

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES**

Notes of formal consultation meeting for the amalgamation of 3 Early Education and Childcare Centres in Alexandria (Ferryfield, Renton and Vale of Leven)

Held on Tuesday 24 November 2009 at 7.00 pm in St Martin's Primary School

Front table members: Councillor May Smillie, Terry Lanagan, Dave Clarke

Also in attendance and in the audience were Councillors Calvert, Rooney, Bollan, Miller, Union Rep Stewart Paterson and Angela Nicoll, other officers Lynn Townsend and Lillian Goldie, public attendance including teachers approx 50.

TL introduced the meeting giving the background to the decisions made to-date including the informal consultations and the recent report to Council. Council instructed that we re-consult on the proposal to close St Martin's Primary School in June 2010 and also to re-consult on the merger of the 3 nurseries into St Martin's Primary School. It was emphasised that this is a formal consultation but not a statutory consultation in other words if closure of St Martin's Primary were to be approved statutory consultations would then take place.

Question: When were the pre-5 staff consulted?

Answer: At previous informal meetings involving staff and public.

Question: The weather just now is terrible and this is the kind of weather that you would expect primary school children to have to walk in. They will arrive at school wet and tired?

Answer: The Council has a policy regarding travel. Primary school children who live more than one mile away from the school receive free transport. Additionally it is hugely expensive to run a school for only 45 children.

Question: What about health and safety? The main road to St Mary's Primary School is too busy to walk alongside?

Answer: There would be an assessment to ensure that whatever the expected travel route for children is then this would have to be a safe route.

Question: Surely it is cheaper to keep St Martin's Primary open rather than bringing nurseries here and involving expense in adaptations. Where is the money coming from?

Answer: The money for adaptations would come from a Capital Budget and would be a one-off cost.

Question: What if we don't want to send our children to St Mary's Primary?

Answer: If St Martin's Primary were to close then the children would be zoned for either St Mary's Primary School or Renton Primary School. WDC is faced with financial difficulties and we have more schools than many other similar sized local authorities. A school of 45 costs twice as much per pupil as others within WDC.

- Question: Why not keep this school open and add the nurseries as well?
- Answer: This neither addresses the short term issues of funding nor does it address the requirements of modern current education. It also fails to address the regeneration of the Schools' Estate in the Alexandria area over the next 10 to 20 years.
- Question: Why not build the new school at St Mary's Primary first before St Martin's Primary closes?
- Answer: This still means that there are high costs being incurred by WDC in the short term which are unaffordable.
- Question: This issue is all about individuals and practicalities. Travel arrangements need to be in place. There is a particular problem with special needs children walking in poor conditions for the distance that is required. It is unreasonable. We need further detailed information to properly inform this consultation and we need better communication from the authority?
- Answer: This proposal is partly about money but it is also a vision to deliver a better primary and nursery service in Renton and Alexandria.
- Question: Only Ferryfield deals with 0-2 year old. Will families travel the added distance to St Martin's Primary? I don't believe that they will.
- Answer: Noted. It should also be noted that the intention is to provide for families as well as children and this can't be done within the 3 existing nurseries. This is a good opportunity to provide a family support unit as well as an EE&CC.
- Question: I believe there is a real issue about pre-5s where there is no transport provided. Many people in Renton can't afford cars and this is too great a distance to have to walk?
- Answer: Noted.
- Question: Does WDC promote healthy living? If St Martin's Primary closes it is unlikely that the children who currently walk to St Martin's Primary would walk the added distance to St Mary's Primary. They will want transport of some kind to get there, particularly if the route isn't safe?
- Answer: If a route isn't safe measures would be put in place to make a safe route or if this fails we would require to provide transport.
- Question: Would there be a possibility of changing the closing times of the school?
- Answer: This could be considered.
- Question: Why is this the only area where 3 EE&CCs are going into 1 centre?
- Answer: There are 2 other areas where a similar, though not identical, proposal is being made.

Question: I represent Ferryfield EE&CC. The Curriculum for Excellence focuses on EE&CCs in the heart of the community and we use local leisure centres on learning road safety. My concern is that children won't be in the community if they are moved out of central Alexandria into Renton? There are great new links at St Mary's Primary and Ferryfield EE&CC but this will be taken away?

Answer: Noted.

Question: How can you make travelling alongside the fastest flowing river (Leven) safe?

Answer: We require to ensure that there is a shortest safe route to school and there is a strong argument that primary school children or nursery children would not be particularly safe walking alongside an unguarded river. We will not allow kids to be endangered and we will ensure that there is a safe route to both the St Mary's Primary and to the new EE&CC.

Question: In the event of a fire how will people get down from the upper floor in St Martin's Primary because lifts can't be used in the event of a fire?

Answer: We would ensure that a lift is installed and that it would be useable in the event of a fire. Also it must be borne in mind that an emergency exit via a lift will not be necessary for all children. It would be for children with physical disabilities; others could use emergency stairs.

Question: What are the costs to adapt St Martin's Primary and what are the proposed plan?

Answer: Lynn Townsend, Lillian Goldie and Dave Clarke recently inspected the building to consider this. However the Care Commission will require to be consulted before any final plans can be put in place.

Question: What are Lillian Goldie's ideas for the building?

Answer: We need to carry out further assessments. We are only at the feasibility stage. However we do believe we could get good use of the entire building using both the ground floor and the upper floor.

Question: How many years will it take for WDC to realise the cost savings through this exercise?

Answer: A closure of St Martin's Primary and a transfer of the Early Education and Childcare Centres would result in an immediate cost saving and more over subsequent years.

Question: Our EE&CC is family orientated. Other EE&CCs have children with parents who have addictions and we are concerned about them mixing with us?

Answer: The Council prides itself in being inclusive and there is a wide range of families who currently access our buildings and any of these proposals would be no different.

Question: With regard to teachers what would happen to excess staff?

Answer: We would look to redeploy them.

Question: How many staff would be made redundant?

Answer: No staff would be made compulsorily redundant and any excess staff numbers would be dependent on whatever the current staffing situation will be at that time of the closure.

Question: How many children are accommodated currently in the EE&CCs?

Answer: 35, 51 and 40 FTE places totalling 126.

Question: Can't we have the EE&CCs and the school in this building?

Answer: We couldn't use the space efficiently by keeping the school here as well and of course we would still have a very small unsustainable primary school.

Question: The decision seems already to have been taken?

Answer: This same accusation has been made at many consultation meetings over the years an example being the recent PPP schools. Primary schools were originally proposed to merge/co-locate at the proposed Vale of Leven Academy site. However following various consultations this did not happen. (Councillor Smillie then said that she was delighted to hear the strong discussion that was taking place. However she did reiterate that there was no decision made to-date and that Councillors will base their decision on the results of these consultations and the officers' reports).

Question: Is there a higher chance of bullying when the 3 EE&CCs amalgamate?

Answer: No.

Question: Can you not go back and reappraise your proposals?

Answer: Yes that is exactly what we are doing at the moment by re-consulting.

Question: I have a P1 daughter who brings back lots of homework. She brings back words for learning to read and write. When the children move to another school they will find that they are being asked different words and so the children will be disadvantaged?

Answer: There is no question about the quality of education at St Martin's Primary nor indeed at St Mary's Primary. Youngsters are more flexible than we give them credit for sometimes and we do not believe that the children will be disadvantaged by moving to another school.

Question: I want to be able to tell my 4 year old what school she is going to after the summer what can I tell her?

Answer: Currently we cannot give an answer as this will not be clear until 2010. If Council do not choose to close St Martin's Primary at the January 2010 Council then the school will be safe. However Council may instruct statutory consultation with a view to closing St Martin's Primary School and so no final decision on St Martin's Primary School's future would be made until April or May 2010.

Question: How will you fit all the children from the nurseries into St Martin's Primary?

Answer: This is perfectly feasible.

Question: We have concerns of the amalgamation of 3 nurseries into 1. The children's first step into an educational establishment would be frightening because it would be too big for them?

Answer: There are huge differences in sizes and shapes of nurseries across the local authority and indeed across the country but there is no suggestion that any one age range suffers more or less than any others.

Question: I'm concerned that there could be 50 children in any one room. It would be too big?

Answer: It's not necessarily what we would plan. We would need to split and divide certain areas to have fewer children in the area.

Question: You are more concerned about saving money and this is nothing to do with education?

Answer: Absolutely not. If we are spending inefficiently then the costs for education are being wrongly channelled.

Question: Would you be providing courses for parents? This has to be a family centre as well as a nursery?

Answer: Yes we would work closer with families and this is an ideal opportunity to develop such a model.

Question: If you add St Martin's Primary pupils to St Mary's Primary there will be more composite classes. Central Alexandria needs a pre-5 unit we need a commitment that staff will be consulted at the earliest opportunity?

Answer: Parents of St Martin's pupils have said that multi-level composites are not a disadvantage but don't seem to want composite classes at St Mary's Primary. The more pupils who attend a school, the less the likelihood of composite classes.

There being no further questions Councillor Smillie thanked everyone for their attendance and advised that the Member Officer Working Group and Council would consider the points of views raised over tonight and the previous meeting as well as any written correspondence.

Dave Clarke
Head of Service (Resources)
30 November 2009