

CONSULTATION MEETING – GAELIC MEDIUM CATCHMENT AREA FOR GLENURQUHART PRIMARY SCHOOL

ONLINE – 6.30PM, 8 DECEMBER 2021

MINUTES OF MEETING

Panel

Cllr. David Fraser – Chairperson
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources
Fiona Shearer, Area Education Manager
Lena Walker, Gaelic Education Support Officer

Also Attending

Maggie Mulholland – HC Community Development Officer
Kerrie Laird – HT
Julie MacLeod – HT
Mina Johnstone – Teacher
Ewen Kelly – Teacher

Joan Esson - HMIE
Jim Whannel – BnaG
Christie MacLean – BnaG
Magaidh Wentworth – CnamP

Nikki Kipfmiller – Parent
Roz Matheson - Parent
Alan Speed – Parent
Michelle Scott - Parent

Chair Cllr David Fraser opened the meeting -

For those who haven't participated in a Teams meeting, could I ask that you keep your microphone muted if you aren't actually speaking, as that reduces feedback. You should see a microphone symbol on the bar on the top of your screen, which you can toggle on and off. Secondly, Teams has a system under which anyone who wants to ask a question or make a point should "raise their hand" to attract the Chair's attention. You do this by clicking on the hand symbol on the bar at the top of your screen. To keep the meeting manageable, could I ask that anyone who wants to ask a question alerts me by clicking on the "raise your hand" symbol, and by clicking it off once you have finished speaking.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the proposal to formally establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Glenurquhart Primary School, as set out in the recommendation to the proposal Paper.

The Proposal has been issued as a result of statutory guidance on Gaelic Education, produced by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Council officials present tonight are Fiona Shearer, Area Education Manager; Ian Jackson, Education Officer, (Resources); and Lena Walker, Gaelic Development Manager.

Ian Jackson will now describe the consultation process and the detailed reasons for issuing the Proposal.

Ian Jackson

As indicated by the Chairperson, the Council is required to introduce GM catchment areas under the terms of Statutory Guidance issued by BnaG. The setting up of a catchment area involves a statutory consultation, of which this meeting is part. We are currently in the initial phase of that consultation, which is due to end on Friday 4 February 2022, and I would urge anyone who wants to submit views in writing to do so by that date. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather views, and we will try to answer any questions that are raised.

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. Once the public consultation ends on 4 February 2022, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper, the note of the meeting tonight, and any written representations, and will form a view on the educational benefits of the proposal. Education Scotland will contact Glenurquhart Primary, and they will be keen to hear from any parents who wish to make their views known. 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 prepare a Report reviewing the consultation exercise and present it to the Council's Education Committee. The Review Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, and anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be invited to make "further representations" during those 3 weeks. 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. Members will also see copies of the original responses and the note of this meeting.

Because of the Statutory Guidance we mentioned earlier, the Council has to set up a Gaelic Medium catchment. What is up for debate is the extent of that catchment. The GM catchment we are proposing covers the catchments of Glenurquhart PS, Balnain PS and Cannich Bridge PS. Up to now there has been a "custom and practice" arrangement in respect of any children who wanted to attend Gaelic Medium education from outwith the Glenurquhart Primary catchment itself, and at the present time we do have children from outwith the catchment attending GME at

the school. To an extent this Proposal is simply formalising arrangements which have already been operating in practice.

In summary, the benefit of the Proposal is that we're giving clarity to parents in respect of GME, making clear where entitlement exists and where it doesn't exist, and that's an improvement on the existing arrangements based on custom and practice.

The Chair then invited Lena Walker to speak about the Gaelic educational issues set out in the Proposal Paper.

Mrs Walker

Gaelic Medium Education is about offering children the opportunity of bilingualism. Bilingualism is about a lot more than two languages. There are 3 main advantages we can speak to, Social, linguistic and cognitive. By giving families the choice of choosing a Gaelic Medium Education for their children, they are offering them new opportunities. Socially, children have access to two cultures which in turn leads to more tolerance to and more interest in other cultures. Linguistically, total immersion can lead to an earlier awareness of sounds and words with an enhanced language learning ability impacting on improved literacy skills. Cognitively, there are many benefits which are widely published and all 3 advantages are backed by research. Therefore, total immersion learning in Gaelic is a wonderful opportunity to provide children with the benefits of bilingualism. Bilingualism is essential to both enhancing Gaelic and for the survival of Gaelic in many of Highland's communities.

The Statutory Guidance recommends that Catchment Area be developed to provide clarity for parents about the entitlement to GME for their children and it is important to note that provision of GME in an area follows a demand lead by parental request. The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan is a statutory document, following the requirements of the Gaelic Language Act, where Highland Council makes a clear commitment to increasing Gaelic useage, increasing the number of Gaelic speakers, enhancing the profile of Gaelic and generating a positive image of the language. For that reason, the Highland Council has a strong focus on Gaelic Medium Education

The Chair advised that Mrs Shearer, Mr Jackson and Mrs Walker were available to answer questions.

Q1 David Fraser

Pupils currently coming from the school, where do they currently come from?

A1 Ian Jackson

The GME class is small but growing. Most pupils are from the Glenurquhart catchment area. The entitlement to GME will expand to include Balnain and Cannich. For any pupils from further afield, a placement request would be required.

Q2 Nikki Kipfmiller

Has there been any thought to include Beauly and Fort Augustus in the GM catchment area?

A2 Ian Jackson

We did give that some thought. The Statutory Guidance recommends that a GM catchment should cover a geographical area in which travel distances are reasonable and the prospect of GME is attractive to parents. The proposal does not include the Kilchuimen ASG. There is no GME within that ASG. If you have a view that Fort Augustus should be included, we can take consider this.

Q3 (Follow-up)

I am a parent of a child in the class. I want to see numbers growing. If it is practical to expand the catchment area to keep numbers healthy, this would mean a bigger class and more opportunities for the children in the class.

A3 Ian Jackson

This consultation is about listening to views. It is good to get new points.

Q4 David Fraser

The catchment aligns with that of the High School. Correct?

A4 Ian Jackson

Yes, the 3 feeder primaries will be the catchment. Happy to take on views as variations to that.

There were no further questions.

Ian Jackson

If there are no further questions and Fiona and Lena have nothing further to add, I will hand you back to the Chair.

Cllr David Fraser

I will now bring this meeting to a conclusion. If questions do come afterwards, this is the start of the consultation process. Any representations should be sent to Ian Jackson.

Cllr David Fraser thanked everyone for coming and reminded everyone that representations should be sent to Ian Jackson, email Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk (address circulated in the letter), or via the online form, to arrive **no later than Friday 4 February 2022**.

Cllr David Fraser advised that the record of the meeting will be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Education Committee where it is intended that the report of the meeting, plus any submissions/representations and the view of Education Scotland on the proposal, will be considered.