Why cannot the option of reopening the nursery on merging Tullynessle with Keig as one primary school be put to the community?

R Goldring – It was discounted because of the additional costs of running two schools.

E Carter – Couldn't parents be responsible for that? Could that not be asked?

L Findlay – The Council has a duty to provide transport.

There was a discussion about school transport, whether Tullynessle catchment is zoned to Alford, and some families living closer to Keig and getting transport to Alford or a bus passing a house and a family not taking it. How is that more or less cost-effective than having transport from Tullynessle to Keig?

E Carter – Could it not be put to the community?

Cllr Keating – Recently we merged one school that was over capacity and one under capacity, and as a result we have two buildings with very high utilisation, while you are asking the Council to have two half-full buildings.

E Carter – The nursery would feed into it. I didn't choose Alford, I live in Tullynessle, but I did not consider Tullynessle for my daughter as it was a P1-P7 composite. I would have considered it if it was a P1-P3 composite. How can a teacher be expected to teach 25 children from four to 11 years old? But if there were a nursery and a class P1-P3, she would naturally feed into that. Within a few years, there would be two healthy rolls.

L Findlay – We do capture this tonight, but I also encourage people to provide feedback as part of this process.

Two participants stated that it was provided, but it was dismissed.

L Findlay – The options appraisal was completed, now it is coming back during the formal statutory consultation process. Following the 31st of October, all feedback will be considered and we will prepare the final report.

E Carter – You need to recapture it now, put this to the community.

L Findlay – We need to follow the process, as per the 2010 Act. It is about discontinuing the education at Tullynessle and merging with Alford or Keig. If people come back with their feedback strongly, we will put this into our consultation report and the Full Council will make the final decision.

Michelle Stuart (former Tullynessle parent, nursery and school) – My children went to the school during mothballing, one to the nursery, one to the school, they are now at Keig. In terms of reinstating the nursery and splitting the setting between Tullynessle and Keig, which was dismissed, despite in previous meetings this option was deemed as a viable option, I cite from the proposal document: 'this approach will only be considered when one of the two schools is over capacity'. Now that Keig is at capacity, can this option be triggered? Also: 'splitting the primary provision across two sites would unnecessarily increase travel time, distance and transport costs, and it would be contrary to the expectations of some parents/carers and community members'. How do you know that, since you did not discuss it with parents and the community?

Cllr Keating – It is based on the expertise and analogy, at the meetings held last year, not for this proposal, and I can assure you there were many people against.

There was a discussion about the fact that this community is a different community and no assumptions should be made because of what other people thought.

Cllr Keating – That is why we put this in this consultation.

R Goldring – Once the process is finished, we have to look into all the received feedback and then we make recommendations to the Councillors. We can adopt the proposal, amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt it, amend the proposal in a

significant way and reconsult or abandon the proposal and retain the status quo which is mothballing. Splitting the catchment in some way between Alford and Tullynessle, perhaps with the boundary somewhere near Montgarrie would not require consulting, but to do a split-site and reopen the Tullynessle School building would require consulting. We can do that if there is enough feedback suggesting it.

E Carter – There are eight families here in this room that attend Keig. Out of 50 children, most of them with multiple children, it's about 40% of the Keig families in this room. So, why can't you reconsult that?

L Findlay – We also have an online survey and other submissions, so tonight is part of the process. Everybody has a right to have their say and all feedback must be considered.

E Carter – You have got a presumption against the closure of rural schools, remember that. I have been trying to collect so much information about the nursery and send it to the Council, but you said you did not trust that data. So why don't you send it to all families, all relevant families and stakeholders?

R Goldring – What kind of information would you like us to send?

E Carter – About the split settings with the nursery. There are many infant schools and junior schools, and it is a positive thing. To support my child's education and the community, I would do that, and I believe that most of us would. It is hard, but it impacts us all.

Cllr Keating – It will be minuted, but I would encourage you to put this into the consultation, and it will be considered as part of the final consultation report.

M Walters – And you will discount it due to transport cost.

E Carter – Can we do something actively?

R Goldring – This consultation needs to run its course. We already wrote to every single property in this catchment, so we need to consult on this.

L Findlay – The current consultation is required, and if there is going to be more than a minor amendment, we need to reconsult.

E Carter – Is it the right thing to do with the presumption against closure? Wouldn't it be the right thing, since this is what the communities want?

R Goldring – I am not saying we cannot or will not do that, but we need to get to the end of this consultation process. And then we can send something out.

E Carter – Can I ask this to be minuted, that that goes to Tullynessle, Keig, Montgarrie and any out of zone children attending Keig School.

R Goldring – It would be exactly the same way as this consultation.

C Steven – It feels like there is not an actual plan, 'we'll wait till the end of this consultation', we will see if it is Keig or Alford', but in the middle of it all, there is a group of children that moved from a school where they were settled into another school. It does not consider the education of children. If the five zoned to Keig kids had not left last year, what would happen now? 'We would then look at that as a floating classroom.' Daviot families were told that another school may join Daviot, as it may be shut.

R Goldring – There are no such plans around Meldrum Cluster.

C Steven – There should be some sort of plan going forward. You saved money shutting Tullynessle. You are saying it was not that. Obviously, changing composite classes to 25 was purely for financial reasons, not in the best interest of education. Whatever we say will come to money.

L Findlay – Things can change very quickly.

L Reeves – The roll was declining for years.

E Carter – How can you manage a school of 49, if things change quickly?

Cllr Keating encouraged a young attendee to ask questions, but she did not have any at that time.

L Mavor – I presume you know the numbers for primary ones for next summer, Keig versus Alford.

E Carter – It is exactly the same. I think it is six in and six out.

L Mavor – I applied for a delayed entry to P1 for my son, he is due next session. I was told he would be zoned to Tullynessle, so he will probably go to Keig. Is he included in that 6?

E Carter – We counted him.

R Goldring – Yes, he is. We have two separate School Roll Forecasts, for Tullynessle and Keig.

Discussion took place around the necessity of splitting pupils in P4.

Cllr Keating – I would like to assure you that it is not about the cost. Tullynessle School was mothballed due to the falling roll, in line with the Council policies. We have heard you, it will be minuted and we encourage you to leave feedback. We need to be clear that what happens if the school closes is about education. You said about the split of P4, about composite classes, there is a strong push for a better way to do it. We agree that we do not wish to run a school at 99% of its capacity for a sustained period, as it has been discussed. The final thing is the presumption against the closure of rural schools, and that is why we are here tonight. This is the process established

by the Scottish Government and it must be followed. The other thing that is mandated by the Scottish Government is that we have a sustainable learning estate. To be fair, that is about costs and we need to be conscious of that too. That is why we have started a review of the whole of Aberdeenshire, all primaries in all clusters. And what was earlier suggested, to have two schools with utilisation of 50%. A target occupancy band is between 75% to 90%. I know this is a particular community, but we have to look across Aberdeenshire. A new major building development attracts a certain demographic, families with primary age children, and after that we do not see the same big peak.

L Findlay – I know mothballing is traumatic. We set the trigger at eight, it was agreed by Councillors, but some Councils set it at 12 or 15. Over the last few years, we mothballed 10 schools, some are still mothballed, and seven schools were closed. Strachan school was mothballed, reopened, mothballed again and closed. That is why we are trying to have this strategic look, going to different clusters and taking a different approach, working with communities. We are proposing mergers, rezoning. Meldrum is a cluster where we do not propose any changes at all. We will be coming to Alford in due course.

Eilidh Reeves (former Tullynessle pupil) – Isn't it part of the children's rights that their voices are heard? I do not remember myself or any of the pupils at the school being asked whether or not we wanted it closed.

Cllr Keating – The school is mothballed.

L Findlay – The Head Teachers will be talking with pupils about it.

There was a discussion that the mothballing was not discussed with pupils, and it should have been. One attendee said that the mothballing did not enhance children's education at Keig, but it had a detrimental impact on their education.

E Carter – Tullynessle School did not get to eight, when you informed us about the mothballing, it was predicted. How is it right?

L Findlay – Because it was predicted to be eight.

L Reeves – Was there any evidence about that? You just picked the number. The Scottish Government say 'zero'.

L Findlay – Close to 'zero'. The Scottish Government are reviewing their guidance on mothballing.

M Stuart – When are you going to review the Alford cluster?

R Goldring – We are just about to launch Stage 3 of the review, and Alford is not in this stage. It will not be within the next six to nine months.

C Steven – Why is a composite class set at 25? It was 19 when we came to Keig. It was 26 pupils in classes P1-P4 and P5-P7, and it worked great. With its good

reputation, the numbers at Keig increased, but it was set at 19. What was the reasoning between 19 and 25?

L Findlay – That was a financial decision. The Council made that decision as part of the budget.

N Eddie – For reopening the nursery and merging Tullynessle and Keig, the P1-P3 would be 23 kids at Tullynessle, which is a decent size, and at Keig P4-P5 would be 16 and P6-P7 would be 10, which is more than P4-P7 had previously. The numbers would not be so little.

Cllr Andrew Hassan (Mid Formartine, E&CS Committee) – What was discussed for the two schools, and the Foveran/Tipperty solution, it seems that that solution would work for what we want to see?

E Carter – This solution should not be discounted for what has happened to Tipperty and Foveran.

Cllr Keating – It was not discounted for that. When we finished, the Foveran and Tipperty were quite high in utilisation.

Discussion took place about the possible school rolls at Tullynessle and Keig.

L Mavor – Do any other schools in Aberdeenshire go through the same process as Tullynessle?

L Findlay – Kinneff and Fintry Schools are currently mothballed.

L Mavor – Have they had their clusters reviewed already?

L Findlay – Fintry School.

L Mavor – So why are clusters with problems not reviewed first?

L Findlay – Pretty much all our clusters have their own challenges, like Inverurie, Ellon and Westhill, where there was a lot of growth in these areas. So we are taking our cluster review in the order that seems best.

R Goldring – When we did Ellon Cluster and Foveran and Tipperty consultation at the same time, we were criticised, because there were too many consultations and too many surveys at the same time.

E Carter – When Tullynessle school was mothballed, the school was not listed on the primary admission form. It was not communicated in the way we were promised. There was no ability to express an interest in Tullynessle School.

R Goldring – We sent letters to all Tullynessle residents and emails to out of zone Tullynessle families. Tullynessle was supposed to be on the application form and we gave instructions to rectify it, which was done immediately. We also checked the

admissions system to see if there were any applications with the Tullynessle postcodes.

E Carter – The use of the Tullynessle building will be looked at once the decision is made. How can you do that if the nursery is still mothballed? And the nursery is not mothballed, as nobody is able to apply for it.

L Findlay – Early Learning and Childcare is a different process as ELC settings do not have zones. We require to have sufficient places across the cluster, but we have oversupply, so we are going to look across all 17 clusters to see what demand is. At that stage we will know if statutory consultation regarding the closure of the nursery is required.

L Mavor – Tullynessle nursery was not an option when I was applying for my child.

E Carter – Does mothballing of a nursery or a school fall under the same guidance?

L Findlay – It is the same legislation, but we are consulting on it separately as nursery provision is not attached to school.

M Stuart – You cannot say that it is part of the school or it is not part of the school when it suits you.

E Reeves – If the nursery is not part of the school, is the nursery shut because there would not be a Head Teacher at the primary school?

L Findlay – It is correct.

E Carter – But there is a Head Teacher at Ballogie who is overseeing Braemar.

L Reeves – If the nursery is not part of the school, why was a part of the school given to the nursery without consultation?

Multiple participants spoke at the same time. Key points could not be captured in the minutes. Cllr Keating reminded that this meeting was to discuss primary education provision at Tullynessle.

E Carter – What is the process for the nursery going forward?

L Findlay – The review process will start either in December or February next year, it is because the Scottish Government is updating the mothballing guidance. We will be required to engage with parents and the community. We will then update our guidance and set out the timelines.

E Carter – Shouldn't you follow the guidance that was live when it happened?

L Findlay – The guidance is being updated, and we have been instructed by Councillors to update our own guidance to make sure it aligns with national guidance.

M Stuart – By that time, we have to take our child to Echt because Tullynessle nursery does not exist.

L Findlay – You get to choose, you get your three options when choosing an ELC setting. But I will pick that up with the Early Years Team.

M Walters – This process leads to the building, the exterior areas and the garden, which was set up by the parents, deteriorating. The polytunnel was disappearing under the willow trees, which grow very fast, and they need cutting every year. They have not been cut since Tullynessle was mothballed. What is the plan for that? You need parents to keep things going.

L Findlay – Property colleagues are looking after this.

R Goldring – Our Janitorial Team does regular checks, and Landscape Services also provide periodic work around the site; however, not at the same frequency as when the school was open.

5. Next steps

Cllr Keating reminded that the proposal regarding the closure of Tullynessle School is subject to consultation between 1 September and 31 October 2025, which covers the required period of 30 days of term-time consultation.

Any comments on the proposal need to be submitted by 4pm on Friday, 31 October 2025. Comments can be submitted by email to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or in writing to Learning Estates, Unit 15, Harlaw Way, Inverurie, AB51 4SG.

Cllr Keating encouraged everyone to take part in the consultation and give opinions by completing the online survey. It was reminded that the link and QR code to the questionnaire are made available tonight, as well as on the Education Consultation page on the Aberdeenshire Council website. Spare paper copies of the survey are also available for anyone to complete on their way out. Pupils will also be involved in discussions, and Head Teachers will be asked to work with pupils to gain their views on the proposals.

Cllr Keating outlined the next stages of the consultation process. Once the consultation period is over, all written submissions, minutes of this meeting and pupil discussions will be provided to Education Scotland for their consideration. Education Scotland will produce a report on the consultation.

If substantial parental concerns are submitted by 31 October, the Council may stop the process and obtain from submitting it to Education Scotland, instead returning to the community for further consultation. However, this cannot be guaranteed.

If the proposal goes ahead, the final report on the consultation will be presented at:

- Marr Area Committee for consideration and comment,
- Education & Children's Services Committee for a recommendation and

- Full Council 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 proceed with the project. 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.

R Goldring added that members of the public will be able to submit representations to Scottish Ministers requesting a review, within three weeks of the Full Council's final decision. This information will be shared with the stakeholders and published on the Aberdeenshire Council website and Engage Aberdeenshire portal.

6. Close of Meeting

Cllr Keating thanked everyone for attending. Anyone unable to participate fully or who felt unheard was encouraged to get in touch with himself and/or the Learning Estate Team.