



EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**PROPOSAL TO BUILD NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL IN
PORTLETHEN AND REZONE PORTLETHEN PRIMARY
NETWORK**

CONSULTATION REPORT

JUNE 2015

**This Consultation Report has been issued by Education & Children's
Services of Aberdeenshire Council in accordance with the Schools
(Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

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1. THE PROPOSAL

- 1.1 At its meeting on 4 December 2014, Aberdeenshire Council's Education, Learning & Leisure Committee authorised the launch of a statutory consultation regarding the delivery of a new primary school in Portlethen and the subsequent rezoning of the Portlethen primary school network. The Proposal Document was issued in the week ending 19 December 2015 to those individuals and bodies listed under Distribution within the proposal document.

The Proposal Document was also published on the Council website:

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/education/EducationConsultations.asp>.

The Proposal Document made clear to consultees that the consultation period would run from Monday 5th January 2015 - Friday 27th February 2015 – a period of 37 school days in total.

The proposal on which consultation took place was that:

An additional primary school should be built in Portlethen in the community of Hillside;

The existing primary school catchment areas within the Portlethen network be amended with effect from 16 August 2016

Education provision in the Portlethen network should be provided at five primary schools with effect from August 2016;

The proposals will only affect new pupils in the network. Current pupils and their siblings could continue to attend their existing school.

- 1.1.1 The proposal document provided a number of options for the catchment area of each of the four existing schools in the Portlethen primary network and for the new school at Hillside. A preferred catchment was also presented for each school. This option was the preference of officers at the start of the process and was based upon feedback from the informal engagement stage and analysis of future pupil projections.

1.2 Educational Benefits Statement

The Proposal Document contained within it an educational benefits statement. That statement drew upon the fact that Portlethen Primary School is operating above core capacity. Whilst the school has some working capacity derived from temporary accommodation and the conversion of GP spaces to classrooms, the continued development of the Hillside area is would exceed the working capacity within the school. The delivery of an additional school with a capacity of 350 pupils would allow children from the Hillside community to be educated in their own neighbourhood, with reduced travelling times. This additional school along with a realignment of catchment areas for the remaining schools in the network would address capacity issues for all schools in the network, and ensure that all children have access to education with equitable space and resources.

2. THE PUBLIC MEETING

2.1 A public meeting was held in Portlethen Academy on Wednesday 28th January 2015. The meeting was reasonably well attended, with around 30 parents, staff, councillors and members of the community present. A full note of the meeting is available on our website (at the link provided in 1.1). There were several comments and questions raised and there was a feeling of overall support for the proposals, particularly in terms of providing a new school.

Many questions and comments were made about the timing of the new school and the previous delays that have occurred. Other comments and questions received concerned:

- Zoning arrangements and roll projections for Banchory Devenick School
- Impact of Chapelton on the roll at Newtonhill School
- Zoning arrangements and roll projections for Portlethen Primary School
- Zoning arrangements and roll projections for Fishermoss School
- Safe routes to school / school transport eligibility
- Early Years provision in Portlethen

2.2 Discussions with Pupils

As part of the consultation process, the head teachers across the Portlethen Network posed a short set of questions to pupils about the proposal to build a new school and rezone the Portlethen Network catchment areas. A summary note of responses from the pupils is appended (Appendix B).

3. WRITTEN RESPONSES

In all, 9 written responses were received by email. An overview of this correspondence is provided below.

- (1) Email from Councillor 31/12/14: commenting that a number of complaints received about the quality of maps in the online survey
- (2) Emails from Stonehaven parent 21/01/15 and 22/01/15 (total 3): asking when a similar review will take place for the Stonehaven network. No comments pertaining to the Portlethen consultation
- (3) Email from Community Council 22/01/15: advising that they would have a representative at the public meeting
- (4) Email from Newtonhill parent 29/01/15 and 19/02/15: asking for the consultation to be wider to incorporate Lairhillock School in the Stonehaven network
- (5) Email from parent 11/02/15: asking that the Downies area be rezoned to Fishermoss from Portlethen Primary School as geographically nearer.

- (6) Email from Community Council 26/02/15: asking that Aberdeenshire Council ensures that Banchory Devenick School remains viable.

In summary, the written responses highlight:

- Concerns with the quality of the online survey
- Support for the proposed changes to the Fishermoss zone
- Concerns for the viability of Banchory Devenick School
- A need for further consultation in the Stonehaven network

3.1 SURVEY MONKEY RESPONSES – shown as a percentage for each question with the total number of responses in brackets. In total 263 people responded to the online survey, although not all completed each question.

Question (Number of responses)		Yes % (Number)	No % (Number)		Not sure /No preference % (Number)
Do you agree there should be a new school at Hillside? (263)		97.34 (256)	0.76 (2)		1.9 (5)
		Yes Preferred Option % (Number)	No – an alternative is better		Not sure /No preference % (Number)
			1 st Option % (Number)	2 nd Option % (Number)	
Do you agree with the preferred catchment area for the school?	New School at Hillside (153)	56.86 (87)	10.46 (16)	3.92 (6)	28.76 (44)
	Banchory Devenick (122)	50.82 (62)	4.1 (5)	2.46 (3)	25.9 (52)
	Fishermoss (119)	49.58 (59)	7.56 (9)	7.56 (9)	35.29 (42)
	Newtonhill (119)	50.42 (60)	8.4 (10)	N/A	41.18 (49)
	Portlethen Primary (127)	81.89 (104)	18.11 (23)	N/A	0 (0)

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED OPTIONS

4.1 Options for the catchment areas of the four schools in the Portlethen network plus options for the zone of the new school were consulted upon. One option for each existing school was to maintain the status quo and not build a new school at Hillside. A preferred option for each school was suggested by officers, and either one or two alternatives were also consulted upon.

Option 1 – Maintain the Status Quo, No new school

The overwhelming view both through the online survey and at the public meeting was that a new school was needed. As the new school would automatically require its own catchment area, maintaining the status quo in terms of catchment areas for the network stops being viable.

Option 2 – Preferred Option (of officers) to create catchment area for new school and all other schools in Portlethen network.

This option was consulted on as the officers' Preferred Option for the Portlethen network as it would address issues raised during the informal engagement stage and would also address capacity issues. The response to this proposal was largely positive.

Alternative Options for each school

New School at Hillside

The first alternative to the preferred option followed postcodes around the Banchory Devenick border and does not include the houses to the east of the A90 at Marywell. This option received some support from consultees.

The second alternative for the new catchment area is the smallest of the 3 proposed zones, again does not include Marywell and leaves more land within the Banchory Devenick zone. This option received minimal support from consultees.

Banchory Devenick School

The first alternative to the preferred option for Banchory Devenick School follows the current postcode boundaries and would result in the smallest catchment area for the school. This option received a small amount of support from consultees.

The second alternative for Banchory Devenick School would make a larger zone and maintain some additional land to the south of the zone. This option would follow the road, but could result in children on opposite sides of the road being zoned to different schools. This option received minimal support from consultees.

Portlethen Primary School

Only one alternative to the preferred option was consulted on for Portlethen Primary School. This alternative maintains the Marywell area within the Portlethen catchment area with the boundary line following the A90, and keeps more of Bruntland Road and Bruntland Court in the zone. This option received some support from consultees, although an overwhelming majority supported the preferred option.

Fishermoss School

The first alternative to the preferred option for Fishermoss School follows postcodes, is generally smaller than the preferred option and maintains the existing Newtonhill boundary. This option received limited support from consultees.

The second alternative for Fishermoss School replicated the changes in the first alternative to the north of the school, but suggested some changes along the Newtonhill boundary. Neither of the alternatives to the preferred option remove the northern most part of the Chapelton development from Fishermoss. This option also received limited support from consultees.

Newtonhill School

Only one alternative to the preferred option was consulted on for Newtonhill School. This proposed some minor changes to the catchment area around Clashfaquhar, but does not incorporate the north of the Chapelton development into the Newtonhill catchment area in order to facilitate future zoning arrangements. The alternative option received some support from consultees.

5. EDUCATION AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO WRITTEN AND ORAL REPRESENTATIONS

5.1 Educational Benefits

For Aberdeenshire Council, Education & Children's Services, educational benefit to pupils affected by the proposal is the key issue. Pupils are already accessing high quality education at schools within the Portlethen network, and parents are happy that their children are receiving quality education in their chosen setting. There are however increasing concerns that the rising pupil population in Portlethen will restrict that education if the status quo continues.

The provision of a fifth primary school in the Portlethen network and corresponding changes to the catchment areas will ensure a more even allocation of school places across the network. This will relieve the physical pressure on those schools which are currently working at, or near to, full capacity, thereby providing better physical environments for learning and teaching.

There would be no requirement for children to move schools, if their catchment area changes. However parents who wish to move their children would be able to do so. This will ensure that any existing friendships and peer groups can be sustained.

5.2 Road Safety

At the public meeting concerns were raised about pupil safety when walking to school, the distances involved and access to school transport. Officers will be working with pupils and school staff to consider safe routes to both the new school, and the current schools, particularly in the areas where the catchment area changes.

Pupils are entitled to free school transport if they live more than two miles away from their zoned school. Pupils living within two miles are not entitled to transport. However if there are available seats on an existing transport contract then parents can purchase a 'privilege seat' for their child at an annual cost of around £100.

Particular concern was raised around transport from Marywell. The development at Marywell is on the cusp of the two mile distance for free school transport entitlement to Portlethen School. Residents in some streets are eligible for free transport whilst others are not. The preferred option of officers is for this area to be rezoned to the new school. This would reduce the distance to school for any future pupils and for any current pupils who choose to move. Until it is known whether any existing pupils from Marywell who are eligible for transport would move to the new school, it is not possible to determine whether privilege spaces would be available for other Marywell children still attending Portlethen Primary School. This will be explored in full once a decision on implementation has been made.

5.3 Timing of the proposal

During the public meeting, in the online survey responses, and also in the weeks following the statutory consultation period, concerns have been raised about the delay in constructing the new school which will impact on the timing for implementing the proposals. Officers are disappointed at the delay in construction and understand that many in the community would have wished for the new school to be completed by August 2016 (if not before). Notwithstanding this, there are sufficient pupil spaces for all children in Portlethen to be educated at schools in the town. There will continue to be sufficient spaces until the new school is delivered.

It has recently been publicised that the opening of the new school has been delayed until a later point in the 2016/17 school session. Officers, in consultation with parents and the wider community, are committed to putting transition arrangements in place for August 2016, to minimise the disruption caused by any delay in project completion.

For example, in August, 2016, there will be an opportunity for the classes for the new school to be formed, and pupils taught by their 'new teacher(s)'. This will take place in Portlethen, with actual location(s) being dependent on actual numbers and further discussion with parents and school staff. The position will be confirmed in sufficient time for parents to make any necessary arrangements. The children will be able to wear the uniform of the new school rather than that of the 'host' school. When the new building is completed, and is ready to open, the teachers will take their classes to the new school in a managed way, with minimal disruption to learning & teaching.

5.4 Sustainability of Banchory Devenick School

Some concern was raised about the future sustainability of Banchory Devenick School with the provision of an additional school at Hillside, and the subsequent reduction of the Banchory Devenick catchment area. Officers anticipate that the school will remain sustainable in the coming years. It is likely there will be a number of out of zone placing requests to the school from existing and new housing being built close to the catchment area. Assuming these requests do not put pressure on the capacity of the school for in zone pupils, then it is probable that they would be approved, subject to them meeting the terms of the Placing Requests Policy.

6 EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT

6.1 The Education Scotland report is reproduced in full (Appendix C).

6.2 Education Scotland acknowledges that the provision of a new school at Hillside and the changes to the catchment areas in the Portlethen network has the potential to be of clear educational benefit to children and young people in the area.

- 6.3 Education Scotland note that parents raised concerns about provision of school transport and safe routes to schools. These points have been addressed in paragraph 5.2 above.
- 6.4 Education Scotland also comment upon concerns about potential delays in the delivery of the new school. These concerns are addressed in paragraph 5.3 above.

7. RURAL SCHOOLS – COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 12 OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

- 7.1 Section 12(3) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires the education authority to have special regard to the following factors when proposing changes to rural schools:

- any viable alternative to the rezoning proposal
- the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal
- the likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements that may be required.

Some of the schools within the Portlethen Network are rural schools. Therefore Aberdeenshire Council has given regard to the above factors.

7.2 Viable Alternatives to Rezoning

An alternative to rezoning was consulted on as part of this proposal, however this alternative would be maintaining the status quo and not building a new school at Hillside. This is not believed to be a viable alternative.

7.3 Effect on the Local Community

The provision of the new school will enhance community facilities in the Portlethen network, and will be closer to the residents in the Banchory Devenick community than those currently available in Portlethen. The creation of a catchment area for the new school will also enable pupil to be taught within their local community.

7.4 Travelling Arrangements

Pupils living rurally within the Portlethen network who are currently entitled to transport will continue to be entitled to transport and will be able to attend their current school until they finish primary.

For pupils attending the new school there may be some properties in the current Banchory Devenick zone that would be eligible for free transport to the new school. The changes to the Newtonhill and Fishermoss boundaries are not expected to affect travelling arrangements for families at this stage.

The journey times for pupils are not expected to increase.

7.5 Financial Implications

The delivery of a new school at Hillside will come at significant cost to the Council. This has been approved by the Policy and Resources committee.

- 7.5.1 There are no anticipated financial implications for school transportation as an outcome of this proposal.

8. **INACCURACIES / ERRORS**

- 8.1 When the consultation was first launched in December 2014, feedback was provided from a local councillor about a number of complaints that had been received regarding the quality of the maps in the online survey. The survey was promptly suspended whilst the maps were replaced. The new maps were available from the second day of the formal consultation period, for a period of 36 days term time.

9. **COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 9(1) OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010 AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 9.1 Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 states that:

After the Education Authority has received HMle's report, the Authority is to review the relevant proposal having regard (in particular) to

- (i) written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the consultation period,*
- (ii) oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting,*
- (iii) HMle's report.*

Officers of the Education Authority have listened carefully to the points made at the public meeting and have considered equally carefully the written representations. The Education Authority's position is set out in this document.

9.2 **Conclusions and Recommendation**

The Council now has 4 broad options for the proposed changes to the Portlethen network;

- (a) Approve the delivery of the new school and adopt the preferred zoning option in its entirety; or
- (b) Approve the delivery of the new school and adopt an alternative zoning option either in full or in part in combination with other options consulted on;
- (c) Amend the proposed options in some way and undertake a further consultation exercise on each new proposal; or
- (d) Abandon the proposal and maintain the status quo

There have been no substantial concerns raised regarding the catchment areas consulted on as the preferred option. There has been limited support for the alternative options consulted upon in the proposal document.

There have been no reasons identified through the consultation process to abandon the whole set of proposals at this stage.

There are no other obvious ways of amending the proposal other than postponing its implementation. Postponing the implementation would have no real benefits.

If the council adopts the proposal it would be on the basis that the educational benefits set out in the proposal document would materialise.

9.2.1 The recommendation of officers is that the Council should approve the delivery of the new school at Hillside, and adopt the catchment areas consulted upon as the 'Preferred Option'.

The map in Appendix A shows an overview of what the Portlethen network would look like if the proposals are adopted.

APPENDIX A – Map of the proposed changes

Portlethen Network Map



APPENDIX B – Note of Meetings with Pupils

Portlethen Consultation – Pupil Questions

The school that children go to in Portlethen and Newtonhill (and the rest of Scotland) is decided by which street and sometimes which house they live in. Each school in Portlethen and Newtonhill has a catchment area. A catchment area or zone is a line on a map which shows the streets and houses that are grouped together for that school.

In Portlethen and Newtonhill the catchment areas for schools have not been looked at for a very long time, and a lot of new houses have been built in this area since then. This means that there are some schools with a lot of new houses in their catchment area, and therefore a lot of new pupils. There are also some areas where there used to be a lot of school pupils coming from the houses in the zone, but those children have grown up and not as many new families with school aged children have moved into those areas.

With the number of new houses that have been built in and around Portlethen, there is a need for a new school which the council is planning to build.

Aberdeenshire Council wants to change the school catchment areas so that all of the schools in Portlethen and Newtonhill have the right number of pupils for the number of classrooms and teachers in the school. This will mean that some of the schools with lots of pupils will have more space, and some of the schools with lots of spare classrooms can have more pupils. Some pupils will be in the zone for the new school.

The council have drawn some new lines on the maps, and are asking parents, teachers and pupils what they think about the changes that they are suggesting, and if the catchment for the new school is in the right place.

Your teacher will be able to show you a map with the changes for your nearest school.

1. Do you think is a need for a new school?
2. Do you think that your school needs to have a different catchment area – are there too few or too many pupils at the moment?
3. Do you think that the changes suggested for your nearest school are a good idea?
4. Do you think that changing the catchment areas for some of the schools that are empty or full is a good idea?
5. Is there anything that worries you about this?
6. Is there anything that interests or excites you about this?
7. Is there anything that you think the council needs to think about if they do this?

Summary of Pupil responses to questions about rezoning							
School	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Banchory Devenick	Split between yes and no. There is space at Banchory Devenick so pupils could come to this school instead of building a new one	More pupils needed at Banchory Devenick – better to have 3 classes than 2.	Mostly Yes	Mostly Yes	Worried about having to move school, the impact on wildlife, worried that the school might be closed.	No	Take care of the environment, make sure there is enough money for resources. Will there be enough people?
Fishermoss	The majority of pupils think a new school is necessary although P4 & 5 pupils less certain.	The majority of pupils in the lower stages thought the school had enough pupils, those in the upper stages could see advantages and disadvantages	Again the pupils in the lower stages saw no need for change, pupils in the upper stages could see both sides	Mostly Yes	Worried about having to move school or friends moving school; the impact on wildlife.	Making new friends	Making sure there is enough space; the cost; what if there are more houses built?
Newtonhill	86% of pupils said yes, 14% said no.	95% of pupils said no with only 5% of pupils agreeing	A more even split, 45% agreed and 55% disagreed	34% agree whilst 66% disagree	Worried about friends moving; too many children leaving because of zone change.	New people coming to the school; making new friends	Making sure the school is big enough; getting teachers and equipment; have a big playground and football pitch at the new school
Portlethen	Only 2 children responded "no" and 6 children responded "don't know". All other children responded "yes"	Around two thirds of pupils thought there were too many pupils at the school.	Mixed from class to class but around two thirds thought the changes were a good idea. One class responded 19 not a good idea and only 2 a good idea – opposing the trend across other classes.	Around four fifths said this is a good idea	Worried about being forced to move school, friends moving and siblings being separated. Houses near to their school being zoned away	More space in this school; pupils from Hillside would be able to walk; new equipment	Improve this school and new school; don't force people to move; better resources; accessibility

Appendix C – Education Scotland Report

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to build a new Hillside School; create a catchment area for the new school and at the same time amend the catchment areas of the other primary schools in the Portlethen area.

1. Introduction

This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to build a new Hillside School; create a catchment area for the new school and at the same time amend the catchment areas of the other primary schools in the Portlethen area. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.1 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the four primary schools affected by the proposal; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.2 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 28 January 2015 in connection with the council's proposals;

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected;
- visit to the proposed site of the new Hillside School; and
- visits to the sites of Banchory–Devenick, Portlethen, Fishermoss and Newtonhill Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 Aberdeenshire Council formally consulted stakeholders between 5 January and 27 February 2015. The council also engaged with local community councils. Prior to the formal consultation, the council had undertaken a pre-consultation exercise involving a number of stakeholders. The results of this exercise helped to inform the formal consultation proposal. Headteachers of the schools affected had consulted with their respective staff, pupils and Parent Councils. A public meeting to discuss the proposal was held on 28 January 2015 in Portlethen Academy. The council received a total of 265 responses to the on-line survey about the proposal.

In addition it received four email responses, two of which pertained to this proposal. There were no other written responses to the consultation proposal. Almost all who responded agreed that there should be a new school at Hillside. The majority of those who responded agreed with the proposed catchment area for the new school, with around a third of those who responded having no preference or being unsure.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to build a new primary school in the Hillside area of Portlethen; to create a catchment area for the new school and at the same time amend the catchment areas of the other primary schools, has the potential to be of clear educational benefit to the children and young people in the area. It also has the potential to bring considerable benefit to the community through, for example, access to the enhanced community and sports facilities and resources, including the early learning and childcare provision the council proposes to develop within the new school.

3.2 The proposal will help to relieve the pressure on the already stretched facilities and resources within Portlethen Primary School, where the school is currently operating above its maximum main school capacity. With the school's roll predicted to rise further over the next few years, a new primary school in the area is much needed. The building of the new school has the potential to provide a high-quality learning environment to support the delivery of a modern curricular experience. The provision of learning spaces fully equipped with modern information and communications technology should support an improved educational experience for all children. The new Hillside School will be built with the capacity to be further extended in the future should the need arise. The provision of a new primary school in the Hillside area will reduce the distance and time some children need to get to school and has the potential to provide improved

opportunities for safe walking routes to enable a greater number of children to walk to school and thereby support their health and wellbeing. It will further help to provide more space for learning and play for children in other schools across the area. It will be important for the council to continue to engage with staff, parents, children and the community in developing and planning the design and layout of the new school.

3.3 The proposal to amend the catchment areas for the other primary schools is also of clear educational benefit since it helps to address some anomalies within the current catchment areas; supports a shorter commute to school for a greater number of children; and helps to balance out pupil numbers more evenly across the other primary school establishments in line with their respective existing capacity. With regard to the proposed preferred catchment areas for the other four schools affected, most respondents agreed with or had no preference or were unsure about the preferred catchment areas for Portlethen and Fishermoss Primary Schools. Almost all respondents agreed with or had no preference or were unsure about the preferred option for Banchory-Devenick and Newtonhill Primary Schools.

3.4 While there was general agreement about the proposed catchment area amendments from the majority of those who responded to the consultation and those who met with HM Inspectors, there were a small number of staff and parents who were not fully convinced by some of the proposed changes. Some parents were unclear about whether the council would continue to provide transport and privileged pick-up points for children who would be zoned for a different school than they attend currently. A few parents expressed a concern that some of the proposed catchment areas meant that routes to school were not safe for some children allied to the lack of a sufficient number of crossing patrol attendants. If the proposal goes ahead the council should provide more information about safe routes to schools and arrangements for traffic management.

3.5 In considering the educational benefits of the proposal, HM Inspectors met with representative groups of parents, staff and children in the schools directly affected by the proposals. All those, who met with HM Inspectors, were positive about the proposal to build a new primary school at Hillside. They expressed some frustration about the delays in getting to this point. They were particularly pleased about the additional provision for early learning and childcare although their view was that this would still not fully meet the demand within the Portlethen network. The council is undertaking a study to determine the extent of early learning and childcare provision the area requires. Parents, staff and children were pleased that the proposal enabled them and any of their siblings to continue their education at their current school should they wish to do so. Several parents and staff considered that the planned timescale for the new build was not realistic and they were concerned that the council did not provide any information regarding planned contingencies should the deadline of August 2016 not be met for the opening of the new school. If the council decides to proceed with the proposal, given the tight timescales, it will need to reassure parents and staff about planned contingencies should the building not be completed by August 2016.

3.6 A few responses raised concerns about the quality and structure of the online survey and the associated maps which they felt made it difficult to express a clear opinion. As a result of this and the fact that the proposal paper did not provide a blank questionnaire response for stakeholders to complete, some stakeholders felt that they had not been suitably consulted. Partly in response to these concerns, the council uploaded improved maps into the survey two days into the consultation period.

3.7 Parents, staff and pupils at Banchory-Devenick Primary School were concerned about the impact of the new school on the long-term viability of their own school and were keen to ensure that the roll was maintained at a level where it could continue to have three classes.

4. Summary

4.1 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to build a new purpose-built primary school in the Hillside area of Portlethen by August 2016, creating an appropriate catchment area for the new school in addition to amending the existing catchment areas of the other primary schools, has the potential to be of significant educational benefit to the children served by schools in the Portlethen network. These benefits will derive largely from the enhanced facilities provided at the new school and the corresponding additional capacity which will help to relieve the pressure on the other schools in the network. The proposal also has the potential to have a positive impact on the local community through the enhanced facilities and resources, including provision for sports and early learning and childcare. The proposal to build a new school has the clear support of parents, staff and children. The proposal to amend the catchment areas of the other schools in the network to the preferred options identified, enjoys the support of the majority of stakeholders.

4.2 During the consultation, some consultees raised a number of concerns in relation to the proposals. These included issues around safe routes to school, school transport, the provision of crossing patrol attendants, the widening and upgrading of roads and the provision of adequate facilities for turning school buses given the change in catchment areas. A few parents were also concerned about the tightness of the timescale in relation to the new build and the possible negative consequences for children, staff and parents if the anticipated date for opening the new school is not met.

4.3 In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to continue to work with all stakeholders and the local community in addressing the concerns identified and in the planning and design of the new school to ensure that the potential educational benefits to be borne by the proposal are realised for all children in the Portlethen network.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
March 2015**