

Highland Council Consultation on Proposed Closure of Kinlochewe Primary School

On behalf of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC) please see below, for consideration, the following comments to Highland Council's (HC) consultation on the proposed closure of Kinlochewe Primary School.

(1) TKCC would refer you to TKCC's previous email dated 3 February 2024 to Ian Jackson and cc'd to Mhairi MacDonald (copy attached). Many of the points made remain relevant and should be taken cognisance of in HC's consideration of the future of Kinlochewe Primary School.

(2) TKCC draws to your attention that some local parents have raised the issue of catchment sharing and would request that HC investigates the possibility of permitting parents to choose whether to send their children to Shieldaig Primary School or Gairloch Primary School with the introduction of a shared catchment. This is also relevant for pre-school nursery education choice.

(3) TKCC reiterates the concern of local parents regarding school transport and the current unsatisfactory situation of four year olds requiring to share school transport with secondary school aged pupils. A separate arrangement for primary school pupils should be investigated whether they are travelling to or from Shieldaig or Gairloch.

(4) No Pre-school nursery provision is available for Kinlochewe children without travelling to either Gairloch or Shieldaig. Therefore, if there was a proven need to re-open Kinlochewe Primary School, it would be key to also provide pre-school nursery education within Kinlochewe.

(5) TKCC asks HC to investigate where the school fund monies from Kinlochewe Primary School are held. These monies had been fundraised by Kinlochewe Primary School and the local community and it is right that HC returns the funds so that they can be shared between Shieldaig and Gairloch Primary Schools.

(6) There is a general concern that there is no accommodation for key education workers in this area, eg for pre-school, primary and secondary school teaching staff. This is a matter which needs addressed to maintain an adequate complement of education staff within our local schools.

Torridon & Kinlochewe Community Council
26 February 2025

From: Caroline Hamilton <chair@tkcc.scot>

Date: Saturday, 3 February 2024 at 11:32

To: "Ian Jackson (Resources)" <ian.jackson@highland.gov.uk>

Cc: "Mhairi MacDonald (Area Education West)" <Mhairi.MacDonald3@highland.gov.uk>

Subject: Re: Kinlochewe Primary School

Dear Ian,

I refer to your e-mail below of 4th December regarding the future of Kinlochewe Primary School. This was discussed by Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC) at our meeting on 17th January. Present at the meeting (held by Zoom) were 3 parents of primary and pre-primary school age children. The following reflects the views they expressed and those of TKCC.

A school is a vital part of a community and without a school it is very difficult to attract young people to live there. However, it was acknowledged that this consultation is happening because over the last few years parents have taken their children out of the school and sent them to school elsewhere. For the school to have a viable future would depend, in part, on parents bringing their children back to the school, which they may not want to do. It would also depend on the parents of children approaching school age choosing to place their children in the school. TKCC understands that there are currently around 12-13 children, toddlers and babies in Kinlochewe. The parents of school age children are being consulted about the future of the school, but the parents of pre-school children, and those thinking of having children, should be too. In the past Kinlochewe Primary School has taken pupils from as far afield as Achnasheen and Badavanich, Letterewe Estate, Loch Maree Hotel and Talladale. In its consultation, HC should also seek the views of residents in those areas.

TKCC understands that the condition of the buildings at Kinlochewe Primary is poor and that they are unlikely to last long in their mothballed state. While some attending the meeting suggested that no decision should be taken on the future of the school for some time, a delay is likely to lead to a significant deterioration in the state of the buildings. On balance, TKCC consider that Highland Council should come to a decision sooner than later, always allowing for proper consultation. If the decision is to re-open the school, this will limit the extent of remedial work needed. If the decision is to move towards closure and disposal of the site, it will maintain the value of the buildings.

As regards re-zoning, TKCC acknowledges that this is a contentious issue and that Kinlochewe looks to both Gairloch and Torridon/Shieldaig. The village is in the historic parish of Gairloch and children of secondary school age attend Gairloch High School. On the other hand, medical cover is provided by Torridon Medical Practice which also covers Shieldaig and the surrounding area and TKCC's own boundaries reflect the connections between the village and the communities to the west of it. In considering how the catchment should be re-zoned (should this become necessary), Highland Council should remember that this is a matter that will affect the whole community and will have a bearing on whether the village leans more to Gairloch or to Torridon and Shieldaig. Any consultation on re-zoning should therefore involve the community as a whole. The potential receiving schools should also be

consulted. TKCC understands that Shieldaig has been approached, but it is unclear if a similar approach has been made to Gairloch Primary.

The catchment of Shieldaig Primary now extends from Diabaig round Loch Torridon to north Applecross. While it has a good number of pupils at present, that may not always be the case and it would be disastrous for many communities if Shieldaig Primary were to close. To include Kinlochewe in its catchment may help secure the position of Shieldaig, this would make a significant difference for Shieldaig Primary and avoid the risk that pupils from outlying areas such as Diabaig would have to travel even further than they do at present. Gairloch Primary is unlikely to face such risks.

Travel arrangements should also be considered. Although Shieldaig Primary is a little closer to Kinlochewe than Gairloch, the travel times are similar. Highland Council should also remember that it may not be appropriate for a child of as young as four to share transport with teenagers. Separate arrangements for primary school pupils may be required whether they are travelling to Shieldaig or to Gairloch.

I should add that TKCC welcomes the fact the Highland Council is having this conversation at an early stage and has invited the community to comment.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Hamilton
Chair – Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council