

Councillors are being presented with false information, say Cullivoe parents

Parents at the Cullivoe Primary School in Yell have been left feeling let down by Shetland Islands Council officials, after it emerged that a report being presented to Councillors next week contains [false information](#) in favour of ‘mothballing’ the school.

Not only that, but other information and statistics appear to have been cherry picked in order to make sure that Cullivoe Primary meets the SIC’s new criteria for mothballing schools – whilst other information that might remove Cullivoe from consideration has been omitted.

The Cullivoe Parent Council is extremely disappointed to have heard nothing of substance from SIC education officials since November, when a meeting was arranged – but only at parents’ insistence. All attempts at meaningful correspondence since then have so far been ignored by both officials and relevant Councillors alike – in some cases without even acknowledgement.

The three particular issues with the way this mothballing process has been conducted are outlined below:

- The school roll figures due to be provided to Councillors next week are wrong, with a total of **8** pupils now enrolled at Cullivoe Primary School and a further increase projected within this year. This, combined with reserve places, means Cullivoe Primary meets the SIC’s 20% capacity trigger for considering if a school should be mothballed. SIC education officials are well aware of the recent school roll increases, plus further projected increases, and so must have made a conscious decision to present false/outdated figures to Councillors in their upcoming report.
- Technically, the capacity of Cullivoe Primary has been assessed to be a maximum of 45 pupils, which is patently unfeasible for a modern school setting to anyone who has ever set foot within the school building. This has been calculated by the SIC using outdated 1967 guidelines, based on the total toilet provision within the school. However, the same legislation also covers sink provision – which gives Cullivoe Primary a much smaller total capacity, and therefore would remove it from mothballing considerations. SIC officials appear to have ignored sink provision requirements in their report, and chosen to cherry-pick toilet provision, which leads to an inflated total capacity for the school.
- At the meeting with SIC education officials in November 2023, parents were told (incorrectly, we hope) that council officers had the delegated authority to mothball our school without the approval of elected Councillors - or even

consultation with the school community. The issues and queries raised during that meeting continue to go unanswered, and parents heard nothing of substance from officials until this week (27th February 2024) when we were informed, out of the blue, that the mothballing process was underway.

Not once have we received adequate, timely or helpful responses from the relevant SIC officers - and now face a situation where the future of our school will be determined by Councillors working off of incorrect information which appears to have been carefully curated to make the case for mothballing Cullivoe Primary School. We feel that there are serious questions to be asked of this process, and hope that elected members will demand answers to these questions on our behalf.

Alan Keith, chair of the Cullivoe Parent Council, says:

“By any objective assessment of all the facts, we are confident that Cullivoe Primary does not fall under the council’s minimum requirements for ‘mothballing’ – and will not for many years. I urge all of Shetland’s Councillors to show concern at the way this process has been carried out, and to carefully interrogate the information being provided to them - which we know to be factually inaccurate and out of date. It begs the question why Councillors’ time, and officials’ efforts, are being wasted on a flawed proposal and unnecessary process.

“We consider ‘mothballing’ to be school closure in all but name: and the bare minimum we expect is that Councillors consider accurate, up to date, and properly balanced information before potentially deciding to close the heart and soul of our community.

“The council will claim that this is just the start of a process, and that the community will be consulted in due course, but we have already lost faith in the fairness of this process - having been largely ignored so far.”

Kate Lonsdale, secretary for the Cullivoe Parent Council, says:

“Parents in Cullivoe have been forced to escalate these concerns to more senior figures at Shetland Islands Council, and – given the absence of any meaningful response from education officials, plus desperately short timescales – have taken the decision to publicly air their frustration.

“Successive councils have told us that schools will not be closed without a community’s consent, or that ‘mothballing’ will be [guided by a community’s point of view](#). We hope it will not get to that stage, but North Yell will marshal all of the evidence, arguments and wholesale community support for our school in order to defend our future.”

Note to Editors

Monday's meeting of the SIC's Education & Families Committee (4th March 2024) will be asked to “**note** the progress being made on the consultation around mothballing with school communities of Skeld Primary School and Cullivoe Primary School”.

<https://coins.shetland.gov.uk/viewDoc.asp?c=e%97%9Df%96o%7F%88>

People in North Yell have invested their own time and money into improving Cullivoe Primary School, saving the SIC money in the process. This was most evident through the notably innovative partnership of 2014/15 to renovate the old school hoose (adjoined to the primary school). The SIC agreed to supply materials and the community took on to complete the labour – in order to bring the building back into use as much needed extra storage and meeting space for our relatively small school building. However, this huge community effort – lauded by the SIC at the time – would now be utterly negated by any ‘mothballing’ of Cullivoe Primary. This is considered to be an extra ‘kick in the teeth’ to Cullivoe’s committed school parents and community supporters.