**MINUTE OF PUBLIC MEETING HELD AT KINBRACE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**22 JUNE 2016**

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| **CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE PROVISION OF**  **EDUCATION AT KINBRACE PRIMARY SCHOOL**  **Panel** | |
| Drew Millar, Councillor (Chair)  Brian Porter, Head of Resources, Care and Learning Service  Barry Northedge, Area Quality Improvement Manager (North), Care and  Learning Service  Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Highland Council |  |
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9 other people attended the meeting, including 3 local councillors (Cllr. G. Phillips, Cllr. D. MacKay, Cllr. G. Farlow), the Head Teacher of Helmsdale Primary School, a class teacher from Helmsdale Primary School, and a representative of Education Scotland. There were 3 parents/members of the public.

**The Chairperson** began by welcoming everyone to the meeting, by introducing himself as the Chair of the Council’s Education, Children and Adult Services (ECAS) Committee, and also by introducing the officials present. He advised that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to formally close Kinbrace Primary School, (as set out in the recommendation to the Proposal Paper). The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures. He asked whether anyone present would like a copy of the papers. [Copies were then distributed]. Other options identified in the proposal paper are re-opening the school, or continuing to “mothball” it. The Chairperson explained that we could also discuss any other options or alternatives to closure which those present would like to raise. The Chairperson then asked Brian Porter, Head of Resources for Care and Learning, to describe the consultation process.

**Brian Porter** explained that the meeting was part of a set statutory procedure relating to a school closure. Some of those present may have had already had contact with Mr Jackson and Mr Northedge, who had held a series of informal discussions prior to the Council embarking on the statutory process. The Proposal Paper sets out a proposal to close the school, but clearly there are other options and these are identified in the paper. People are entitled to express their views on those other options, or indeed any others that the Council should be considering. The purpose of tonight’s meeting is to gather views, and we would try to answer any questions that are raised. Any questions that cannot be answered tonight, and which require further research, will be responded to in due course. There is a very clear obligation on the Council to consider each and every one of the comments received, including those made at the meeting tonight.

He emphasised that we were at the start of the formal process rather than at the end of it, and that the process was designed to gather the views of those affected.

The formal process has a number of stages and gives ample opportunity for views to be expressed to the Council before any final decision is made. The consultation period itself runs up to 24 August, and the Council is looking for views to be submitted before that date. Once the public consultation ends on 24 August, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper and the note of the meeting tonight, and will form a view on the educational benefits of the proposal. The Council has to take account of Education Scotland’s view on the educational benefits and respond to any points raised by their report, as well as any representations received as a result of the consultation process. Following the completion of that stage, the Council will take a Final Report to Committee. As part of the inclusive process, the Final Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, to allow for further representations. Any further representations that are made are submitted to the members of the Committee, either in advance or tabled on the day, so that members are fully informed of any issues that may have arisen. Our current intention was to publish the final report in December, prior to submitting it to Committee in January 2017. Following that, the decision of the ECAS Committee has to be confirmed by the full Council, which would meet in March 2017, as a school closure decision has to be taken by the full Council. That is not however the end of the process, as the Scottish Ministers have a right of call-in for any school closures proposal, so even after the Council has made its decision there is a further period in which people can raise concerns with the Scottish Government. Any such representations might lead to Scottish Ministers calling-in the proposal. If the decision is called in, there would be a further review process. If the decision is not called-in, the Council would then implement its proposal. It is a very slow and measured process, with multiple opportunities for review.

**The Chairperson** then asked Barry Northedge, Area Quality Improvement Manager, to explain the educational aspects of the proposal.

**Barry Northedge** said that a decision to propose a school closure was never taken lightly, and was only ever taken with the best interests of pupils in mind. The Council’s contention was that with such low numbers, we cannot provide the best educational opportunities for pupils. The Curriculum for Excellence promotes principles such as pupils taking more responsibility for their learning, and peers supporting one another. Those opportunities become extremely limited with such small numbers. Team sports become impossible. The Council cannot say to any parent that pupils would get the best offer of education with such small numbers. We could say that the offer would be better at a school like Helmsdale, which has larger numbers. We must also look beyond education and look at socialisation, the friendships that pupils make, and opportunities to play with other children. Making and breaking friendships is part of life and part of growing up, and the more difficult that becomes, the more compelling the argument becomes for children to be educated in a larger school.

**The Chairperson** then opened the meeting to the Q and A session.

**Marie MacKenzie**, a parent from within the Kinbrace catchment, asked what the new catchment area would be.

**Ian Jackson** commented that the proposal was to reassign almost all of the Kinbrace catchment area to the Helmsdale catchment, with the exception of the community of Forsinard, which would be reassigned to the Melvich catchment.

**Mrs MacKenzie** asked whether this included the area as far as Garvault and Loch Choire. Although there were currently no children at the latter location, anyone from there would have to travel 14 miles along a dirt track before even getting to a road, and from the road they would have to travel about an hour one way to get to Helmsdale.

**Mr Jackson** confirmed that under the current proposal Garvault and Loch Choire would transfer to the Helmsdale catchment, but that clearly the Council would consider any views submitted in response to consultation.

**Roanna Grant**, a parent from within the Helmsdale catchment, asked a question about the implications of re-opening Kinbrace. If a parent from within the Kinbrace catchment did not want to send their children to Kinbrace, but wanted them to stay in Helmsdale, would they be allowed to, and would they receive transport?

**Mr Northedge** advised that if Kinbrace PS re-opened, parents from the catchment could still request a place at Helmsdale PS, but it would be treated as a placing request and parents would be liable for the organisation and costs of transport.

There being no other comments, the Chairperson reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 24 August 2016 – and of where responses should be sent, either via letter or via email. A record of this meeting would be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee in January 2017, as well as all the submissions. The members of the Committee would have a chance to see the note and all other representations before the meeting. Following the decision of the Committee, the minutes would be submitted to the full Council for ratification, most likely in December.

MEETING CLOSED.