**MINUTE OF PUBLIC MEETING HELD AT THE BLACK ISLE EDUCATION CENTRE 29 JUNE 2016**

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| **CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE PROVISION OF**  **EDUCATION AT THE BLACK ISLE EDUCATION CENTRE (BIEC)**  **Panel** | |
| Drew Millar, Councillor (Chair)  Brian Porter, Head of Resources, Highland Council  Bernadette Cairns, Head of Additional Support, Highland Council  Derek Martin, Area Care and Learning Manager, Highland Council  Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Highland Council |  |

12 other people attended the meeting, including the Head Teacher and 4 other members of staff, and a representative of Education Scotland. There were 5 parents/members of the public plus one of the young people currently attending the Centre part time.

**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 close the Black Isle Education Centre, (as set out in the recommendation to the Proposal Paper). The proposed change, if approved, will take place for the start of the 2017/18 school session, in August 2017. Other options identified in the proposal paper are operating the Centre as a standalone school, or operating it as an Outreach Centre offering part-time support to young people. 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.

Mr Porter - The meeting is part of a set statutory procedure relating to a school closure. It is never an easy decision to propose a school closure and the legal process for doing so sets out extensive opportunity for comments and representations to be submitted to the Council. There are a number of key stages in the process, of which the public consultation period is one. The purpose of tonight’s meeting is to gather views, and we will try to answer any questions that are raised. A record of the meeting will be kept. Any questions that cannot be answered this evening, and which require further research, will be responded to in due course. All those present are encouraged to submit written representations in addition to any points made tonight. 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.

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 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 is 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. This is because a school closure decision has to be taken by the full Council. These dates are targets and could be affected by issues raised during consultation.

In the event the Council does decide on closure, 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. The Council would publicise this further opportunity for comment, and any representations that were made 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. We are however looking at a timescale beyond March 2017 for any decision on the proposal. It is a very slow and measured process, with multiple opportunities for review.

The above information is set out in the Proposal Paper.

The Chairperson then asked Bernadette Cairns, Head of Additional Support, to explain the educational aspects of the proposal.

Mrs Cairns - A lot of thought has been given over a number of years about how best we can support young people with social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN). The Council undertook an Additional Support Needs (ASN) Review a couple of years ago which pulled together a lot of the thought that has been given to the subject. Previously the BIEC had operated as a school for a small number of pupils, and the review found that a lot of those pupils had become dislocated from their home communities. There was not enough interaction between BIEC and the pupils’ local schools. Acting on that, and in consultation with parents, the Council had developed a model in which pupils spent some time in their local schools and some time at the BIEC, undertaking a range of outdoor and curricular activities that were individualised to meet the needs of each pupil. The model involved more of an emphasis on the development of numeracy and literacy. The current proposal to close the BIEC is not therefore a proposal to stop supporting pupils with SEBN. It is a change in model that we would be looking at, so that pupils would remain on the role of their mainstream school. We would use the expertise of staff currently at the BIEC and elsewhere to provide some time outside the mainstream environment, in provision which might not be this provision, but would be somewhere else, and which would maintain a link with the mainstream school. The Highland Council’s aim was to have more flexible provision that could provide support on a more bespoke basis, that would be of more benefit to the children.

The Chairperson then opened the meeting to the floor.

Q1 - **Sarah Atkin**, (Fortrose and Rosemarkie CC) – What outcomes data is there to back up the new model? Is there data on outcomes that supports the suggestion that part-time provision is better than full time provision?

A1 – **Bernadette Cairns** - There is research to back up the model, in the sense of showing that children who attend their mainstream school have a better sense of belonging to their school and community. In terms of outcomes for those who previously attended the BIEC as a school, the main measure would have been their post school destinations. What we have now, in relation to those young people attending the BIEC part-time time, is good data in terms of the progress they are making, and their emotional well-being.

Q2 - **Sarah Atkin** – What about sustainability of provision for each child?

A2 – **Bernadette Cairns** – That is very much what the model is based on.

Q3 – **Jenna Duncan,** (parent) – I have some views on the proposal, and I have also been talking to other parents, who have the same views. The children who come to the BIEC include some who have failed in mainstream schools, and who have also failed in special schools. To me there is a gap in the middle. In my experience, the BIEC provides this. Pupils are happy and successful at the Centre and actually the fact they have to attend their mainstream school on certain days is an additional pressure on them. If the BIEC closes, what is Highland Council’s next provision, and will it be similar to the BIEC?

A3 – **Bernadette Cairns** – You should think of the new provision not as a building but as a service. We recognise that some pupils benefit from having some time out of school, so the service will continue. Where it will be we haven’t fully bottomed out yet, but we will be tracking the progress of every child and assessing what they might benefit from.

Q4 – **Jenna Duncan** - currently there is an age limit on pupils attending the BIEC, and yet some of the pupils who attend are not ready for mainstream school when they reach the age limit. What happens to young people when they reach the age limit?

A4 – **Bernadette Cairns** – There is an ideal age range in terms of intervening to support young people, from about middle primary to early secondary, but there is nothing in tablets of stone. Vocational provision is being developed in the Mid and South areas, and that can be important for the age group that are looking to move to Further Education or employment. It’s about finding the most appropriate provision for each young person.

Q5 – **Jenna Duncan** – The young people who attend the BIEC often struggle with change, and now they are faced with another.

A5 – **Bernadette Cairns** – It is important that young people’s views are included within the consultation about the nature of the Service that will be offered in future.

Q6 – **Pat MacDonald** (local resident) – What happens if BIEC is closed and then a child’s mainstream school placement breaks down? Where does that child go then?

A6 – **Bernadette Cairns** - The Service on offer now is pretty much the kind of service we want to offer in the future. What I can’t say at present is whether we will have a shiny new building to deliver it, but discussions are ongoing with staff about what the new Service will look like.

Q7 – **Pat MacDonald** – But if BIEC wasn’t closed it could continue to be a concrete provision for those who need it.

A7 – **Bernadette Cairns** - The Service has developed with a view to offering more flexible provision, and that feels to me like a better way of supporting more children than operating the BIEC as a school.

Q8 – **Pat MacDonald** – Is there somewhere else, that isn’t a school, that can support children who in the past have come here?

A8 – **Bernadette Cairns** – At the moment it is the Black Isle Education Centre that fulfils that need.

Q9 – **Pat MacDonald** – What happens to the children that absolutely need a facility like this, which operates full-time? Will they be sent out of the area?

A9 – **Bernadette Cairns** –We have many less pupils than we used to that are sent out of area, although we still have some that we would prefer to educate more locally. We are trying to bring pupils back from residential placements and support them more flexibly. I am not sold on an “all or nothing” approach in terms of school attendance. Individual plans have to be made for individual kids.

Q10 – **Jenna Duncan** – We had expected to hear more details tonight about the plans going forward. It’s all very well saying that this is the procedure for closing the school, but there is no plan to replace it.

A10 – **Bernadette Cairns** - There is a plan. It’s maybe for another meeting to discuss the location of the replacement service. There are a couple of options and we haven’t narrowed that down yet. We will be keen to get parental input into what it might look like.

Q11 – **Jenna Duncan** – my son is quite anxious about the school closing. He is asking us and asking his teachers about what is going to happen. We thought we would be able to tell him more after tonight’s meeting.

A11 – **Bernadette Cairns –** It is probably important to stress that there is no immediate rush to leave this building. In terms of where the new provision will be sited, that will be a positive decision.

**Chairperson -** It is very important for those present to put their concerns in writing, and also that parents and residents take the opportunity to speak to their local ASN Manager, to get as much information from them as to what the way forward is. Parent/residents could also speak to their local councillors.

**Sarah Atkin** commented that she thought the local councillors might have been at the meeting.

**Chairperson** – They know it’s on. Two of them told me they could not attend as they had other engagements. I repeat that parents should seek comments from their local ASN Manager as to what the plans are for the children currently attending the Centre, and if necessary put those questions to local councillors. All the written representations received in response to consultation will be collated and put in front of the members of the Education Committee before any decision is taken on the proposal.

Q12 – **Jenna Duncan** – Does that mean that if not enough people make a noise, it will just close and that will be that?

A12 – **Chairperson** – No, all the representations, whether there are 2 or 102, will be put to the Committee members, who will have to take a decision on the Report in front of them. The final decision will be taken by the full Council. It is very important that parents in particular put their views in – after all it is your children who are affected. You have until 24 August this year to do that. You might want to make representations separately to your local members.

Q13 – **Sarah Atkin** – Is the BIEC’s status as a school causing a logjam in what the Council wants to achieve? Is there a significant difference in it having the status of a school? Does that mean the Centre has to do certain things and is limited in what it can change?

A13 – **Bernadette Cairns** – In my view, there is a significant difference. As a school the facility is limited to a maximum of 12 pupils, and what happens when it is at maximum and another pupil comes along? Pupils require varying amounts and varying types of support, and you don’t get that kind of flexibility with a standalone school. Obviously there are also constraints around the delivery of a full curriculum. The proposal allows more scope to do things in a slightly different way. Under the proposal the young people would remain on the roll of their mainstream school, and that mainstream school would have the responsibility for tracking progress. Staff at BIEC already contribute to targets that children have for literacy, numeracy and Health and Wellbeing, and they would continue to do that, but would do so for more of the objectives within each Child’s Plan.

Q14 **Sarah Atkin** – So it could be quite liberating for BIEC to lose its status as a school?

A14 **– Bernadette Cairns** – Yes, the BIEC staff would still contribute to educational outcomes for the children, but they would be contributing to them rather than delivering them.

There being no other comments, the Chairperson reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 24 August – 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’s 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 March 2017.

MEETING CLOSED.