Dear Dr Johnston

Petition PE 955 : Catriona Lessani on behalf of the Parents Action Group of St Kevin's Primary School

1. General background

1.1 In 2002 the council agreed the development of Education 2010, a major school refurbishment programme, partly funded by the Scottish Executive’s PPP initiative. It included improvements to the two primary schools in Bargeddie. The initial plan was to locate St Kevin’s Primary School and Bargeddie Primary School in a refurbished St Kevin’s building.

1.2 In April 2004 Balfour Beatty was selected as the contractor for the PPP project. Its bid included a total rebuilding of St Kevin’s on a shared campus to accommodate both schools. To ensure the best possible design for the schools and in the interests of pupil safety, the existing St Kevin’s building had to be vacated and the school decanted to another location during the building period.

1.3 As part of the decision making process the council consulted on both of these decisions, as follows

(1) September - December 2002 : the redevelopment of the existing St Kevin’s Primary School on a shared campus with Bargeddie Primary School

(2) November 2005 - January 2006 : the temporary relocation of St Kevin’s Primary School during the rebuilding of the two new schools

1.4 The consultation procedures followed on both occasions were comprehensive and more than met the requirements of the Education (Publication and Consultation etc) (Scotland) Regulations 1981 and subsequent amendments, and the advice in the Scottish Executive Education Department Circular 2/2004.

2. The 2002 Consultation

2.1 The education committee approved the release of a consultation paper on September 9 2002.

2.2 The education department arranged an extensive process to consult those potentially affected by the proposed changes in provision. The proposals were advertised in the national and local press, and copies of the consultation document were made available to interested parties, including parents, school boards, elected members, unions and school staff. Written comments on the proposals were invited.
2.3 Responses relating to the general Education 2010 proposals including the St Kevin's Primary School and Bargeddie Primary School proposals were received from the Bishop of Motherwell, the Church of Scotland (Hamilton Presbytery), NHS Lanarkshire, EIS North Lanarkshire Association, North Lanarkshire NAS/UWT, Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire HAS and the MSP for Coatbridge and Chryston.

2.4 64 individual public responses specific to the Bargeddie proposals were received.

2.5 All the submissions were made available for public reference in the Education Department.

2.6 The results of the consultation were considered by the education committee on 17 December 2002. In a formal report the views expressed in the consultation were described and analysed. The individual responses were made available to members. The decision taken was to proceed with the proposal.

3. The 2005-6 Consultation

3.1 The education committee considered and approved the release of a consultation paper on 9 November 2005.

3.2 Again, the proposals were advertised in the national and local press and copies of the documents were issued to interested parties, including parents, school boards, elected members, union and school staff. Written comments on the proposals were invited.

3.3 Ten written responses to the consultation were received. In addition, a petition with 39 individual signatures and 19 petition letters were submitted. The petition was reported to the education committee.

3.4 All submissions received were made available for public reference in the education department.

3.5 The results of the consultation were considered by the education committee on 18th January 2006. In a formal report the views expressed in the consultation were described and analysed. The individual responses were made available to members.

3.6 Significantly, particular attention was given in the report to the following two issues raised in the consultation:

(1) Concerns associated with travel to the decant school (the St James PS building in Coatbridge). In response, the education department proposed changes to the travel arrangements and gave assurances that the existing range of extra-curricular activities and meetings could be catered for locally. However, it is worth noting that the travel distance between St Kevin's Primary School and the St James' building is two miles only.

(2) The proposal of a temporary huttoon school in Bargeddie village. This proposal raised by a parents' group was reported to the education committee. The committee decided to reject it and to proceed with the decant on educational and financial grounds. Firstly, the capital investment would be nearly £500,000, significantly greater than the cost of transport to the St James' building then estimated at £35,000. Secondly, the educational opportunities which could be provided would be very restricted, significantly inferior to the facilities available in the St James' building. For example, there would be no internal or external PE facilities and no general purpose education spaces. The dining facilities would be very limited. A lead-in period of six months would be required to allow tendering, planning procedures, site preparation and construction. As a result the PPP building programme would be disrupted with potential cost implications for the council.

4. Subsequent developments
4.1 Following the January 2006 decision by the education committee a parents action group associated with St Kevin's Primary School continued to argue in favour of the temporary huttered school in the village. The action taken included the occupation of the school on three occasions, the removal of children from the building during the school day for a demonstration march despite attempts by the head teacher to prevent it. In addition, the council's legal services made representations to Google to close a website which carried materials from the St Kevin's action which were highly defamatory to the Bishop of Motherwell, council members, council staff and the St Kevin's head teacher.

4.2 The council continued to respond to representations made by the group in the post-January period including the convening of meetings between the group and senior members of the council. As a result, the date of decanting St Kevin's to the temporary provision in the St James building was delayed until the beginning of school session 2006/07.

5. Specific points attached to the petition

5.1 The following responses to the additional information included in the petition may be helpful.

(1) the proposal to develop a shared campus was widely publicised as detailed above.

(2) there was no commitment by the council to set up individual school 'focus groups'

(3) public meetings were held as part of most formal consultations, particularly where major changes were proposed. A meeting was offered to the St Kevin's school board in December 2005 but was not taken up.

(4) the children of St Kevin's were consulted. Indeed, responses to the 2002 proposals were received from 49 pupils.

(5) all submissions to the consultations and petitions were considered by the education committee.

(6) the council consider that both members and officers have been very responsive to the action group representations, sometimes in the face of some very provocative behaviour.

6. Conclusion

6.1 It is considered that the existing consultation regulations relating to changes in school provision are operating effectively, allowing both the council to discharge its responsibilities and giving interest groups the opportunity to express their views. In relation to the decisions taken on St Kevin's Primary School, it is considered that the procedures followed were fully in accordance with the existing Regulations.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive