

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES**

**Notes of formal consultation meeting for closure of St Martin's Primary School
Held on Tuesday 10 November 2009 at 7.00 pm in St Martin's Primary School**

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

Also in attendance and in the audience were Councillors Ronnie McColl, George Black, Geoff Calvert and Jim Bollan. Parent Representative Iain Ellis, Church Representative Ellen McBride. Remainder of gathering including teachers approximately 25.

TL introduced meeting. Read Council minutes instructing need for formal consultation. Noted EE&CC parents not specifically invited. All those present at the meeting agreed that this meeting would go ahead and that a future separate meeting would be held for parents and interested parties of Ferryfield, Renton and Vale of Leven EE&CCs.

TL then outlined history of the previous informal consultations carried out since August 2008 including all factors to be considered. At the previous Alexandria meetings it was clear that the parents of St Martin's Primary School children did not wish the school to close. The Member Officer Working Group had considered all points; however opted to recommend closure on the basis that there were only 45 pupils in the school and that St Mary's Primary School be the proposed receiving school which is only 1 mile from St Martin's Primary. Council had approved the report with exception of Faifley co-locations (dealt with elsewhere) and the closure of St Martin's Primary where instruction was given that further formal but non statutory consultation be carried out. This is the reason that we are here tonight. A report on findings of the consultation together with other recommendations will be tabled at the Council meeting in December 2009 and should Council recommend closure of St Martin's Primary then statutory consultation would be required. There is no suggestion that the proposed closure is a reflection on the quality of education at the school but rather that it costs twice as much per pupil to educate as compared to other WDC schools.

Question: Scottish Government wants smaller class sizes but this proposal contradicts that? What staffing will be given at St Mary's Primary once the children move in from St Martin's Primary?

Answer: Appropriate staffing will be allocated at St Mary's Primary to accommodate all children.

Question: Scottish Government is ploughing millions into banks but not into education. However more houses are being built locally - will this not add to St Martin's Primary future roll?

Answer: Not necessarily. School rolls will continue to fall in the foreseeable future and this is the general trend for all but 2 or 3 Scottish local authorities.

Question: Why not keep the school open ie keep children at St Martin's but bring in the EE&CCs as well (Ferryfield and Renton). Children parents and

public are unhappy with the proposal to close St Martin's Primary coming up year in/ year out?

Answer: We understand the distress that these proposals continue to create; however we still have a need to consider these changes wherever and whenever appropriate.

Question: Why are you proposing to move children from St Martin's which is rated condition B and suitability B into St Mary's Primary School which has a condition B and suitability C rating?

Answer: Query noted however appropriate adaptations will be made to ensure that all children can be accommodated in the school. The long term objective would be to rebuild a new St Mary's Primary School.

Question: We have heard that parents of St Mary's Primary children don't want St Martin's Primary children at the school?

Answer: If Council were to instruct statutory consultation for the closure of St Martin's Primary then the process would include parents of children from both schools.

Question: Will identical facilities be available at St Mary's Primary?

Answer: The 2 schools are different. However parents can be assured that there will be no loss to their children's education.

Question: What would be the cost to the local authority to educate children in their own homes?

Answer: Home education is paid for by parents who choose to educate their children at home.

Question: What would happen to excess teachers and clerical staff if St Martin's were to close?

Answer: Staff would be redeployed or consideration would be given to early retirement.

Question: Would EE&CCs come into St Martin's Primary following the schools move?

Answer: It is proposed that the EE&CCs that would merge within St Martin's Primary would be Ferryfield, Renton and Vale of Leven.

Question: Has there been consideration given to a shared campus between Renton Primary School and St Martin's Primary School?

Answer: Yes but St Martin's Primary is too small a school in roll numbers to be sustainable. Also co-located schools should each be of a reasonable size and wherever possible both should have approximately equal roll numbers.

Question: What is the Catholic church view of this closure?

Answer: Ellen McBride – the Catholic church doesn't like to see schools close and we recognise the education quality being high at St Martin's Primary. It is incumbent on local authorities to provide Catholic education but we recognise that we are in a severe economic situation and we believe that a move of the children to St Mary's Primary would not mean that children would lose out on their education and so therefore the church has no objections.

Question: For 12 years St Martin's Primary has been under threat of closure. Because of that threat many parents have chosen not to send their children to St Martin's Primary.

Answer: The threat to close St Martin's Primary has been real for several years now because of the low roll. The current economic situation is now exacerbating this situation.

Question: There is a possibility that St Mary's Primary School will be rebuilt sometime in the future. Has the St Martin's Primary site been considered for a new build?

Answer: We consider that St Mary's Primary is a more central location for the Catholic children in Alexandria. It should also be noted that the Council policy currently is that if children live more than 1 mile from the shortest safe walking route then they would receive free transport to school. Also we would not expect to be able to get planning permission for a new build school on the St Martin's Primary site because of its proximity to the Diageo maturation plant. Planning conditions historically had no regulatory power to prevent schools being built close to maturation plants although this is now different.

Question: Why not re-prioritise funding from, say, street lighting to go towards running St Martin's Primary School?

Answer: This is a separate budget. The public will get an opportunity to consider budgets at the finance public meetings in January 2010.

Question: Why not consider keeping the primary on the first floor and move the EE&CCs into the ground floor there is plenty of room?

Answer: As previously stated we consider that a school roll of 45 is not sustainable in the current economic conditions.

Question: If you move the EE&CCs into St Martin's Primary there will be accessibility issues. How will they get onto the first floor?

Answer: If the EE&CCs move into St Martin's Primary then we would have to consider installing a lift. Finance for this would come from the sale of the other 2 EE&CCs.

Question: Renton is unique. It is community based and the breakfast clubs are paid by the community. Facilities in Renton are being closed down the community centre has been shut and the library has been shut?

Answer: Yes we recognise this however there are areas of regeneration in Renton as well and this is widely recognised across the authority.

Question: Have you considered any further the Cordale proposal to build a school?

Answer: The Cordale's proposal is to build a non denominational school (Renton Primary School). This doesn't fit in with the Catholic church requirement. It should also be noted that Renton Primary School is not a high priority school for replacement.

Question: I want it noted that the school is a vital part of the local community and must remain open. Why do you continue to recommend school closure? The message is concise and clear. We do not wish a school closure. There will be a deterioration of values by moving the primary out of St Martin's Primary?

Answer: If children were to be moved to St Mary's Primary they would still receive an excellent education.

Question: What about children with additional support needs?

Answer: There is no correlation between the provision of ASN and school size/ population.

Question: How can a bigger school provide the same care as a small school? Why can't Councillors be at the front of this meeting rather than sitting in the audience?

Answer: Members are here to listen and not necessarily to take part.

Councillor Bollan's Statement:

The locals have been trying to save St Martin's Primary for a long time Bollan's and they will continue to save it. I am disappointed with the Catholic Statement church. The stance that they have made shows that they are not in the 21st century. If the building remains then the Council should be able to come up with sustainable and viable solutions by filling it with other services whilst keeping the primary school here. There is a waiting list at Ferryfield and so they could come here. Renton expects a co-located school to be built locally sometime in the future. Cordale Association has asked WDC to specify what we want and they would be prepared to build it.

There being no further questions Councillor Smillie advised that no decision had yet been made on the future of St Martin's Primary School and that the Member Officer Working Group and Council would consider the points of view raised tonight as well as any comments made on the questionnaire which should be filled up and submitted tonight or within 1 week. TL confirmed that if there are people absent from this meeting but who wish to comment they are at liberty to write within the next week or so.

Dave Clarke
Head of Service (Resources)
23 November 2009