



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

CARE AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT INVERASDALE PRIMARY SCHOOL, REASSIGNING ITS CATCHMENT AREA TO THAT OF POOLEWE PRIMARY SCHOOL.

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:

- To discontinue education provision at Inverasdale Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Poolewe Primary School

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any persons) at the public meeting held at Inverasdale Primary School on 10th June 2015.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Education, Children and Adult Services Committee (ECAS), at its meeting on 20 May 2015, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Inverasdale Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Poolewe Primary School.
- 1.2 **Appendix 1** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices 1a-1ix** are the appendices to the original proposal.
- 1.3 Inverasdale Primary School has been “mothballed” since the end of session 2011-12, and current population figures within the school catchment indicate a maximum school roll of 5 by 2018-19. A roll of this size impedes the successful delivery of the curriculum and hampers social interaction opportunities for children.
- 1.4 Since July 2012 pupils from the Inverasdale Primary catchment have attended Poolewe Primary, 5.4 miles from Inverasdale Primary, an arrangement which has been of benefit to the pupils at both schools.

- 1.5 The community of Inverasdale has proposals for developing the building for community use. Since the school was “mothballed” in 2012 the community have made extensive use of the building, including the creation of a museum into the Arctic convoys of WWII (which departed from Loch Ewe) and an exhibition into the history of the school.
- 1.6 As mentioned in the original Proposal Paper, Inverasdale Primary School would have a notional school roll of 5 by 2018-19, set against a planning capacity of 49. The school building is rated “B” for educational suitability and “C” for condition. Poolewe Primary has a current roll of 24 and this is also the projected roll for 2018-19, although the roll would drop to 19 by 2018-19 in the event Inverasdale re-opened. The school has a capacity for 50 pupils and is currently rated “C” for educational suitability and “B” for condition.
- 1.7 The Condition and Suitability ratings are used, together with the capacity figures, to prioritise the Council’s decisions on future investment in schools. The modular accommodation at Poolewe is one aspect which will be given due consideration, in relation to future investment options.
- 1.8 Inverasdale Primary School is designated as a very remote rural school. Under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, the Council has given special regard to:
- any viable alternative to the closure proposal,
 - the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school’s premises and its other facilities for use by the community;
 - the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to;
 - the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school’s pupils and staff and any other users of the school’s facilities, (ii) any environmental impact.

2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Wednesday 27 May 2015 to Friday 21 August 2015. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:
- (i) Parents of pupils in the catchment areas of Inverasdale Primary School and Poolewe Primary School, including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (ii) All P4-7 pupils attending Poolewe Primary School.
 - (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;

- (iv) The Parent Council of Poolewe Primary School.
- (v) Staff of Poolewe Primary School.
- (vi) Trade union representatives;
- (vii) The community councils for the areas covered by the 2 schools;
- (viii) Education Scotland;
- (ix) Highland Youth Convenor.
- (x) Russian Arctic Convoy Museum
- (xi) Inverasdale Heritage Group
- (xii) Wester Loch Ewe Trust
- (xiii) GBB Estates (local landowner)
- (xiv) "Good for Ewe" community co-operative.
- (xv) Members of the Highland Community Planning Partnership

2.3 The proposal document was also advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held in Inverasdale on the 10th June 2015. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and Facebook page, and in the *Ross-shire Journal* and the *Gairloch and District Times*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**. No person spoke at the meeting to oppose the proposed closure.

3.0 Review of proposals following the consultation period

3.1 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.

3.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by a range of Council officials. This ensured that the Council met the requirements of the 2010 Act.

3.3 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

4.0 Responses received

4.1 The views of P4-7 pupils at Poolewe Primary School (which included pupils living within the Inverasdale catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire completed by the pupils. 15 questionnaires were returned and copies of these are at **Appendix 3**.

4.2 A list of others who responded in writing during the public consultation is also at **Appendix 3**, along with copies of these responses

5.0 Issues raised during the consultation period

5.1 Of the 15 pupil responses, eight were in favour of closure with four suggesting keeping the status quo for a bit longer. Three indicated a preference to reopen the school.

5.2 Arguments put forward by pupils supporting the closure were:

- The number of pupils at Inverasdale would be too small to re-open the school.
- If Inverasdale re-opened it would have to close again in a few years as there would be too few pupils.
- If Inverasdale re-opened, in two years' time there would only be one girl at the school.
- If Inverasdale re-opened, both schools would be weakened and one or other would eventually have to close.
- Poolewe Primary would lose a teacher if Inverasdale re-opened, and P1-7 pupils would all be in the same class. Poolewe would also lose the equipment which was transferred from Inverasdale.
- Since Inverasdale was mothballed, all the children have made new friends, and would miss each other if the schools were split again.

5.3 All of the letters from individuals and community groups were in support of the proposal, although some responses indicated that their support was conditional on Highland Council transferring the building to community use after closure.

5.4 In addition, a 341 name petition was submitted in support of the proposals.

5.5 The issues identified by the pupils who opposed the proposal are summarised below. Individual issues raised that are similar to one another have been "grouped."

Issue 1

Re-opening Inverasdale School would mean pupils from Inverasdale would have less travel.

Response 1

In drawing up the original proposal, the Council gave consideration to the issue of additional travel time, and the results of this were set out in Section 5 of the original proposal paper. The two schools are located 5.4 miles apart, and the furthest pupil from Poolewe has a total travel distance of 7.9 miles. The travel times to Poolewe for each individual pupil vary from 13 minutes to 27 minutes. These figures are within the Highland Council's guideline figure for maximum travel times for pupils of primary school age. The pupil with the furthest journey to Poolewe would have a 6 minute journey to Inverasdale Primary, so the maximum additional travel time for any pupil is 21 minutes.

Issue 2

Inverasdale Primary was a good school with good facilities.

Response 2

The proposal is based on educational benefits. These were set out in detail at Section 6 of the original Proposal Paper and have been endorsed in the

Report prepared by Education Scotland.

Issue 3

In a few years the numbers at Inverasdale might go up again.

Response 3

In drawing up its original proposals, the Council considered the current number of pupils within the catchment, the local birth rate and the anticipated future roll. As set out in Section 4 of the Proposal Paper, projections indicate that if Inverasdale Primary were re-opened, it would be as a single teacher school with a very small roll.

6.0 Community Use of Building

- 6.1 During the period that Inverasdale Primary School has been mothballed, the local community have made extensive use of the building. Details were set out at Section 9 of the original consultation paper. Almost all of the letter and email responses to the consultation specified that they supported the continued use of the building by the community, and some responses specified this as a condition of their support for the school closure. The issue was also the main topic of discussion at the public meeting (see **Appendix 2**).
- 6.2 It has not been possible for Highland Council to provide the community with guarantees about the future use of the school building, as to have done so would have pre-empted the outcome of the consultation. The Proposal Paper specified that in the event of the merger proceeding, and subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the community of Inverasdale to see whether some or all of the current school building could be turned over to community use. Any such proposal would be progressed within the terms of the Council's current asset management policy.
- 6.3 It is clear however, that a successful transfer of the building to the community would offer opportunities for community and economic development. Conversely, re-opening the school would undo the development work undertaken by the community since the school was mothballed.

7.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 7.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4**.
- 7.2 In their report, Education Scotland recognise that the proposal offers the prospect of clear educational benefits to the children affected. HM Inspectors are of the view that since July 2012 the operation of a single combined school at Poolewe Primary School, has been of benefit to the pupils of both schools. They note that the proposal has very strong support from stakeholders and will

help Poolewe Primary School to maintain teacher numbers. Children will continue to have access to increased learning opportunities, wider experiences and better socialisation through being part of a larger school.

7.3 No issues were identified for further consideration by the Council.

8.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

8.1 No alleged omissions or inaccuracies were raised in the responses to consultation. In reviewing the proposal, officials identified one inaccuracy in the Rural Impact Assessment appended to the Proposal Paper. That assessment indicated that parents of children aged 3 and 4 years would have increased costs if they wish to access pre-school education. This statement was inaccurate since nursery age children from Inverasdale have always attended Poolewe Primary. Implementation of the proposal will not lead to any additional costs to parents of pre-school children.

8.2 A revised Rural Impact Assessment is at **Appendix 5**.

9.0 Further Review of Alternatives

9.1 Throughout the consultation the Council has had special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In particular, the Council has had special regard to the following:

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Alternatives to closure were reviewed at Section 2 of the original proposal paper (**Appendix 1**). The consultation exercise did not identify any new alternatives for consideration. Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Section 2 of Appendix 1, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal. This view has been endorsed by HM Inspectors. The detailed reasons for the Council's view are set out in Section 6 of **Appendix 1** and in **Appendix 4**.

- the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to; (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

The potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 9 of the Proposal and is further considered at Section 6 above. The Council's conclusion is that that the re-opening of the primary school would have an adverse impact on the community initiatives developed since the school was mothballed, in particular the Arctic Convoys Museum and the exhibition developed by the Inverasdale Heritage Group.

- the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact, (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities;

The impact of the implementation of the proposal in relation to travel time was considered at Section 5 of the original proposal paper and again at Response 1 above. Since Inverasdale School has been mothballed since 2012, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. The travelling arrangements that have applied since 2012 have worked well and overall travel times for all pupils are within the guideline figure adopted by Highland Council for the purposes of reviewing the school estate.

As mentioned above, during mothballing the school building has continued to be available to other users. If the closure proposal is implemented Highland Council plans to work with the community to see whether the building could be transferred to the community.

10.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers

- 10.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 17 December 2015 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so until 7 January 2015. The Scottish Ministers will have until 11 February 2016 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.
- 10.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in a local authority decision to close a school is asked to email schoolclosures@gov.scot or to write to School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by 7 January 2015.
- 10.3 Until the outcome of the eight week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

11.0 Legal issues

11.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

11.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000). As with all Council duties, the Council also has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value, and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). Each of the above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

12. Financial Implications

12.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued with the Proposal Paper and can be found at **Appendix 1f**.

13.0 Equality Impact Assessment

13.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was issued with the proposal paper and can be found at **Appendix 1g**.

14.0 Conclusion

14.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 5, 6, and 7 above.

14.2 Education Scotland staff visited Inverasdale and Poolewe to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses.

14.3 The Director of Care and Learning, on reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; (see section 9 above) concludes that the proposal offers educational and community benefits and should be implemented without amendment.

15.0 Recommendation

- 15.1 It is therefore recommended that the Highland Council's approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Inverasdale Primary School and re-assign its catchment area to that of Poolewe Primary School.

Bill Alexander
Director of Care and Learning
20 October 2015