

EDUCATION, LEARNING AND LEISURE COMMITTEE - 6 FEBRUARY 2008

ZONING OF SCHOOLS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report proposes that the Education, Learning & Leisure Committee adopt a set of principles in relation to the setting and alteration of the zones of primary and secondary schools.
- 1.2 The report makes no specific proposals for altering the zone of any school. Any specific proposals made in the future would be based on these principles and would be the subject of a full Statutory Consultation as described in section 3 below.

2. Background

- 2.1 Aberdeenshire Council inherited the custom and practice of Grampian Regional Council in relation to the alteration of zones, but no formal policy had been adopted in relation to this.
- 2.2 From time to time, school zones have been altered after conducting the Statutory Consultation procedures and, where necessary, after obtaining the approval of the Scottish Executive. Whilst the majority of such changes have served a clear strategic purpose, there have been instances where the rationale for the change was less clear. This report will review these and ask the Committee to set out clear principles to be applied to all future proposals.
- 2.3 There is a trickle of requests from individual families to alter a school zone, apparently as an alternative to the making of a Placing Request. This is discussed in 4.7 below. The other main category has been requests from School Boards to annex part of the zone of a neighbouring school to counteract a declining roll. This is discussed in 4.8.

3 The Practicalities of Altering a Zone

- 3.1 Changing a school zone requires consultation under the Education (Publication & Consultation Etc.) (Scotland) Regulations 1981. Statutory Consultees are the parents of children who would have been expected to enrol at the school within 2 years of the proposal but would be required to enrol at a different school, and the Parent Councils of the schools affected (as successors to the School Boards). The Council has generally consulted more widely than required by the Regulations. (The Regulations also require consultation with parents of pupils who would be liable to be requested to change school as a result of the proposal, although in practice Aberdeenshire has only applied zoning changes to new entrants.)
- 3.2 The first step in the process is the preparation of a report to Committee to seek authority to conduct Statutory Consultation on one or more proposals set out in the report.

- 3.3 With Committee approval, the Statutory Consultation then takes place. Typically a document setting out the proposal or proposals is circulated with a response form, and a public meeting is conducted.
- 3.4 At the close of the consultation period, responses are analysed and a report is prepared for the relevant Area Committee which is invited to add its response.
- 3.5 The Education, Learning & Leisure Committee then considers a report which includes the Area Committee's response and decides whether to implement the proposal and, if alternative proposals or variant options were included in the consultation, which option is to be selected.
- 3.6 If a school whose zone is to be altered is operating with a pupil roll of more than 80% of its capacity, the proposal has to be referred to Scottish Ministers together with a considerable volume of supporting information.
- 3.7 Consideration of any proposal to alter a zone requires considerable time and effort by the Education, Learning & Leisure Service.

4 Proposals

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to agree to the following proposals which will be discussed below:
 - 4.1.1 Zone Changes should only be made where they serve a clear strategic purpose in relation to matching the demand for school places to the capacity available.
 - 4.1.2 On educational grounds, the zone of a secondary school should be coterminous with the zones of the primary schools in its network.
 - 4.1.3 The whole of the zone of a primary school should form part of the zone of one secondary school only, except where there is an exceptional case for a different arrangement.
 - 4.1.4 Existing arrangements under which a primary school is dual zoned or has a zone which is split between two secondary schools should be reviewed at the earliest convenient time with a view to terminating arrangements which cannot be justified.
 - 4.1.5 Where a primary school is the only primary school in a settlement and its zone consists of a single settlement and the surrounding rural area, its roll cannot be altered to any significant extent by altering its zone as the great majority of pupils live within the settlement boundary.
- 4.2 Clear Strategic Purpose

Zones should only be changed where there is a long term need to do so in order to match the supply and demand for school places. If the Council maintains its practice of applying zone changes to new enrolments only, the change in a school's roll which result from a change in its zone will take place over a period of 6 or 7 years.

It should be noted that the zoning arrangement which best matches the supply and demand for places does not necessarily mean that children will be zoned for the school which is the shortest distance from their home.

4.3 Secondary School Zone Coterminous with Primary Schools Zones

If a zoning change transfers an area between 2 primary schools which are zoned for different secondary schools, a corresponding change should be made to the zones of the secondary schools concerned to avoid giving rise to a Split Zone.

4.4 Primary School Zoned to One Secondary School Only

There is a clear benefit for Primary – Secondary liaison and work within the Community Schools Network if a primary school is zoned to one secondary school only.

There is also an implication for the workload of primary headteachers who have to maintain working contacts with more than one secondary school.

4.5 Dual and Split Zones

- 4.5.1 A number of primary schools have Dual Zoning for two secondary schools. This means that children who live in the zone of the primary school are entitled to seek places at either of the secondary schools as in-zone applicants. The disadvantage to the Council is the need to make school transport arrangements to both secondary schools.

It is proposed that all remaining Dual Zoning arrangements should be reviewed in due course. Such review should certainly form part of the detailed option appraisal for any scheme of replacement or major refurbishment or extension of the relevant secondary schools.

A list of dual zoned schools appears in Appendix A

- 4.5.2 Some other schools have a Split Zone. Pupils who live in one part of the primary school zone are zoned for one secondary school whilst pupils from the other part of the zone are zoned for a different secondary school.

It is proposed that Split Zoning arrangements should be reviewed in due course. Such review should certainly form part of the detailed option appraisal for any scheme of replacement or major refurbishment or extension of the relevant secondary schools.

It is however acknowledged that there are some cases where one part of a rural primary school is much closer to one secondary school, whilst other parts of the zone are much closer to another secondary school. In such cases, a review would probably conclude that the arrangement should be retained.

A list of split zone schools appears in Appendix A.

It should be noted that Balmedie Primary School is a zoned primary school for Bridge of Don Academy in the City of Aberdeen, and similarly, Newmachar Primary School is zoned for Dyce Academy.

4.6 Rural Primary School Zones

In Aberdeenshire, 70% of the population live in the 1% of the land area which is occupied by settlements. Where a primary school is located within a settlement and serves that settlement and the surrounding rural area, a substantial majority of the pupils will live in the relatively small area of the town or village, whilst a minority will live in the much larger area outwith the settlement. The rezoning of even large areas will only affect a relatively small number of households and will not have a significant impact on the school roll. As the Council's practice is to apply zoning changes to new enrolments only, the change will be phased over 7 years. In these cases, it is unlikely that a zone can be changed in a way which will have any significant effect on the school roll.

Where a school's zone includes more than one settlement, it may be possible for zoning changes to be used as a way of changing the school roll.

In those towns which have more than one primary school, the changing of zone boundaries within the town can be used to help to match supply and demand for places.

4.7 Requests to Alter a Zone from Families

In the past, there have been a few instances of a zoning change for a primary school made solely because of a request from a particular family. Parents may make a Placing Request to attend a school other than their zoned school and the Authority must grant such requests unless one or more of a limited number of grounds for refusal, which are specified in legislation, exist.

The only apparent benefit to the parents of seeking a Zoning Change rather than making a Placing Request is that it would confer an entitlement to school transport.

The consequences of acceding to such requests from individuals have the potential to cause very considerable problems for the Authority. Some of the possible consequences are set out in Appendix B.

4.8 Requests to Alter a Zone from Parent Councils

Typically, the request for a change to a zone comes from a primary school whose roll is declining. The apparent reason for the request is to boost the school's roll. In practice, any such change is unlikely to achieve its objective for a number of reasons:

- 4.8.1 Those families who live in neighbouring school zones and who would be affected by a proposed change would have to be consulted on the proposal. If they were enthusiastic about the proposal, they might well have used the Placing Request procedure to obtain places in any case.
- 4.8.2 If those consulted do not support the proposal, it is unlikely that the Committee would wish to enforce a change to the zones.
- 4.8.3 If zones were changed against local wishes, parents would still be entitled to make Placing Requests for places at the school they were previously zoned for.

4.8.4 Where a Committee decision to change a zone in these circumstances required to be confirmed by Scottish Ministers under the 80% rule, it would be difficult to present a compelling case for the proposal.

4.8.5 The effect of any zoning change takes 7 years to be fully effective as the Authority's practice has been to apply the change to new enrolments only.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 Whilst there are no financial implications arising directly from this report, a clear policy on zoning will assist the Council in matching supply and demand for school places. It should therefore help to minimise the demand for temporary accommodation and school extensions.

5.2 In the majority of cases, zoning changes will increase school transport costs and may increase staffing costs at the school whose zone is enlarged. In some cases these will be offset to a greater or lesser extent at the school whose zone is reduced.

6. Area Implications

6.1 There are no implications of this report which have specific implications for particular Areas within Aberdeenshire.

6.2 Area Committees will be included in the consultation on any specific proposals which affect their Area as described in 3.4 above.

7. Consultation

7.1 Education Network Managers have been consulted on the proposals in this report.

7.2 The Directors of Law & Administration, Personnel & ICT and Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

7.3 Where any specific proposal to alter a zone is brought forward, there will be a full Statutory Consultation as described in section 3 of this report.

8. Policy Implications

8.1 The implications are described in section 4.

9. Sustainability Implications

9.1 Zoning arrangements which are consistent with the Estate Management Plan will assist in optimising school transport arrangements .

10. Staffing Implications

10.1 Where zoning changes are made in the absence of a strategic justification, additional staffing costs for which there are no offsetting benefits may arise.

11. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 11.1 Adopt the principles in section 4.1 above as its policy on school zoning**
- 11.2 Note that there would be full consultation on any specific rezoning proposal as described in section 3.**

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Appendix A

Dual Zoned Schools

Primary Schools with Dual Zoning	Associated Secondary Schools
Insch	Gordon Schools and Inverurie
Oyne	Gordon Schools and Inverurie
Premnay	Gordon Schools and Inverurie
New Pitsligo	Mintlaw and Fraserburgh
St Cyrus	Mackie, Mearns and Montrose

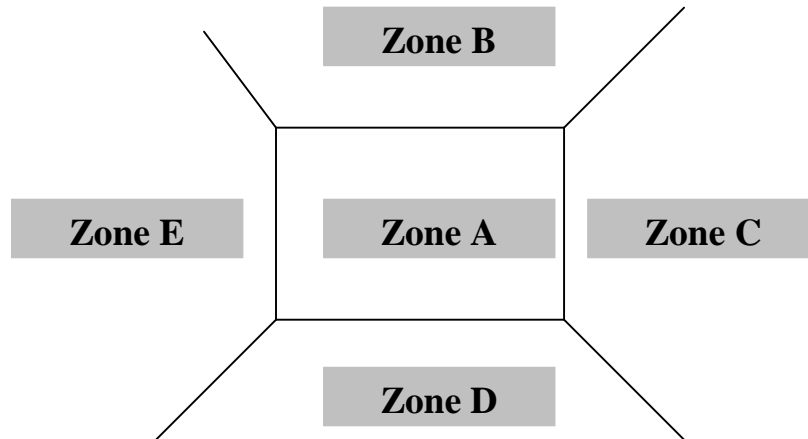
Split Zone Schools

Primary Schools with Split Zoning	Associated Secondary Schools
Aberchirder	Banff and Gordon Schools
Ordiquhill	Banff and Keith Grammar School (Moray)
Hatton of Cruden	Ellon and Peterhead
Ardallie	Ellon and Mintlaw
Auchnagatt	Ellon and Mintlaw
Lairhillock	Mackie and Cults (Aberdeen City)
King Edward	Banff and Turriff
Lumsden	Alford and Gordon Schools
Methlick	Meldrum and Ellon

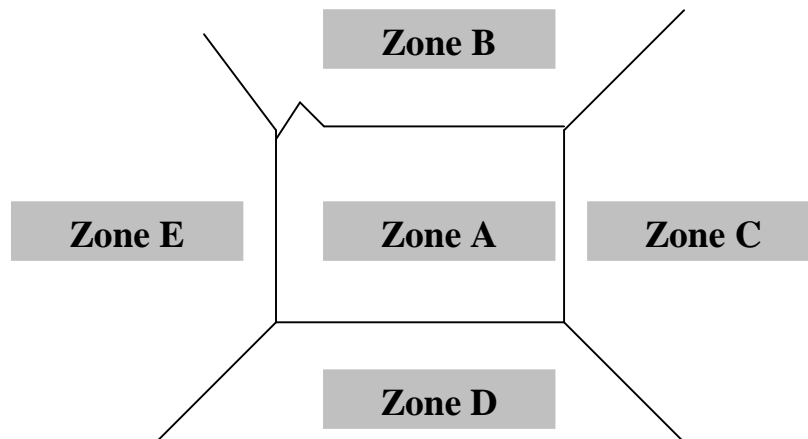
Appendix B

The Problems associated with Changing Zones in response to Parental Requests

School A has 4 neighbouring schools: B; C; D; and E

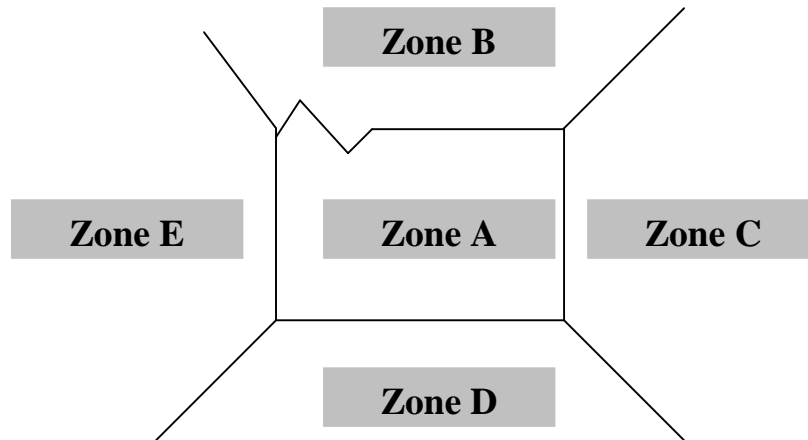


If the zone is altered to move one family from Zone B into Zone A



The first question is if this family moves away and the incoming family would prefer to be in zone B, must the Authority accede to their request? If the change was made for no better reason than the wishes of the first family, it would be difficult to justify not responding to the second family's request.

If another family living near the zone boundary requests a change, it would be difficult to refuse them less favourable consideration than the first family so the zones now become:



...and eventually, if a number of individual requests are made over a period of time, the zone boundaries will eventually look like:

