

WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL

EDUCATION SERVICES CONSULTATION

**PROPOSAL TO MOTHBALL DECHMONT INFANT SCHOOL AND DECHMONT INFANT
SCHOOL NURSERY CLASS**

NON-STATUTORY CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

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SECTION 1: PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to give information on:

- West Lothian Council's proposal to mothball Dechmont Infant School and Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class for the duration of school year 2024/25.
- The educational benefits to be gained through the implementation of this proposal; and
- How you can give your views and take part in the consultation process.

West Lothian Council believes that thorough and effective consultation will support better outcomes for pupils and their families.

“Mothballing” a school is a temporary closure which does not lead to a requirement for consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. Statutory Guidance on the 2010 Act states that mothballing should not be a way of denying parents access to the statutory consultation process required under the 2010 Act, and that if the majority of parents oppose mothballing, it would be appropriate to move to statutory consultation on closure as soon as possible. For this reason, West Lothian Council will adopt a model of consultation based firmly on the requirements of the 2010 Act, in order to maximise stakeholder confidence in the robust nature of the consultation exercise.

With this in mind, this document is further organised into the following sections:

Section 2 details the proposal and gives the background and rationale.

Section 3 contains the educational benefits statement in relation to the proposal and provides an assessment of the effects of this proposal on the children/young people and their families of the affected school.

Section 4 provides information on the Integrated Impact Assessment undertaken in reference to the proposal. An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is undertaken to ensure that the Council meets its statutory requirement to assess policies and practices and ensure that they meet the legislative requirements in relation to its equality, human rights and socioeconomic obligations.

Section 5 details how West Lothian Council has organised the consultation process and how you can take part and give your views.

SECTION 2: PROPOSAL AND BACKGROUND TO PROPOSAL

2.1 THE PROPOSAL

Dechmont Infant School and Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class will be mothballed for the duration of school year 2024/25.

Children attending Dechmont Infant School will be accommodated within Kirkhill Primary School, Broxburn for the duration of school year 2024/25.

Children resident in the catchment area of Dechmont Infant School and due to commence education in school session 2024/25 will be offered a place at Kirkhill Primary School, Broxburn.

Children eligible for Early Learning and Childcare can choose from available Council-run and partner establishments.

These arrangements will be reviewed annually, with the next review to take place in early 2025 in order to enable re-opening in school year 2025/6 should that be the outcome of the review.

West Lothian Council has already agreed to relocate Dechmont Infant School to become part of the planned new primary school at the Bangour Village development when it opens, currently scheduled for August 2027. Early Learning and Childcare will be offered at the new primary school.

2.2 MOTHBALLING

The option of “mothballing” a school is set within Statutory Guidance to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

- In considering alternatives to closure, authorities may choose to consider “mothballing” a school (or a stage of education or a nursery class at a school). This is a temporary closure which does not lead to a consultation under the 2010 Act. It is only appropriate in very restricted circumstances. When a school roll falls very low, the authority and/or community may consider that the school is not presently viable but do not wish to close it immediately because there is a reasonable prospect that the number of pupils in the area will increase such that it should be re-opened in the future.
- It is vital that this flexibility to close a school for a temporary period is not used to undermine the requirements under the 2010 Act to consult on all school closure proposals. Mothballing is only appropriate for a temporary period and should be subject to regular review, at least annually, against the same requirements which led to the original decision to mothball the school (or stage of education). The maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote. The condition of the school building and cost of maintaining the mothballed provision will also be relevant.
- A school can be mothballed where the school roll has fallen to zero and continues to be zero. It *may* also be appropriate where the roll or potential roll is very low and the authority considers the only other option to be closure. However, in circumstances where a school is mothballed rather than closed and some children and young people

remain in the catchment area, this decision should be taken in consultation with the parents involved, and the possibility should be raised as early as possible, in order to ensure that families can understand the options open to them. Mothballing should not be a way of denying parents access to the statutory consultation process required under the 2010 Act and if the majority of parents oppose mothballing, it would be appropriate to move to statutory consultation on closure as soon as possible.

2.3 BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSAL

Education Provision in Dechmont

Non-denominational primary stage education provision in the Dechmont area currently consists of an infant school in Dechmont that delivers P1- P3 education followed by progression to Kirkhill Primary School in Broxburn for P4- P7 education.

Dechmont Infant School is the only remaining P1-P3 education facility in West Lothian.

Dechmont Infant School and Kirkhill Primary School currently operate under the management of one Headteacher.

As part of the proposed development of the former Bangour Village site, the Education Executive agreed, at its meeting of 17 January 2023, to construct a new non-denominational P1-P7 primary school incorporating Dechmont Infant School to cover both the existing village of Dechmont and the new development site at Bangour Village. The new Primary School is currently scheduled to open in August 2027.

The new Primary School will include Early Learning and Childcare provision.

Current and Anticipated Future Numbers in Attendance at Dechmont Infant School

At the start of 2024, the pupils in attendance at Dechmont Infant School were as follows:

Dechmont Infant School: School Session 2023/24	
Stage	Number of Pupils
P1	0
P2	1
P3	6
Total	7

The school roll was anticipated to fall in School Session 2024/25. Planning forecasts indicated that 4 pupils would be in attendance. At the start of the application process for School Session 2024/25, West Lothian Council has knowledge of six catchment children eligible for P1 in August 2024.

The anticipated roll for School Session 2024/25 was therefore up to a maximum of seven pupils, an anticipated maximum of six in P1 and with only one pupil in P3.

At the start of 2024, draft updated planning forecasts indicate that 1 pupil would be in attendance in session 2024/25.

By the end of the application process on 31 December 2023, there were no applications for the P1 stage at Dechmont Infant School. No pupil was expected to continue in attendance at any other stage.

By the start of 2024, therefore, the anticipated roll for Dechmont Infant School for school session 2024/25 was zero.

West Lothian Council has knowledge of five catchment children eligible for P1 in August 2025, and 4 catchment children eligible for P1 in August 2026. Latest forecast numbers show an anticipated roll of two in School Session 2025/6 and three in School Session 2026/27, after which numbers are anticipated to rise as a result of the proposed development at Bangour Village. This information will be considered as part of the proposed annual review, along with updated information regarding potential applicants for Early learning and Childcare.

Current and Anticipated Future Numbers in Attendance at Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class

The anticipated roll at Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class reduced to two in August 2021. Following discussion between the Headteacher and the parents/carers of the two children, they decided that they did not want their children to attend a provision with such limited numbers, and they were offered placements at other available provisions. There were no children on the roll for the School Session 2022/23, and no staffing allocated to the provision, and this also remains the position for the current school session.

West Lothian Council has knowledge of one child resident in the catchment area of Dechmont Infant School who is eligible to commence Early Learning and Childcare in April 2024, and a further four children eligible to commence Early Learning and Childcare in School Session 2024/25. The closing date for applications for April 2024 was 15 November 2023 and no applications for Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class have been received. The closing date for the August 2024 and January 2025 intakes is 15 March 2024. No first choice applications have been received at present.

Annual Review

Should the decision be taken to mothball Dechmont Infant School and Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class this decision will be reviewed annually, with the next review to be reported to the Education PDSP and Education Executive early in 2025, taking account of the outcome of application process for Primary One places and Early Learning and Childcare,

If the mothballing is confirmed and continued for School Session 2025/26, a further review will be reported to the Education PDSP and Education Executive early in 2026 to consider confirming and continuing the mothballing for School Session 2026/27.

The new Primary School, with Early Learning and Childcare provision, is currently scheduled to open in August 2027.

SECTION 3. THE EDUCATION BENEFITS STATEMENT AND OPTIONS APPRAISAL

3.1 EDUCATION BENEFITS STATEMENT

Although a proposal to mothball a school is not subject to the requirement to consult in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, an Educational Benefits Statement has been prepared having regard to the Guidance and Explanatory Notes published by the Scottish Government.

Curriculum For Excellence

Curriculum for Excellence is the national curriculum of experiences and outcomes for all pupils, 3-18 years. The national guidance from Education Scotland encourages education authorities to ensure that curricular provisions offer opportunities for learners to achieve across all curricular areas and develop skills, attributes and capabilities through courses aligned with the key principles of Curriculum for Excellence: challenge and enjoyment, breadth, progression, depth, personalisation and choice, coherence and relevance.

A key educational advantage of delivery of P1-P7 education in a single school environment is that Kirkhill Primary School is fully equipped to deliver the full breadth of Curriculum for Excellence. This will allow opportunity for the engagement of creative teaching and learning approaches that broaden scope for attainment and achievement. The Education Executive agreed, at its meeting of 17 January 2023, that this benefit will also be delivered by the new primary school in Bangour Village, which is currently scheduled to open in August 2027.

Transition

Pupils in attendance at Dechmont Infant School transition, under current arrangements, to Kirkhill Primary School at the P4 stage. No change to these formal arrangements will result from a decision to mothball Dechmont Infant School for the duration of school year 2024/5, but temporary arrangements would be facilitated by the strong existing connection between the two schools, including their management by a single Headteacher. The early integration of children from Dechmont Infant School into Kirkhill Primary School provides an opportunity for pupils from this school to prepare for the transition to the new primary school in Bangour Village which is currently scheduled to open in August 2027 in the company of other pupils including those from other stages of education who will have the opportunity to transition to that new school.

Admission

There will be no impact to admission arrangement or catchment areas resulting from a decision to mothball Dechmont Infant School for the duration of school year 2024/25. The Education Executive, at its meeting of 17 January 2023, agreed catchment and admission arrangements by the new primary school in Bangour Village, which is currently scheduled to open in August 2027.

School Capacity

Kirkhill Primary school has a capacity of 306, and a forecast roll of 253 in school year 2024/25. Kirkhill Primary School therefore has sufficient capacity to accommodate all children resident within the catchment area of Dechmont Infant School.

School Management/Staff Teams

West Lothian Council operates a budget model of calculating primary teacher numbers based on overall pupil numbers. The proposed mothballing of Dechmont Infant School will not, therefore, have any impact on total teacher numbers within the primary sector in West Lothian Council. The Council also operates an established methodology of allocating staff to individual schools based on the anticipated staff structure, in order to ensure efficient and effective spread of staff to support learning across all schools.

It is normal for staff numbers to vary at each school, each year, as a result of these established processes. Any amendments to staffing will be undertaken in accordance with established Council policies on recruitment and transfer.

School Transport

There are no amendments to existing school transport policy as a result of the proposals. Any requests for school transport provisions will be considered in accordance with West Lothian Council's Policy on Home to School Transport, which provides free home to school transport for pupils living 1.5 miles or more from their catchment school, or where no suitable walking route to their catchment school exists. Pupils in the P1-3 stages resident in the catchment area of Dechmont Infant School will be treated as catchment for Kirkhill Primary School for the duration of any agreed period of mothballing for the purposes of determining entitlement to transport.

School Grounds/Outdoor Learning/Playground

The school grounds and playground areas at Kirkhill Primary School offer ample scope for delivery of the outdoor classroom for the small number of additional children who would attend as a result of the proposal. Car parking and pupil drop off / uplift areas are sufficient to ensure safe and efficient traffic flow.

Breakfast / School Clubs

The Breakfast Clubs at Kirkhill Primary School will provide pupils with a healthy breakfast and offer opportunity to sample and develop preferences for healthy options. The aim of the club is to establish positive relationships at the start of the school day and improve attitude, behaviours and motivation to learn. Pupils in attendance at Kirkhill Primary School will be invited to take part in a wide range of extracurricular activities. Activities will be designed to offer opportunity to learn new skills and enhance experiences. Participation in these activities promotes and encourages social interaction, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

Parental Involvement

At present, parents and carers at Dechmont Infant School are an integral part of the school community with their contributions and working partnerships being considered key to the success of the school. West Lothian Council does not foresee any impact to existing opportunities for parental involvement and engagement as a result of the proposal. Opportunities for Parental Involvement are also well established at Kirkhill Primary School, which aims to deliver a welcoming school that is inclusive for all parents, carers, pupils and staff.

Community Links

Community interaction encourages a welcoming ethos, provides pupils with valuable life and interpersonal skills and promotes acknowledgement and respect for the local area.

Opportunities for community involvement are already well established at Kirkhill Primary School, and all external links that Dechmont Infant School has established will remain.

Benefits for Any Other School Users

Dechmont Memorial Hall currently has nine regular lets including a weekly church usage and councillors' surgeries. It has a separate management committee which operates as a charity.

It is proposed that community access to the Dechmont Memorial Hall will continue to operate during any agreed period of mothballing.

3.2 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

In formulating the proposal two options were considered:

- Taking no action.
- Mothballing Dechmont Infant School for the duration of school year 2024/25.

The options were assessed taking account of the professional knowledge and experience of education officers with responsibility for delivering the curriculum.

The factors outlined in the statement of educational benefit were considered, as set out above.

The impact of the falling roll was considered.

Discussion took place with the school's Headteacher and Education Officer. Professional officers agreed that delivering a curriculum for seven children across two year groups presented a challenge to the school in the current year, and anticipated a greater challenge with a potentially smaller group including only one child in P3 separated by two stages from the small number of children anticipated to enter P1. They agreed that opportunities for collaboration were limited, and this was likely to be true particularly in relation to the single child at the P3 stage. They agreed that the opportunities and experiences that could be offered were restricted or made more difficult by the current numbers and that this would be exacerbated by the potential for a smaller year group in School Session 2024/5, including only one child at P3. They agreed that opportunities for social interaction were limited, and that this was likely to be true particularly for the one child at the P3 stage.

The likely pattern of application and attendance of the 6 catchment children eligible for P1 in August 2024 was considered, including consideration of their attendance at Early Learning and Childcare and the attendance of their siblings.

Experience at Dechmont Infant School has shown that not all children resident in the catchment area attend the school. Historic data shows that in August 2023, there were three children resident within the catchment area, but that none attend Dechmont Infant School.

Experience in managing pre-school and primary school placements has shown that the early learning and childcare attended is a driver of choice of primary school due to factors such as friendships made by children, familiarity with facilities and staff for both children and parents/carers, established routines for parents/carers for drop of and collection, and childcare associated with the location. Experience has also shown that attendance of siblings is a driver

of choice of school. Officers considered the likely impact of the current attendance at Early Learning and Childcare, and the attendance of siblings where applicable on the likely pattern of choice of P1 placement for the six children eligible for P1 in School Session 2024/25.

Experience has shown an increase in the percentage of children whose parents/carers request an additional year of Early Learning and Childcare. All Early Learning and Childcare is non-denominational, and so no information is held on the denomination of children attending Early Learning and Childcare. A proportion of children resident in the catchment area can be expected to choose denominational education.

In preparing the proposal, officers considered these factors, and concluded that the actual number of applications for Dechmont Infant School was likely to be less than six, in line with Planning forecasts, as not all parents/carers of eligible children would apply to the school. Information in respect of the actual intentions of the parents/carers was also considered, as these became clear during the application process and through informal discussions between parents/carers and Headteachers.

The impact of increased travel was considered. This would be managed in terms of the Council's policy on Home to School Transport which provides free home to school transport for pupils living 1.5 miles or more from their catchment school, or where no suitable walking route to their catchment school exists. Children resident in the catchment area of Dechmont Infant School at the P4-7 stages currently travel to Kirkhill Primary School, Broxburn, with transport assistance in line with Council policy. Children resident in the catchment area of Dechmont Infant School at the Early Learning and Childcare stages currently travel to attend Early Learning and Childcare at a variety of local venues, without transport assistance. Families resident within the catchment area of Dechmont Infant School currently have experience of travelling out with Dechmont to access Early Learning and Childcare and school education.

Financial implications did not feature as a factor in the options appraisal.

West Lothian Council has not identified any revenue budget reduction to be achieved through school closure, whether temporary or permanent.

3.3 CONCLUSION

Assessment of educational benefit and options commenced at a time before it was anticipated that the school roll would fall to zero.

Taking account of the factors outlined in the statement of educational benefit and those considered during the options appraisal, officers concluded that it was in the overall interests of the children eligible to, and expressing a desire to, attend Dechmont Infant School and Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class in School Session 2024/25 to propose that the school be mothballed for the duration of School Session 2024/25; and that taking no action would lead to a less optimal educational experience for these children.

At present West Lothian Council has no knowledge of any applicants for entry into any stage at Dechmont Infant School for Session 2024/5, but this conclusion will continue to apply should any application be received up until the date that a decision is taken on mothballing the school.

SECTION 4: INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

To meet statutory equality duties, the Council conducts an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) to critically assess policies and practices and ensure compliance with all legislative requirements.

The aim of an IIA is to examine policies and practices in a structured way taking account of equality, human rights and socioeconomic disadvantage (poverty) implications when making decisions, ensuring the impact within the community is recognised and addressed accordingly. IIA screening is completed using the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment Toolkit and allows the Authority to recognise positive steps it can take to promote fairness and equality of opportunity for all.

As part of the consultation process the Council will consult with a wide range of stakeholders, staff, parents/carers and young people and will welcome and address comments on the IIA process.

The outcome of the Integrated Impact Assessment will inform the Final Consultation Report and the Council's consideration of the proposed changes prior to reaching a decision on whether they should be implemented.

SECTION 5: CONSULTATION PROCESS AND HOW TO HAVE YOUR SAY

The proposal to mothball Dechmont Infant School and Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class for the duration of school session 2024/25 does not lead to a requirement for consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. West Lothian Council will, however, adopt a model of consultation based on the requirements of the 2010 Act, in order to maximise stakeholder confidence in the robust nature of the consultation exercise.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, sets out statutory consultees are prescribed as follows:

1. the Parent Council or Combined Parent Council of any affected school
2. the parents of the pupils at any affected school
3. the parents of any children expected by the education authority to attend any affected school within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper
4. the pupils at any affected school (in so far as the education authority considers them to be of a suitable age and maturity)
5. the staff (teaching and other) at any affected school
6. any trade union which appears to the education authority to be representative of the persons mentioned in bullet point above
7. the community council (if any)
8. the community planning partnership (within the meaning of section 4(5) of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 for the area the local authority in which any affected school is situated.
9. any other community planning partnership that the education authority considers relevant
10. any other education authority that the education authority considers relevant
11. any other users of any affected school that the education authority considers relevant
12. in relation to any relevant proposal which affects a denominational school, the Church, Denominational Body or Scottish Hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

West Lothian Council has agreed to consult consultees 1-8 and 11 in relation to the proposal to mothball Dechmont Infant School for the duration of school session 2024/25.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 states that statutory consultation periods should last a minimum of six weeks continuous and incorporate a minimum of 30 school days (excluding school holidays). The consultation period for this proposal will run from Monday 18 March 2024 until Friday 17 May 2024.

The consultation paper will be made available for reference electronically and in paper format.

A Public Meeting will be held in respect of the proposal as follows:

- Dechmont Infant School on Monday 25 March 2024 at 18.00

This meeting will give interested parties a formal opportunity to express their views. Representatives of the Council will be present at the meetings to outline the proposals, facilitate discussions and answer questions.

The Council website will contain information on the consultation. The web address is: www.westlothian.gov.uk/education

During the consultation period any views on this proposal should be sent in writing to the address given below: Education Consultations, Education Services, Civic Centre, Howden Road South, EH54 6FF

Responses can also be made by e-mail to Education.Consultation@westlothian.gov.uk

All responses to be received by no later than 5.00pm 17 May 2024.

Consultation Timeline:

Following the end of the Consultation period West Lothian Council will consider a report detailing all findings pertaining to the Consultation period. As the proposal to mothball Dechmont Infant School for the duration of school year 2024/5 does not lead to a requirement for consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, no report will be submitted to Education Scotland.

All written and oral comments received during the consultation process are recorded and represented in a Final Consultation Report, along with the Council's response to those comments.

West Lothian Council will not make any decisions, or put any changes into effect until the Final Consultation Report has been concluded, published and subsequently presented to the Education Executive on 25 June 2024.

Date	Event	Description
N/A	Education PDSP	The proposal has been submitted directly to the Education Executive in order to allow presentation of the most up to date information regarding applications for Early Learning and Childcare (closing date 15 March 2024), and sufficient time to conduct a consultation and inform parents/carers before the end of School Session 2023/24.
12 March 2024	Education Executive	Meeting to discuss proposal and agree continuation to consultation phase
18 March 2024	Start of Consultation	Beginning of public consultation (6 continuous weeks including 30 school days)
25 March 2024	Public Meeting Public	Meeting to discuss proposal
17 May 2024	End of consultation	End of public consultation at 5.00pm
4 June 2024	Publication of final consultation report	A minimum of three weeks after publication of consultation report, Authority will make final decision.
25 June 2024	Education Executive meeting	Education Executive Meeting