

SPSO decision report

Case: 201301098, East Dunbartonshire Council
Sector: local government
Subject: primary school
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

The council carried out an informal consultation exercise in respect of their schools, looking at a number of options, including possible closures and mergers. Ms C complained that the consultation included her local rural primary school. She said that there was an agreed moratorium (temporary delay) on proceeding with statutory consultations for the closure of such schools and, because of this and a recent legal case, she complained it was not appropriate for the school to be included. She also raised concerns that the council did not consult appropriately with the community and failed to highlight the potential loss of grant funding and increased transport costs when assessing the options.

We noted that the moratorium was in place while the commission for the delivery of rural education carried out a review on the closure of rural schools. However, this related specifically to progressing closures through the formal statutory consultation stage, which was not the case here. The council exercise was a review of their whole school estate and we did not consider it unreasonable that they included this school in that. Any eventual decision to proceed with closure, once the implications of the commission's report and the legal case had been considered, would still need to be taken through the statutory consultation process. Our investigation found that the council's consultation on the future of the school estate was comprehensive, and involved stakeholders such as parent councils as well as surveying the opinions of the general public. We also considered the financial information provided by officers when considering the options, but found no evidence to suggest that they misrepresented the financial case for this school. The impact of any decision on grant funding was clearly detailed in reports and they had included transport costs when assessing the overall potential cost implications.

As we found no evidence to suggest that the council's informal consultation was unreasonable, that the consultation exercise was flawed or that the financial implications for the school were misrepresented, we did not uphold Ms C's complaints.