# Scottish councils face backlash over mothballing nurseries without community consultation



In recent years, the practice of mothballing nurseries has come under increasing scrutiny in Scotland, as councils appear to indulge in decisions that skirt established legal frameworks meant to protect community voices. These frameworks are designed to ensure that local authorities consider the views of parents regarding the closure of educational institutions. Despite this, many councils have adopted strategies that effectively silence these voices, particularly in the case of nursery closures.

Official statutory guidance states that mothballing—a temporary measure intended to preserve facilities until they are viable again—should only be considered when the roll has fallen to near zero. This approach is intended to keep facilities in a state of readiness for reopening if demand returns. However, numerous councils have interpreted this guidance differently, often citing cost-saving measures as justification for their actions. For example, some councils have delegated the authority to mothball nurseries to unelected officers, enabling decisions to proceed without direct community or parental consultation.

A notable case occurred in Dumfries and Galloway, where plans to mothball Drummore Early Learning Centre were pushed through without proper consultation with parents. Families were informed of the decision only after it had been made, prompting elected councillors to intervene and block the closure. This highlights the disconnection that can exist between local authorities and the communities they serve. In Scottish Borders, a similar situation arose when the council attempted to temporarily close multiple nurseries under the guise of a procedural change with the Care Inspectorate, a move met with significant parental opposition.

The emotional weight of these decisions is reflected in the response from local residents. In Aberdeenshire, a proposal to mothball Glass Nursery drew over 400 signatures on a petition against the plan. Parents expressed concerns about the implications for both the nursery itself and the future of the village primary school. The council contended that the move was intended to safeguard the 'educational and social wellbeing' of students, yet parents remained sceptical, concerned that the decision overlooked the nursery's integral role in the community.

Political reactions to these closures have also been pronounced, with various representatives voicing their opposition. Colin Smyth, MSP for South Scotland, described Scottish Borders Council's proposal to mothball eleven early learning centres as a "devastating blow" to affected communities. He lambasted the hasty consultation processes that accompanied such decisions, underscoring the need for a more respectful dialogue with parents and stakeholders.

Significantly, in May 2025, Scottish Borders Council responded to public outcry by reversing its decision to close five rural nurseries, acknowledging the necessity of community engagement in shaping educational services. Plans were established to explore alternative models that could maintain educational access without resorting to mothballing. This shift demonstrates the potential impact of collective parental advocacy and the importance of responsive governance in local education matters.

Despite these pushbacks, the ongoing ambiguity surrounding the mothballing of nurseries raises concerns about the wider implications for early years education in Scotland. The persistent funding gaps faced by local councils further complicate the issue, spawning a climate in which educational facilities are viewed as expendable rather than essential components of community infrastructure. Critics argue that such measures not only undermine parental rights but also threaten the very fabric of rural communities, which often rely heavily on local educational establishments.

As these issues continue to unfurl, the responsibility remains with local authorities to adhere to the regulations designed to protect families and communities. However, as the trend of mothballing becomes more common, parents are left questioning what recourse they have when councils seemingly disregard statutory guidance. The prevailing advice from government officials has been to engage directly with local councils, a response that raises further questions about accountability and transparency when serious breaches occur.

Amidst this complexity, the future of early years education in Scotland underscores the critical need for robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, ensuring that the rights of families are at the forefront of any decisions regarding nursery provision. The path forward may require not just adherence to existing guidelines but also a reimagining of how local authorities engage with the communities they serve, reaffirming the idea that early learning centres are not merely operational entities, but vital lifelines for families and communities.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 4, 5
2. Paragraph 5
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraphs 5, 6
6. Paragraphs 2, 6
7. Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25184691.councils-use-mothballing-policies-silence-parents/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.grampianonline.co.uk/news/more-than-400-sign-petition-against-short-sighted-plan-to-380063/> - In April 2025, Aberdeenshire Council announced plans to 'mothball' Glass Nursery, a rural early learning centre, leading to over 400 residents signing a petition against the decision. Parents expressed concerns that the closure would negatively impact the community and the future of the village primary school. The council cited undercapacity as the reason for the closure, but parents questioned the decision, emphasizing the nursery's importance to the local area. The council stated that the decision was made to safeguard the 'educational and social wellbeing' of the pupils.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/border/2025-05-09/five-nurseries-saved-from-closure-following-outcry-from-parents> - In May 2025, following significant parental opposition, Scottish Borders Council reversed its decision to temporarily close five rural nurseries: Cockburnspath, Ednam, Oxton, Yetholm, and Walkerburn. The council acknowledged the reduction in the number of children using the facilities and the need to save money but decided to reconsider its plans after protests from parents. The council planned to explore alternative models to keep early years education accessible across the area, with a special meeting scheduled to discuss these options.
4. <https://www.colinsmythmsp.com/latest-news/2025/04/14/borders-council-plans-to-mothball-nurseries-a-devastating-blow-to-communities-affected-says-msp/> - In April 2025, South Scotland Labour MSP Colin Smyth criticized Scottish Borders Council's proposal to 'mothball' eleven Early Learning Centres, including Cockburnspath, citing it as a 'devastating blow' to the affected communities. The council's plan involved a short consultation period and registering the nurseries as 'inactive' with the Care Inspectorate, allowing them to close for 12 months without canceling their registration. Smyth expressed concerns over the process and the potential impact on rural communities, urging the council to reconsider its approach.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/border/2025-05-05/politicians-welcome-councils-u-turn-on-closure-of-nurseries> - In May 2025, politicians from the Scottish Borders welcomed the council's decision to revisit its plans to close five rural nurseries. The council agreed to explore alternative models to keep early years education accessible in rural communities, following significant parental opposition and protests. The special council meeting aimed to discuss different proposed solutions to nursery closures, with a focus on maintaining services for families in rural areas.
6. <https://education-property.com/news/fury-as-scottish-council-reduces-funding-for-private-nurseries/> - In March 2025, Falkirk Council announced plans to reduce funding for private nurseries, shifting towards utilizing its own council-run buildings. The council aimed to save £580,000 in the 2025/26 financial year by decreasing the number of funded places in private nurseries and offering them in council-run settings instead. This move faced criticism from private nursery operators, who feared it would threaten the sustainability of the sector and disrupt families who rely on private nurseries for childcare.
7. <https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/news/article/4768/special-council-meeting-friday-9-may-2025> - In May 2025, Scottish Borders Council held a special meeting to discuss early learning and childcare options, following the decision to 'mothball' several rural nurseries. The council agreed to set aside the previous decision and explore alternative models to maintain early years education in rural communities for the 2025/26 academic year. The motion proposed that provisions at Channelkirk, Cockburnspath, Ednam, Walkerburn, and Yetholm be maintained, with appropriate models implemented after engagement with parents and carers.