

HIGHLAND BUDGET CONSULTATION ANALYSIS

LOOKING AT OUR COMMUNITY FACILITIES

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Are we running too many schools?

Quantitative Analysis

We asked the Citizens Panel:

“We want to know, if you had to make the choice, would you have fewer schools or have each school taking a 12% cut in their budget. What would you be willing to accept?”

Respondents were faced with two options and asked which of one of them they were willing to accept: **“a reduction in the number of school buildings”** or **“a reduction in all school budgets”**.

Some 86.9% of the sample answered this question and gave their choices as follows:

- **74.9%** chose **“a reduction in the number of school buildings”**
- **25.1%** chose **“a reduction in all school budgets”**

The option to reduce the number of school buildings was supported most strongly by those in the 25-44 age group (81%). Note that respondents in this age group were the ones who earlier in the Performance Survey gave the most mentions of any of the age groups to primary education and secondary education which choosing the 5 services which are of the most importance to them.

The same survey question was asked of Highland Youth Voice (HYV) at its conference in June 2010 and of Council managers in preparation for November management briefings. 82% of HYV and 93% of Council managers responding supported a reduction in the number of school buildings, with 18% and 7% favouring a reduction in school budgets respectively. Response rates among these groups are sufficient for the responses to be generalised to these groups as a whole.

Factors to Help Decide Where to Merge Schools and Provide Better Community Facilities

Only those who had answered the previous question by selecting “a reduction in the number of school buildings” were then invited to answer this next question:

“Which of the following factors should help us decide where to merge schools and provide better community facilities?”

Respondents were presented with five factors and asked to rank them in order of importance from 1 to 5. The table below contains the results. The table is sorted by the percentage of respondents ranking the factors as being “the most important”. **In reading the results you will notice that each row adds up to 100% but the columns do not.** This is because some respondents interpreted the instructions accompanying the question as requesting them to rank each factor by a score of 1 to 5 - hence, for example, some ranked more than one factor as being a 1.

Factors to Help Decide Where to Merge Schools and Provide Better Community Facilities

Factors	Most important				Least Important
	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
Number of pupils in school in relation to size of the building	28	23	21	16	12
Whether the building is fit for purpose	27	20	21	21	11
Number of children likely to need a school in the area in the next 5-10 years	25	21	16	20	18
Condition of the building	18	19	24	23	16
Travel time to the nearest schools	17	15	17	15	36

N= 1,142- 1,153

However, it is important to point out that the first three factors in the table are only marginally separated one from another and even though there is a gap to the bottom two these still have their supporters.

Number of Pupils in School in relation to the Size of the Building

Some 28% of the respondents ranked this factor as a one and a further 23% made it a 2 – meaning that a majority of respondents (51%) have it in their top two. The following patterns of strong support from this factor are evident:

- 54% of those aged 25-44 ranked this factor as a 1 or 2 – a figure double the 27% of respondents from that same age group who ranked the factor as a 4 or 5;
- 55% of respondents resident in the Highlands less than 5 years ranked this factor as a 1 or 2.

Whether the Building is Fit for Purpose

Support for this factor is relatively high with 27% according it a 1 and 20% ranking it as a 2 – thus 47% have ranked it as a 1 or 2. Looking at the results by category, the only distinctive pattern that emerges is that 55% of people who are disabled rank this factor as a 1 or 2 compared with 45% of those who are not disabled.

Number of Children Likely to Need a School in the Area in the Next 5-10 years

This factor ranks a close third out of the five in the overall support it gained from respondents – 25% of whom ranked it as a 1 with a further 21% ranking it as a 2 giving a total of 46% who have ranked it as either a 1 or a 2.

Backing for this factor is evenly spread across categories with the only notable difference being by corporate area. In Ross, Skye and Lochaber 51% rank this factor as a 1 or 2 while 35% rank it as a 4 or 5 – a difference of 16%. By contrast, in Caithness, Skye and Easter Ross, while 44% of respondents chose to rank this factor as a 1 or 2, 41% ranked it as a 4 or 5 – a difference of just 3%.

Condition of the Building

Condition of the building is a factor which has 37% ranking it as a 1 or 2 (18% rank it as being a 1 with 19% ranking it as a 2) while 39% rank it as a 4 or 5 (23% ranking it as a 4 and

16% as a 5). Looking at the results from respondents who have a disability, their leading choice amongst all the 5 factors is this one - some 33% selected this factor as 1 (compared with 16% of those who are not disabled) and 54% have it in as either a 1 or a 2 (compared with 36% of those who do not have a disability).

Travel Time to the Nearest Schools

“Travel time to the nearest schools” has the highest percentage of respondents (36%) classifying it as the least important factor – it is the only factor which has a majority (51%) ranking it as a 4 or 5. Yet it still is rated as important factor by the 32% of respondents who ranked it as a 1 or 2. Looking at the results by corporate area, it is notable that while a majority of the respondents from Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (54%) and Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (52%) rank it as a 4 or 5 a smaller percentage do so in Ross, Skye and Lochaber (46%).

The same survey question was asked of Highland Youth Voice and of Council managers. Council managers ranked 1st the number of children in the catchment in the next 5-10 years whereas HYV responses were equally balanced across all five choices.

Qualitative Analysis

Over 220 responses were received on the question of *Are we running too many schools?* and a further 195 on the secondary question of *Or as an alternative to reducing the number of schools, should we run the same number of schools but with 12% less in real terms for each school?*

Comments were mostly generated from discussions at ward forums and from discussions with groups including Highland Youth Voice and the Community Safety Steering Group. Focus groups with individuals with visual impairments and the deaf forum also provided views. Comments were received from special interest groups such as Parent Councils and from Community Councils. Responses were also generated from individuals via the blog, email and the online questionnaire.

Are we running too many schools?

Views in Favour

Overall respondents to the question of *Are we running too many schools?* felt that yes the Council probably was. There was a feeling of reluctance from many in making this response and equally a number, whilst not against, made no firm statement either way but noted areas of consideration which are incorporated below.

Criteria

Respondents noted the need to set clear criteria to determine which schools should be affected. One set of views was that criteria should be based upon school rolls; schools with very small rolls, a high ratio of cost to pupil or perhaps less than 40% capacity should be targeted for amalgamation. It was also noted that many small schools are not delivering educationally, despite the perception of many parents; therefore amalgamation could be positive educationally. However, it was noted that future population rises should be considered if basing closure upon pupils rolls.

An alternative suggestion was that any potential closure should be based upon the distance to the nearest school. It would be important to consider the length of time children would have to spend on a bus, with a general view that between 20 and 30 minutes should be sufficient. However, it was noted that for many children across Highland travelling by bus to school is already the norm and the Deaf Forum highlighted that for children who are deaf they already need to travel to school in Dingwall.

A further view was that transport availability should be considered. Not all parents will have access to a car to transport them to an alternative school and buses may not exist on these routes at present. It was also suggested that if there were school amalgamations then the Council should improve cycle routes, which could reduce transport costs and improve health. The Community Safety Steering Group also noted that the increased need to travel could result in an increase in traffic accidents.

A number of respondents suggested that criteria for determining which schools should close required to be a combination of travel distance and school capacity.

Rural vs Urban

There was a split in the view of individuals in agreement that too many schools are being run between whether closures should affect urban or rural schools. Some respondents reported that the focus should be on amalgamating rural schools into larger villages and towns given the high running costs in very small rural schools. It was noted that this would result in improved social interaction for many pupils in small schools where social preparation can be poor. However, it was felt that consideration should however be given to the increased transport costs and the impact upon rural communities and there was a view that it would be unlikely this could be achieved in very remote rural areas.

An alternative view however was that closure and amalgamation of schools should be concentrated in urban communities where the impact upon communities would be less. There would be opportunities for building larger schools with improved facilities, which would be of benefit educationally.

Further Considerations

Whilst there was the view that if schools are inefficient they should close, most respondents, whilst agreeing that too many schools are currently being run, noted that prior to any closure proposals, all options should be reviewed and a range of considerations taken into account.

Respondents noted that the educational needs of young people should be given consideration and that any change in provision needs to be for educational benefits and not just financial. As indicated above, it was noted that the building of new schools to accommodate pupils from several amalgamated schools would provide a better learning environment. It was felt that an additional benefit of amalgamation could be to achieve more stable schools, with fewer temporary teachers but this was balanced with the view that schools should not become too large. Other views were that the social implications of bussing children to other schools should be considered.

Respondents also noted that the implications of changes on the wider community should be considered alongside any proposal to change school provision. Concern was expressed at the impact upon local communities if they were to lose their school and whether this could result in more people moving to urban areas. It was noted that many communities rely on

the use of school buildings for additional activities and that the impact of removing the building on wider community activities should also be considered.

It was noted that closure should be a last resort and a feeling that these proposals are unlikely to impact upon the majority of schools across Highland and most will need to be retained. It was also noted that this is unlikely to be a short-term option to save money as there will be considerable parental resistance to any such proposals.

A number of respondents noted that whilst criteria was important in determining which schools should face closure, ultimately the diversity of each community would mean that each decision will require to be location dependent and that one size, or set of criteria, will not fit all.

Views Against

A number of respondents to the consultation question were firmly of the view that the Council is not operating too many schools and that closure and amalgamation should not be considered.

Principle

A number of respondents reported that on principle, school provision should be based on the quality of provision and what communities need. The educational needs of children should be the priority. It was reported that the condition of buildings and the size of the school should be immaterial and therefore if a community needs a school, it should be there and the building refurbished if it is required.

Impact on Rural Communities

The importance of schools in sustaining viable rural communities was also noted as a reason against school closure. Respondents reported that many rural communities would not survive if there wasn't a school and that school buildings are often a resource for the whole community. Any proposal to close a school should also consider what communities have lost already and the overall impact upon the community.

There was concern expressed about the proposal to utilise school rolls for determining closure, as it is difficult to predict what may happen in the future. It was noted that whilst school rolls are currently falling in Easter Ross due to the closure of Nigg, if it were to open again then rolls would increase. Respondents reported that there should be attempts to increase populations in rural areas and the provision of local schools are important in attracting young people back to where they grew up and new families to areas. The lack of stability on the future of schools will inevitably impact upon attracting people to rural communities.

Respondents also noted that smaller primaries provide a better educational and secure environment for children. A further view was travelling over half an hour to school twice a day was inappropriate for young children.

Whilst it was reported that the schools in both urban and rural communities are the heart of the communities, it was felt that there would be greater impact upon rural communities should the school close.

Potential Increase in Costs

Respondents noted that the proposal to reduce the number of schools would have additional cost implications. With fewer schools, there would be an increase in transportation costs for the Council. It was also questioned whether there was appropriate transport infrastructure to enable this to happen.

A further question was whether closure and amalgamation would ultimately result in saving money. Closing a school and releasing the value of that asset would be a one off saving and given that staffing costs will still be there, respondents queried whether school closures would ultimately result in the savings anticipated. It was also questioned whether the costs of amalgamation would be any greater than the repair to existing buildings. It was acknowledged that some buildings may be so dilapidated that closure would be the only option.

In addition to general points, there were a number of respondents who specifically noted that they were against closures within their particular area. Responses of this nature came from across the Highland area.

In addition to the general question of ***Are we running too many schools?***, we also asked:

As an alternative to reducing the number of schools, should we run the same number of schools but with 12% less in real terms for each school?

Views against

When asked about the reduction in number of schools, whilst there was acknowledgment that there are too many schools currently run, respondents felt it important to note the concerns and considerations associated with that potential option. However, given the choice of a reduction in the number of schools or all budgets, respondents views crystallised. The majority of respondents on the question of reducing budgets were firmly against noting that this was not a viable alternative.

Shrinking resources

There was a view that by reducing school budgets this would be spreading resources too thinly which could have damaging results. It was noted that given the savings already made by schools, it was difficult to see where a further 12% could be found and concern that schools would just not be able to function with this. One view was that larger schools wouldn't be able to manage with a 12% cut whilst an alternative view that a 12% cut would have a greater impact on a smaller school with a smaller budget.

Educational impact

Respondents were concerned at the potential educational impact budget reductions would have. It was noted this could affect the quality of education provided and could therefore result in every child's education suffering. Respondents expressed that it was important that pupils should receive all areas of a full education and not have this dictated by budget reductions. A further view was that it was not fair to penalise urban schools if rural ones are struggling.

Amalgamation and maintaining quality

There was a clear preference amongst respondents for the closure and amalgamation of schools over a reduction in school budgets. Unpalatable though the idea of school closures is, it was noted this was a better prospect than the reduction of the budgets in all schools. One view expressing this sentiment was that although it has been a benefit in the past to have primaries in small communities this can no longer be afforded and that it would be better to reduce the number of schools overall than to disadvantage all children by diluting provision.

Respondents noted that it was better to have higher investment and higher quality provision across a smaller number of schools than to have standards in all schools falling.

Targeting for closure and amalgamation

In supporting the closure of schools as an alternative to reducing budgets, respondents added to the responses received from question one and noted how schools should be targeted. Views expressed were similar to the responses received to the first question, with a split between urban and rural provision. One set of views was that small rural schools, where there is a nearby alternative, should be considered for closure. It was noted that rural communities need to accept that it is no longer possible to have a school in every village.

The alternative view however was that closure and amalgamation in urban centres would be preferable. It was noted that larger savings would be generated from these closures whilst not taking the heart of the local community. There was concern noted at the impact closure would have on rural communities, perhaps disadvantaging these communities further, where they often rely on school buildings for alternative uses. It was felt that there was a need to look at cumulative effect of cuts on rural areas.

As with responses to the first question, a number of respondents also noted that demographics and transportation should be considered when identifying schools for amalgamation. It was noted that all children in Highland should have access to the same facilities and opportunities but that it would need to be accepted that some may have longer commutes. The distance between schools, the cost of transportation and the availability of transport provides were all noted as considerations. It was also noted that the demographics of the area should be considered or that a minimum number of pupils per school should be set.

An alternative view however was that each school should be looked at individually as if only a formula was utilised only small rural schools would close.

Views in favour

A small number of respondents to this question were in favour of a reduction in school budgets. It was noted that a safe business plan for each school would be required or that the reduction should be based upon pupil numbers. An alternative view was that each school should be looked at individually rather than a 12% saving across the all schools.

Impact of school closure

The main rationale provided in support of this proposal was concern about impact of school closures. Concerns were noted that the reduction of schools could lead to depopulation in effected areas and that it was only fair to offer an adequate choice of schools. It was noted

that school closure are often distressing and would have a negative impact upon the pupils and also that socially it was not good for pupils to have to travel long distances. It was also queried whether closures would deliver the savings required.

Ways to reduce the deficit

Respondents in support of the option to reduce school budgeted proposed a number of alternative ways in which the budget gap created by the reductions could be overcome. It was suggested that schools could be run more efficiently and also that a reduction in operational costs, such as lighting, could be considered whilst ensuring the quality of education is retained. An alternative view however was that staff wages should be reduced in addition to a reduction in classroom assistants whose role could be fulfilled by volunteers.

Respondents also noted that the community could do more to generate additional funding through fund raising and that this happens in a number of communities at present.

Combination

A few respondents noted that a combination of a reduction in schools and a reduction in school budgets should be considered. Respondents with this view generally reported that in addition to reducing the number of schools, staff such as support staff and generally Council staff should be reduced.

Alternatives to Closure and Budget Reduction

Amongst the responses to both questions were a number of proposed alternative efficiencies to the closure and amalgamation of schools and to the reduction in school budgets. These suggestions were generated by respondents both in support and against the two questions posed.

Organisation

One set of suggestions was based around the need to organise schools differently. There was support for a cluster approach - the sharing of head teachers across primaries in rural areas. There was also a suggestion to look at the broader sharing of resources between schools in rural areas and perhaps cluster departmental heads. It was noted that perhaps joint primary and secondary schools could be considered which could attempt to reduce costs, whilst a further suggestion was to have larger regionally based schools and that the increased transport costs would be offset against the significant savings made in amalgamating a number of schools within one building.

Further suggestions were to move to more composite classes therefore reducing teacher numbers and altering catchment areas to make schools larger and more efficient.

Administration

A number of respondents made suggestions related to streamlining within schools and more scrutiny of school administration costs. One respondent suggested that each school should be responsible for its own budget, therefore able to generate greater efficiencies, whilst another that a centralised approach would assist in saving money for example through adopting a bulk purchase system.

It was also suggested that there was a need for experienced managers to manage school budgets and to let head teachers concentrate on educational matters. Such managers could

be shared across school clusters, this approach would result in less waste and greater savings.

It was reported that there was a need to make better use of teachers, with some schools although having falling roles retaining teaching staff who are underutilised. It was suggested better use should be made of these staff such as being used to cover absence perhaps across several schools. A number of respondents also suggested that staff salaries should be reviewed and ultimately reduced and another view that there should be a reduction in the number of advisory staff.

A range of suggestions were also proposed on the increased use of technology, in order to be more efficient in the delivery of education. It was suggested that specialist staff could deliver courses via video link rather than the need to travel or have specialist staff in each school. There could also be a modular approach to specialist teaching.

A further view was that the Council should consider corporate sponsorship of schools as another approach to generating income.

Buildings

There were suggestions from respondents about the need to make schools into multi-use buildings and therefore increasing their value and efficiency locally. It was proposed that schools could include libraries and service points but also that there should be charges for external use.

Respondents also noted that there was also a need to make buildings more energy efficient such as through solar thermal heating, biomass boilers etc. which could assist in reducing the need to close premises. However an alternative view was that the Council shouldn't be installing renewable energy systems in very small schools as this won't actually recoup the spend made. It was suggested that stopping this approach would save money.

A further view was that there should be a modular approach to school builds so that it would be possible to increase/decrease the capacity of a school as required.

Specialist Provision

In addition to above, a range of suggestions were made in relation to reducing specialist provision such as Gaelic and denominational schools. A few respondents felt that Gaelic medium and Gaelic schools should be removed completely, noting that they are divisive within communities. An alternative view was that whilst provision should be maintained this should be concentrated in existing schools and that there should be no proposal to build new Gaelic schools. Others reported that the Gaelic budget should be reduced and that parents should have to pay for transporting their children if they want this type of education.

On principle a number of respondents felt there should be no segregation in education provision, on either religious or language grounds, and that this should only be provided if it is paid for separately by parents.

Should we continue to run care homes ourselves?

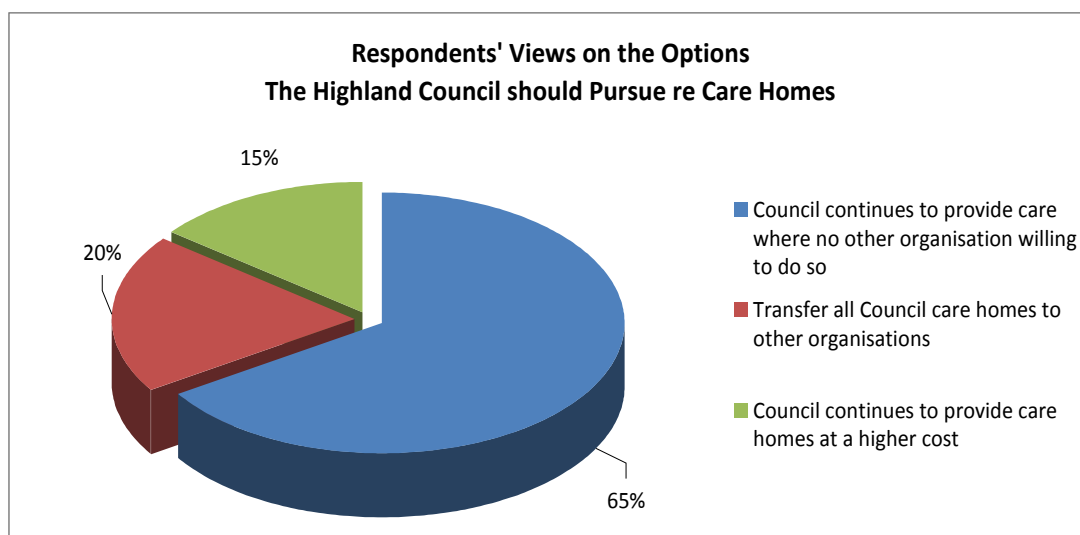
Quantitative Analysis

We asked the Citizens' Panel:

"We want to know if we should concentrate our effort, and our Council provision, in remote and rural areas, where private/ voluntary providers are unlikely to run care homes".

Respondents were then asked to choose one of three options in response to the question: ***"which of the following options should the Council pursue in terms of care homes?"*** Some 92.2% of the entire sample responded to this question. They answered the question as follows:

- 65.9% chose "The Council continues to provide care where no other organisation is willing to do so (mainly rural areas) achieving a lower level of savings"
- 19.6% chose "Transfer all Council care homes to other organisations saving up to £2.9m"
- 14.5% chose "The Council continue to provide care homes at a higher cost"



By the various categories of respondents the most notable features of support for the option that ***"The Council continues to provide care where no other organisation is willing to do so"*** were as follows:

- Females (69%) were even stronger supporters than males (62%) of this option;
- By age group a clear majority of each age group - ranging from 70% of those aged 25-44 to 57% of those aged 75+ - supported this option;
- Of those who commented earlier in the survey about the residential homes for elderly or disabled people provided by the Council, and who answered this current question, support for this option came from a majority of **both** those who expressed their satisfaction with this service (64%) **and** those who stated that they were dissatisfied with the service (53%).

While only 14.5% of the entire sample chose the option that ***"The Council continue to provide care homes at a higher cost"***, it is interesting to observe that the strongest support for this choice comes from those who had earlier expressed their dissatisfaction with the Council's service – 33% of them selected this option. This is much higher than the 18% of

the group who, having earlier expressed themselves satisfied with the service the Council provided, chose this option.

Qualitative Analysis

Just over 200 separate comments were received on the general question *Should we continue to run care homes ourselves?* A further 155 comments were received on the secondary question on whether the Council should concentrate care home provision in remote and rural areas where private/voluntary providers are unlikely to.

Most comments were generated from discussions at ward forums, with others through meetings with partners and special interest groups and via the blog, email and on-line questionnaire. In addition, a petition was received regarding Duthac House care home in Tain, with 2523 individuals requesting its retention.

Should we continue to run care homes ourselves?

Respondents to this question were divided, with views expressed both for the Council continuing to operate care homes and those against.

Views in Favour

Value of Council care homes

Amongst those in support of the Council continuing to run care homes, the rationale generally related to a strong impression that the private sector does not provide good value for money. Respondents disputed that Council and private care homes provide the same standard of service, respondents reporting that the quality of care was better in Council care homes and the staff superior.

Those in favour of Council care homes reported that a positive feature was that homes provided services for the community as a whole and, significantly, maintained people locally within their communities. It was noted this aspect of service was very important and there was the potential for a negative impact on residents if the Council stopped running care homes and residents had to move.

Principle

Respondents clearly noted that there was an important principle that services such as care homes should be run for the good of the community and not for profit. It was suggested that with the current aging population and an increasing need for the provision of this type of service locally, that the Council should be undertaking this provision. Moreover, respondents considered that the Council has a moral responsibility to provide care, especially in rural areas.

Council needs to be more efficient

Respondents acknowledged however that there is a need for the Council to be more efficient. Concern was expressed at the cost differentials between private and Council care and it was suggested that the Council needs to examine how it is providing care and attempt to mirror private sector management.

Although supportive of the Council continuing to run care homes, a minority of this group acknowledged that if the Council cannot compete efficiently then it should only continue to provide homes where there is no alternative, a combination of Council and private homes.

The Council should then only concentrate in rural areas or where the private sector is not willing to provide. The importance of ensuring standards were maintained in this case was emphasised and noted that if homes must be outsourced then they should be run by the voluntary sector.

Acknowledging the differentials in cost, a number of suggestions were provided regarding cost savings in an attempt to retain Council run care homes:

- The community could assist more in service provision and fund raising for services;
- Using common good funds e.g. in Tain to assist in upgrading equipment;
- Need to cut running costs of existing homes, heating a critical area, therefore need to look at new technologies;
- Review current running costs but don't build new homes.

Views against

External providers more efficient

There was support amongst respondents for the alternative view that care homes could be outsourced, acknowledging that the majority are already in private hands. In opposition to views detailed above, it was suggested that Council homes are below the standards of private ones, with the care sometimes better in private provision. Again, concerns were expressed at the cost differentials between the two operations but a clear view that it cannot be justified to continue operating Council homes when a more cost effective model is available. People reported that Council run homes are not good value for money.

Principle

Respondents noted that the principle for service provision should be on the quality of service and not who provides it. If standards are maintained and the quality of the service monitored, there is no reason for the Council to continue to operate care homes.

Additional considerations

Although supportive of outsourcing, concern was expressed regarding the potential impact upon existing residents and a suggestion that existing Council homes should be transferred not closed. Concern was also noted at staff conditions in the private sector and the need therefore to improve staff wages. Respondents noted that there may still be a need for the Council to operate some care homes where there is no private provision.

Neither in favour nor against

A number of respondents were neither in favour or against the Council continuing to run care homes but either registered specific concerns and highlighted areas for considered or provided ideas for service provision.

Impact upon elderly

Similar to other responses noted above, concerns were expressed regarding the impact upon the elderly should the Council cease to run and also the standards and quality of the caring environment in the private sector. However, this was balanced against views that if the standards and quality of care are maintained, then outsourcing provision is quite acceptable.

Cost of care

The cost of care in both sectors generated differing opinions from respondents. One view was that Highland Council could continue to run care homes but only if at a competitive cost.

An alternative view was that it should be left to the private sector if this is cheaper as this could free up more money for the provision of care. It was noted that there would be a need to monitor care if it was all outsourced and concern that this could lead to increased costs. However, it was felt that there would be better accountability if the service was left with the Council.

Principle

Views from some respondents were split between the principle against privatising all provision against the need to be cost effective. It was also noted that there was a need for equity of provision throughout the area.

Alternatives

A further range of ideas were suggested by respondents as ways forward regarding the provision of care homes:

- Care homes could be provided on a franchise basis
- Examine potential public/private partnerships
- Council and NHS should work with communities to explore other models
- Council should build larger but few care homes
- Council should build care homes but then sublet
- If outsourcing this should be to not for profit organisations

In addition to the general question ***Should we continue to run care homes ourselves?***, we also asked:

Should we concentrate our effort and Council provision in remote and rural areas where private/voluntary providers are unlikely to run care homes, and in the main areas of population should we allow the private and voluntary sector to provide these at a lower cost?

Whilst responses to the first question regarding Council care home provision were divided, when asked specifically about concentrating provision in rural areas where no alternative provision exists, responses were far clearer.

Views in favour

There was considerable support from respondents for concentrating Council care homes in remote and rural areas. It was recognised that this model would ensure that rural communities were not disadvantaged and enable people to remain within their communities. There was a feeling that the Council has a duty to provide this service in remote and rural areas.

The support for this proposal came with a series of caveats, most notably the need to ensure that the standards and quality of care provided in private/voluntary sector care homes was equivalent to that received in Council run provision. However, an alternative view expressed was that the perception of superior quality of care in Council run provision was untrue and that in fact private care homes were often better.

Respondents noted that there was a need to improve the continuity of staff in private sector care homes. There was a view that lower wages lead to a higher turnover of staff and therefore a poorer quality of care.

Although respondents noted that private sector companies will generally not want to operate in rural areas, an alternative view was that, where there was an interest, private companies should be considered for operating in rural areas. A further suggestion was that given the costs to provide services in rural areas are higher, then increased funds should be made available to the private sector which may encourage service provision in rural communities.

Although supportive of the suggestion to concentrate Council services in rural communities, respondents were more comfortable with the voluntary rather than private sector providing the alternative services in the future.

Views against

There were a number of respondents who disagreed with the suggested approach. Whilst there was concern at the cost differentials, there was still a view that the Council should continue to run existing care homes but do so more efficiently. Respondents appeared uncomfortable at targeting provision in rural areas. It was reported that there is a need for equity across all communities and that Council money should go where there is need and not be location dependent. Respondents expressed concern that such an approach could lead to private sector monopolies in urban areas.

Concern was also expressed about the profit driven approach of the private sector and views reported that this inevitably led to lower service standards. Although in opposition to the suggestion, it was noted that if areas were to be outsourced, respondents were more supportive of the voluntary rather than the private sector providing services.

Neither in favour nor against

A number of respondents did not express an opinion either in favour or against the proposal but raised a number of areas for consideration and suggestions for how the service could operate. The cost differential was noted as a concern and a query raised at whether this meant that Council services were inefficient. It was suggested that the Council improve the way it provides services and operates in the same way as the private sector.

Respondents were clear that the quality of service was critical and that the same standards should be utilised by whoever was providing care, especially specialist care. Services within local communities were regarded as very important in order to retain elderly within their communities and also reduce travel distances for relatives.

In addition, respondents provided a range of potential suggestions for improving care services. These included:

- Examine the potential of Trust options e.g. Lochcarron model;
- Need for better partnerships with the NHS;
- Examine potential social enterprise/community models, especially in rural areas. Need for Council support for these social enterprises in order for this to work;
- Longer contracts to attract private sector provision in rural areas;
- Multi use of existing buildings e.g. covert disused rural schools into care homes;
- Focus should be on retaining people in their own homes and examining home care and housing solutions. Need to think of different models - e.g. model for looked after children in ordinary houses. This would enable people to stay in their communities supported by local staff at a lower cost.

Can we change how we provide day care for older people?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens' Panel were not asked any particular questions regarding day care provision.

Qualitative Analysis

170 separate comments were received on the general question *Can we change how we provide day care for older people?* A further 20 responses were received to each of the specific proposals for existing day care provision at Beechview Brora, Raasay and Tigh Na Drochaid.

Most comments were generated from discussions at ward forums, through meetings with partners and special interest groups and electronically via the blog, email and on-line questionnaire.

Can we change how we provide day care for older people?

Views in favour

There was considerable support from respondents to the suggestion to provide day care in different ways. It was felt that as long as alternative facilities were available locally and that they met the required standards, such as DDA compliance, then this would be a positive development.

Use of premises

It was noted that there is a need to think more about the multi-use of existing premises. There was strong support to look at existing facilities within a local community such as community centres, village halls, church halls, libraries, and schools. It was suggested that there was the potential to make better use of primary schools especially those currently under-capacity and therefore having space available. Respondents hoped that better use of local facilities in this way could be a way of making them more viable and retaining them. A further suggestion was the need to consider commercial premises such as hotels and care homes to potentially provide alternative venues for day care. One respondent suggested that an integrated approach to day care should be taken; using the hotel for lunch, a swim in the local pool, the community centre for bingo and then taken to library.

The potential to make better use of existing facilities was seen as a positive development – the opportunity to bring together different generations in one place and increasing social interaction. It was noted that this would be better than isolating the elderly in separate facilities and ensuring they were part of the community as a whole. Respondents provided examples of this model already in operation, for example Dornoch, Helmsdale, and Community Gardens Forres.

Different ways to provide day care

A further suggestion was that there was need to look at different options to providing this type of care and different partnerships. It was proposed that there could be greater involvement from community and voluntary groups in providing day care.

It was noted however that there would still be a need for funding and transportation and whilst voluntary and community groups could provide at a lower cost, there would still be a cost. A further caution was that communities would need support if they were to provide these services.

Importance of day care

The importance of this type of care and the need for social interaction was noted by a number of respondents. Although the way the service is delivered may change, the provision and current level of provision was still needed. The service was as important for carers, as a form of respite, as clients and that there would be a negative impact if removed. It was emphasised that no-one should be disadvantaged by any change. A view held by some was that there was not enough provision at present.

It was noted by a representative group of the deaf community that there was a need for greater encouragement for the community to be involved and a need to make services accessible for participation.

A further view expressed was that although alternative models were to be supported, if special care was required then day centre provision would still be needed.

Neither in favour nor against

A number of respondents were neither supportive or against the proposal to change day care provision. The potential use of community facilities was regarded as positive. It was felt there was an opportunity to make use of buildings more efficiently and that a link to residential care could be sensible. It would also allow interaction between all of a community and that the elderly would not be isolated. However, there were concerns expressed that alternative facilities within a community might not be suitable, nor even available in the case of some rural areas. It was noted that this may be dependent upon the level of need and whether skilled help was available. There were further concerns at the potential need for people to travel and that whilst integrated care settings would be good, whether this will save money.

People noted that communities could do more towards the provision of care and that this should be looked into. A further suggestion was that young people could be more involved on the volunteering side of day care which would be good for whole community.

It was suggested that when new buildings were being constructed, a community facility for such provision should be made available.

Views against

Importance of day care

A number of respondents to this question were against any potential proposal to change the way day care is currently provided. People noted that day care is an essential service with the social interaction element critical to the wellbeing of the elderly. Respondents observed that day care centres currently provide a wide range of facilities and activities. It was suggested that they are more than just a lunch club, providing assessment and provision for personal care and would therefore be very difficult to replace. There was a desire for the status quo to be maintained, and that the Council had a responsibility to continue to operate it.

Alternative facilities

With regards the proposal to utilise alternative facilities locally, respondents noted that there would often be no alternative facilities within a community other than the current day care provision and, especially within rural communities, no staff or alternative organisation to run them. Of those that are available, it was felt that it would not be possible to use them as they're purpose and therefore set-up is different or adaptation would be required to bring them up to the standard required. This would be especially true of older village halls. A further concern was the proposal noted elsewhere to close community centres.

Specific Proposals regarding day care provision at Beechview Brora, Raasay, Tigh Na Drochaid.

Around 20 responses were received to each of the specific proposals for existing day care provision. For each, views were generally divided.

Beechview in Brora

With regards the facility of Beechview in Brora, there was support for closing the facility and concentrating on providing alternatives within the local area however this was balanced with concerns about the viability of alternatives, such as village halls, for this purpose and the need to ensure better support is provided to them. A number of people were unsure about the proposal with concerns expressed about the distance people would be required to travel and that on principle these services should be provided locally. However it was acknowledged that the current cost of the service is excessive and noted that it is the quality and accessibility of the service which is important and not who is running it.

A further view expressed was that the facility should not be considered for closure. It was noted that 75% usage was fairly high and that given the aging population, this was likely to increase. It was felt that the travelling distance to the nearest alternative was excessive and that there were not necessarily appropriate alternatives locally; village halls for example would not have the appropriate facilities and would require adaptation.

Raasay Day Care

Respondents to the proposal for Raasay Day Care expressed similar views. There was some support for the proposal to close the existing facility and make the building available to others, but it was felt that the service should continue within another setting, perhaps the community hall or a hotel.

A number of respondents were against the proposal but did feel that the building should be available to other groups locally to run and that this would be a way of maintaining the service. It was noted that the isolated nature of this community meant that there were few other facilities available hence the importance of this one.

Tigh na Drochaid

In relation to the two facilities at Tigh na Drochaid, similar responses were noted. Respondents felt that there was a need to find out why the *Learning Disability Day Care* services were underused and that there should be either an attempt to rectify this prior to closing in an attempt to make the service most cost effective, or to allow another organisation to operate the service. There was concern expressed that any change may not be cost

effective as there would be a need for additional training of new people to provide the service given that it was for people with learning disabilities.

Respondents to both the *Learning Disability* and *Older People's Care* noted that a way to maintain the facility at Tigh na Drochaid would be allow to allow the building to be used by others or to examine what people wanted locally in an attempt to increase provision. There was some support for the proposal to close the current facility but this was combined with a view that alternatives were required locally. It was noted that closing this service would affect the most vulnerable.

Should we close Staffin respite unit?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens' Panel were not asked any particular questions regarding day care provision.

Qualitative Analysis

19 separate responses were received regarding the proposal to close the Staffin respite unit.. Responses were received primarily from individuals and Community Councils across Highland.

There was little support from respondents for the proposal to close the Staffin respite unit. Of those respondents against the proposal to close, it was reported that this was a valuable service serving vulnerable groups within the community and was a way of maintaining people within their own homes.

Respondents suggested that if usage levels are low consideration should be given to extending the use of the facility to other families elsewhere in Highland. A further suggested was to 'let out' the facility to families outwith Highland as a holiday venue and charge accordingly.

An alternative suggestion was that the Council should consider transferring the facility to a charity or community based organisation to operate the service.

Can we reduce the support for Community Centres in Inverness?

Quantitative Analysis

We asked the Citizens' Panel questions about community facilities, including community centres. We asked:

'Thinking about where you live and the facilities in your local community now and in the future, please tell us which of these you would be willing to see run in a shared building?'

77% of respondents were willing to see community centres run in a shared building. Support is strong across all groups of respondents, ranging from 70% to 86% (gender, age, disability, corporate area, length of residency in the Highlands, employment status and housing tenure).

"As well as considering sharing some buildings we are having to consider other options to reduce costs.... As well as considering sharing some buildings, what else would be acceptable to consider to reduce costs?"

Six types of facilities were listed, including community centres.

Inverness Community Centres: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	No Response %
Inverness Community Centres	15.9	49.4	17.9	20.9	19.6

N who responded = 1,188

Some 80.4% of the sample found one or more of the options re Inverness Community Centres acceptable. Before we look in detail at the findings it is important to note that there is a variation in the percentages of people from the various corporate areas who responded to this part of the question – while 80% of those living in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey found one or more of the options acceptable, the percentage drops to 72% for people living in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross and to 70% for those living in Ross, Skye and Lochaber. None of the options presented attracted the support of a majority of the entire sample although one does attract the support of just under half (49.4%) – the option to transfer management of Inverness Community Centres to not-for-profit organisations. By categories of respondents there are some marked differences in the levels of support for this idea:

- By age group, backing for the proposal is strongest amongst those aged 25-44 (55%) and those aged 45-64 (51%) – but is noticeably weaker amongst those aged 65-74 (38%) and 75 + (34%);

- Strong support for this option is evident amongst people resident in the Highlands for less than 5 years (61%) but for those resident in the Highlands for more than 10 years it is markedly less (47%);
- A majority of respondents living in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (52%) find this proposal acceptable – a much higher percentage than emerges from those living in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (38%) and Ross, Skye and Lochaber (42%).
- By employment status a majority of both those who are unemployed (54%) and employed (51%) find the idea acceptable but a markedly smaller percentage of those who are retired (41%) back the idea.

Increasing charges at Inverness Community Centres is acceptable to 20.9% while the reduction in opening hours acceptable to 17.9% and closure of some facilities acceptable to 15.9%.

Qualitative analysis

The following analysis has been undertaken on responses received to questions posed as part of the Council's budget consultation. Around 140 separate comments were received in response to the following questions:

Can we reduce the support for Community Centres in Inverness?

We would like to have your views on whether we could reduce our expenditure by closing 3 or 4 centres, or whether we should reduce the funding for all the centres?

Most comments were generated from face to face meetings and discussions at ward forums and with partners and special interest groups, notably Highland Youth Voice, Inverness Business Improvement District and with people with learning disabilities through the People First Focus Group. Written feedback was received through letters, e-mails and the internet questionnaire. In addition, seven petitions were received for retaining: all community centres in Inverness (4191 signatories); the Hilton Community Centre (3419 signatories); the Spectrum Centre (1560 signatories); the Merkinch Community Centre (826 signatories); the Raigmore Community Centre (763 signatories); the Cameron Youth Centre (216 signatories); and the James Cameron Centre (37 signatories).

A strong theme from the responses was the support for the retention of all Inverness community centres, although this did not necessarily mean continuation in their current form as views on running them better or transferring them to communities to run were offered. Reductions in funding or closure tended to be favoured by those living outwith Inverness, drawing on the need for parity with the village halls model in use there.

Keep All Community Centres Open

Those favouring retention of all Community Centres focused on their value, providing well-used community assets and a focus for a wide range of people in the community, including:

- Children meeting after school;

- Mothers meeting and discussing their children;
- Anyone looking to learn new skills or take part in cultural, sport and physical activity;
- Volunteers, providing a purpose and place for their voluntary activity and the benefits it brings them individually as well as for those they support;
- Older people as place to interact with others, be entertained, to encourage healthy ageing and avoiding specialist care provision.

They highlighted too a potential for displacing costs to other services if Community Centres are closed, notably for young people with nothing else to do and for older people or people with care needs to be cared for increasingly in their community. One respondent commented:

'My son has downs syndrome and should the centre close he would have very little to do for 4 days per week as I am a single carer and have to work full-time. We would be looking for support from social services to fill the gap which would have financial implications for the Council'.

A contradiction in the budget consultation was found with proposals to replace day care centres with Community Centres cited elsewhere.

Many comments focused on individual Community Centres and their particular value to their communities. For some the historic effort, fundraising and community activity to provide the Community Centre was remembered and valued (Raigmore). For others the purpose of the Centre needed to be remembered and valued now and for the future, with strong views expressed about retaining the Cameron Centre as a living war memorial. Others highlighted the Community Centre as a base for valuable outreach work, with any closure having wider impacts on communities, particularly where communities are disadvantaged (Merkinch). Recent investment in buildings was also seen as wasteful if closure proceeds (Merkinch).

Respondents also chose to give testimony about how their Community Centre had changed or enriched their lives, for example in *'attending Alcoholics Anonymous ...as a lifeline..'* A typical sentiment was *'the centre has helped me to gain confidence and make friends ...'* and *'...going to the centre has helped me to get out of the house, make new friends and enjoy learning new skills'.*

Keep all open, but run better

Others responded that community centres should be retained but proposing they are reviewed to make sure they are run efficiently. Suggestions included: charging; opening only during periods of peak use; grouping bookings for classes and opening only when busy; running more events to encourage greater use and charging; sharing management across all six centres; and re-allocating cleaning to keep costs down. Two centres (Hilton and the Cameron Centre) submitted specific proposals for reducing costs in their centres. These can be found below.

Keep all open, but transfer

Another recurring theme was not only the importance of community centres as a valuable asset, but that they should be owned and run by the community or community groups. The transfer of ownership of the Perrins Centre in Alness was cited as an example of where this worked. One church group expressed their interest in running a centre. Another view was that any transfer needed to be supported by training.

Keep all open but reduce funding for Inverness Community Centres

An alternative view for keeping all community centres open was to do this with less funding. The main reason cited was equity in terms of people being able to access community centres locally (with difficulty travelling cited) and in terms of using the same approach with rural areas, where only the village halls grant is provided and they are run by volunteers. Other reasons included the assumption that fund raising in Inverness would be possible and that there should be a move to replacing paid staff with volunteers. Nearly all respondents of this view saw the need to not only reduce funding, but also to transfer the running of the centres to community groups and relying on volunteers.

Closing Inverness community centres

A minority view expressed was to close some or all of the centres. Nearly all respondents were based outside of Inverness. Their reasons for supporting closure focused on their preference for the village halls scheme in rural areas and a view that Inverness is well served generally and residents could cope without community centres. Some suggested that the private sector could provide community centre activities instead and others suggested services could be delivered from other buildings, such as schools or church halls.

Savings proposals submitted by community centres affected:

Budget saving suggestions from Hilton Community Centre

See separate booklet and spreadsheet provided to Director of ECS. Savings ideas include:

- Reduce opening hours by 4 on a Saturday, open 9-3 instead of 8-6. 4 hours x 52 weeks x £8.26 x 1.5 + 21%;
- Reduce opening hours by 0.5 every day, open 8.30am instead of 8.00am. 2.5 hours x 52 weeks x £8.26 + 21%;
- Reduce Centre Co-ordinators hours by 3. 3 hours x 52 weeks x £13.70 + 21%;
- Change current arrangements for cleaning, by creating 1 post of 5 hours per day managed by HC centre staff, instead of 3 posts totalling 7 hours per day managed by Contract Cleaning. 10 hours x 52 weeks x £6.13 + 21%;
- Centre Co-ordinator - as well as managing Hilton Community Centre, is also responsible for managing Culduthel Hall and Smithton Hall;
- Clerical Officer - as well as all Hilton Community Centre work, clerical officer also deals with bookings and payments for Culduthel Hall, undertakes admin duties for Active School Co-ordinator and takes holiday activity bookings for all venues in Inverness area;
- Active School Co-ordinator - Inverness Royal Academy Primary School cluster ASC uses an office in Hilton Community Centre

The Management Committee of the Cameron Youth Centre have looked at the annual Highland Council budget for the Centre. They have identified the following savings that could be made:

- Electricity: Management Committee pay extra 10% making it 60% instead of current 50%
- Cleaning Materials: Management Committee could take on 100%
- Stationery: Management Committee could take on 100%
- Photocopier: Management Committee could take on 100%
- Postages: Management Committee could take on 100%

This amounts to approximately £2,500 per year savings on the current budget.

The staff costs are not something the Management Committee has any control over. The current staff levels are as low as possible for the centre, with the co-ordinator being part time at the centre. We will continue to pay for the minor inside maintenance such as painting and floor covering as we have been doing in the past. The Council will still be responsible for keeping the building wind and water proof.

Should close the Fort William and Portree archives and house these collections in Inverness?

Quantitative Analysis

No questions were asked of the Citizens' Panel regarding Archive provision.

Qualitative analysis

The following analysis has been undertaken on responses received to questions posed as part of the Council's budget consultation. Over 70 separate comments were received in response to the following question:

We are seeking your views as to whether we should close the Fort William and Portree archives and house these collections in Inverness.

Most comments were generated by using the internet, especially the use of the on-line questionnaire and from emails. Some letters were received and comments came from three ward forums. One petition was received for retaining the Portree Archive (767 signatories). Of all the responses to the Council's budget consultation, this question generated most comments from international addresses, especially from New Zealand, Australia and Canada. These responses were mainly from the Highland Diaspora and from Clan Associations.

The strongest theme emerging from the responses is to retain local archive provision. This was for reasons of principle or practice (in terms of saving collections) or in connection with the value individuals reported from using particular local archives. Some responses in favour of closure are recorded. Others offered ideas as alternatives to closure or as ways of keeping local collections local if closures proceed.

Retain local archive provision on principle

The importance of housing archive material in its local context and where it is historically important and relevant was highlighted. Links with information held in local colleges were also seen to be important. The value of local archives to the local economy and for local researchers, students and historians were also common themes. The distance to travel to Inverness was highlighted as another reason for keeping collections local; for others the move to centralising services to Inverness was seen as unfair. The development of the Inverness Archive as part of the hub and spoke model had been supported, but the withdrawal of the local 'spoke' provision was seen as unacceptable.

Relocating local archive material may not be possible

Others saw the closure of the local archives as leading to the loss, rather than relocation of archive material as those lending or donating material may seek its return. This was confirmed by several lenders for both the current material donated and for material promised or bequeathed in future.

Retain Lochaber provision

Those having traced their roots to Lochaber, notably of Cameron descent, called for the local archive to be kept open to enable those researching their family ancestry to be able to do that by combining searching archive records with visits to Lochaber places, college, churches and graveyards. It was highlighted that time to do this by those visiting from abroad was limited and having to include travel to Inverness would hamper ancestry research. Others cited the importance of the archive provision locally in drawing people and tourists and to attend events and gatherings, noting the economic benefit drawn from such events (e.g. the Gathering at Achnacarry in 2009). Those based in the area using the archive for research also wrote of how they valued the local provision. The possibility of losing material donated, notably by Donald Cameron of Lochiel and Mr Ian Thornber, was highlighted.

Retain Portree provision

A key theme emerging is the need to retain local history accessible to local people (notably school children given the location of the archive) and for tourists in support of the cultural heritage of Skye. Related to this, others praised the current service and highlighted its importance not just to learning (19 learning events cited between April and June 2010) but more generally to the Skye economy with 242 visitors counted for 3 months (April to June) 2010.

The loss of material donated, notably by Ruairaidh Hilleary, was highlighted as the material was donated on the basis of it staying in Skye. Another donor, Rev. Murdoch MacKenzie expressed concern about his MacDonald collection being 'lost' among others in Inverness. A prospective donor (Marjorie MacInnes) currently cataloguing documents relating to farming in Skye in the mid 20th century is having second thoughts about the donation if the archive is closed.

Wick archive

Some noted that the arrangements for combining Wick archive material with the National nuclear Archive was not guaranteed and they were concerned that if it did not proceed the Wick collection would be centralised to Inverness.

Conditional agreement with local closure

Some supporting the closure of local archives and relocation of material to Inverness did so conditionally. The conditions were:

- the Inverness facility being able to provide all information digitally to allow searches on-line; and
- local closure only where the service is under-used, ineffective or there is a sound financial rationale.

Agreement with closure of local archives

Very few reasons were provided among those agreeing with closure. Where reasons were provided they related to the archive provision not been seen as a vital service, a view that the service could be run effectively from Inverness in the purpose built facility or because as a service it is not valued and seen as a 'drain on resources'.

Alternatives to relocating local collections to Inverness

Providing archive material locally in other local settings was suggested as a way of retaining records locally. Examples provided were museums, libraries, relocating the Lochaber archive to Lochaber college and the Portree collection to Sabhal mor Ostaig or making

material available instead on-line through Am Baille. Others mentioned that savings could be made instead by reducing opening hours in local archive centres or by generating more income either from the genealogy service or through other local services.

Understanding impact of closure

In addition to the common theme of understanding the detrimental economic impact on local economies by closure given their attraction to tourists and the staging of events, another theme was the need to consult with the UHI on the potential impact of closing local archives as certain courses, research and students could be adversely affected.

Can we reduce Museum provision?

Qualitative analysis

The following analysis has been undertaken on responses received to questions posed as part of the Council's budget consultation. Over 230 separate comments were received in response to the following question:

We are seeking your views on whether we should retain only Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, only the Highland Folk Museum, or only our support for the independent sector.

Most comments were generated by using the internet, especially from e-mails, the on-line questionnaire and the blog; although comments were also received through face to face meetings and forums (12 ward forums, the People First Focus Group and from Highland Youth Voice). Over 30 letters were received on this subject. Three petitions were received in support of Groam House Museum (907 signatories and 39 signatories) and Gairloch Heritage Museum (614 signatories). An on-line petition for the Highland Folk Museum was also cited, but not submitted. Strong pleas for retention of museums were made by the Senior Lecturer and Head of School, History of Art at the University of St Andrews, by Museums Galleries Scotland and by the Highland Museums Forum.

Very few respondents chose to answer the budget choice question posed. Rather than choosing one of three options, a strong theme was to **retain all of the museums** and for three main reasons, namely:

- *their value to the public* (education, learning, culture, economic and tourism benefits, volunteering opportunities provided and the need to retain collections, some of which have national and international significance and to be able to house new archaeological finds locally);
- that *it is not possible to compare* them because they hold different collections, provide different types of services and receive different levels of funding; or
- instead of choosing which to retain, to retain them all by *making them financially viable*. Suggestions focused on: **reducing costs** (reducing opening hours or seasonal opening, better cost controls and co-locating collections); **changing the business model** (by transferring out of Council ownership to either the private or independent sectors); and **generating income** (fundraising, applying for other funding sources, attracting more visitors through better marketing and charging entrance fees and seeking donations, sponsorship from private business,

Others proposed an equal percentage reduction across all museums rather than choosing among them or to close them all.

Of those opting to choose one of the three to retain, there was strong support for the Highland Folk Museum but support was given also for Inverness Museum and Art Gallery and the Independent sector as a whole. The Highland Museums Forum focused on the added value from Council funding, which goes further in the independent sector, and quantified the benefit in the past year from the independent museums as:

- 100,000 visitors in person to Highland independent museums
- 370,000 users which includes web research hits, outreach and educational visits
- 330 volunteers are involved in running Highland independent museums
- 130 voluntary board members govern Highland independent museums
- 34 staff are employed directly by Highland independent museums
- 17 museums have achieved a 3* Visit Scotland grading or above with 7 gaining 4* and Historylinks in Dornoch 5*
- 11 museums are Accredited, others are in the process of applying and all aim to gain this National quality standard by the end of 2010
- Over £750, 000 of external funding has been secured including:
 - Collecting Cultures Fund (Heritage Lottery Fund) Tain Through Time £98,000 and Groam House Museum £99,000
 - Capital development (main funder Heritage Lottery Fund) Highland Museum of Childhood £400,000
- Highland projects and partnerships as part of Museums Galleries Scotland nationwide initiatives e.g. Their Past Your Future and Show Scotland

Responses also tended to support local provision of independent museums, with comments made in support of 16 separate facilities. These are summarised below.

Highland Folk Museum

The museum is seen as a key visitor attraction contributing to the local economy and providing unique cultural insight with high customer satisfaction. Comments from local residents as well as visitors were recorded. A common sentiment is found in the comment below.

"I would like to thank those people responsible for the heritage park at Newtonmore. What an excellent resource! As a depute head teacher at a special school in SW Scotland I was able to take a number of photographs to show to my pupils and make history real for them. I could not believe that this resource was free and I have been recommending to family and friends at home and abroad that they must visit Newtonmore and the heritage museum.

Not only was the park remarkable but the staff were extremely knowledgeable, friendly and able to answer the many questions being fired at them from visitors. I am surprised that Visitscotland does not make more of an attempt to advertise such a resource worldwide."

Groam House Museum

Responses highlighted the high-quality and high-profile exhibitions of the museum along with its community programmes and academic lecture series with publication. Its reputation for Pictish sculpture locally and nationally was cited along with its partnerships regionally and nationally. Its success as a community-led museum attracting volunteers (currently 39 plus 6 expert board members) and external funding (£99k from heritage lottery awards) was highlighted in many responses.

Inverness Museum and Art Gallery

Respondents noted the interesting and well presented collections and exhibits in IMAG. Others mentioned the good layout good and accessibility of the interactive exhibits. Several Scottish history students cited the value of IMAG to their studies. Other views included the

importance of a city having a well presented cultural collection and visual art exhibition space. Some comments focused on the need to promote IMAG better.

Gairloch Heritage Museum

Responses focused on the value of the museum, especially in a remote area of the Highlands. Its role in conservation, tracing family connections for visitors to the area with Scottish roots, open days and educational activities were all cited. Its value has been recognised through the several awards won since its opening in 1977. It is viewed as a genuine community enterprise, full of interesting and informative displays about the local area.

The Liberator project was highlighted which researched the 1945 crash of a USAAF B-24 Liberator bomber named 'Sleepy Time Gal' which ended its days, along with 15 aircrew, in the area of the Fairy Lochs near Gairloch. This was reported to have attracted many visitors from the USA.

It is seen as a valuable visitor attraction (and as one respondent noted '...especially appreciated on wet days).

Other respondents focused on the value from the Council funding in terms of it enabling tourism, learning and volunteer effort (over 40 volunteers cited).

Caithness Horizons

Support for the museum came in various forms: economic benefit and social inclusion (particularly from the Dounreay Stakeholder Group of community organisations); engagement about science and technology in Caithness (especially from the British Science Association); and its success and popularity with 5 star accreditation holding locally and nationally significant collections.

Others wrote about the role of the museum as a catalyst for other community development and learning. A notable example is:

"During the past fortnight here at Caithness Horizons, we spent a week with Scottish Opera, Eden Court and local teenagers creating a totally original Caithness opera inspired by our collection. We've had a week with a disabled artist working with teenagers from both local high schools teasing out themes related to disability and the social mores of our attitude to 'Otherness'. Today our foyer was filled with local food producers, showing off to visitors their produce as one way of reducing the carbon footprint; meanwhile in the education room next door speakers invited by the British Science Association were offering the public an opportunity to learn about the current spectrum of Renewable Technology. Next week we'll have residents from a local care home coming for an activity, as well as two groups of learning disabled adults working for three days on art workshops. Believe me, this is just a hint of the range of activity that now occupies what was once a decrepit building."

Museum of Childhood

Support for the museum focused on its impact in terms of education and outreach services, economic benefits with 22,000 visitors last year, its cultural contribution and community involvement programme including volunteer support.

Timespan, Helmsdale

Comments in support this museum focused on its achievements in attracting other funding (£17 for every £1 received from THC was cited for 2008) and the importance economically of the museum to the local area, especially as it is the biggest employer (10 people employed) and in a fragile area. Others focused on the success of the collections and exhibits. One respondent wrote:

“..recently the Our Past Our Future intergenerational heritage project attracted 2400 participants from as far as Canada to 124 events. The OURS youth arts project had over 500 participants involving 9 villages and culminating in 3 gallery exhibitions, 2 in the community and 1 in the Tate modern.”

Timespan was noted as a 4* visitor attraction containing a fully accredited museum with over 12,500 visitors per year.

Others expressed concern about the future of the collections built up should the museum close.

Dunbeath Heritage Centre

Those writing in support of Dunbeath Heritage Centre focused on the quality of the facility (4 star accreditation) and value for money derived from Council funding in terms of its ability to attract volunteers and other funding amounting to over £100k in the past 4-5 years. Its support for archaeological excavations within Dunbeath area was also highlighted.

Tarbet Discovery Centre

Strong support from academics in Edinburgh University and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland was made. They highlighted the importance of The Pictish monastery discovered at Tarbet which has international recognition and has contributed to knowledge about the Church, not just in Scotland, but in early medieval Britain and Ireland as a whole. They cited the major historical significance of Easter Ross and its people in the Pictish period. The role of the museum in promoting learning through its collections and hosting public lectures was highlighted.

Other museums supported

Individual comments were received in support of Glencoe and North Lorne and West Highland Folk Museums and museums in Grantown, Nairn, Tain, Strathnaver and Historylinks in Dornoch.

Quantitative Analysis

Questions relating to museums asked of the Citizens' Panel focused on sharing buildings, options for reducing their running costs and the use of not-for-profit organisations in providing services. No direct questions were asked on the question with one of three options to select. The responses are analysed below.

Museums in shared buildings

We asked:

“Thinking about where you live and the facilities in your local community now and in the future, please tell us which of these you would be willing to see run in a shared building?”

A list of 11 different facilities was presented and respondents “please tick all that apply”. 1463 respondents answered the question (92% of the sample) and 60% of them were willing to see a museum in a shared building.

Reducing costs in museums

We asked:

“As well as considering sharing some buildings we are having to consider other options to reduce costs.... As well as considering sharing some buildings, what else would be acceptable to consider to reduce costs?”

Six types of facilities were listed and for each there were up to 5 options presented. Respondents were invited to “tick all that apply”. The results are shown in the table below. Note also that respondents could – and did – select more than one option per facility.

Museum Services: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	Provide more services by telephone or on-line %	No Response %
Museum Services	12.7	44.0	32.0	32.5	13.0	19.6

N who responded = 1,334

Some 89.1% found one or more of the options re Museum Services acceptable. However note that there is a marked difference in the responses to this part of the question by the age of people who engaged in the survey. While 76% of those aged 75+ found one or more of the options acceptable, this percentage is much lower than the 91% of the 45-64 age group, the 90% of the 25-44 age group and the 85% of the 65-74 age band. None of the options attained the support of a majority of the respondents to the survey.

The option that came closest to getting support from a majority was “transfer management to not-for-profit organisations” which 44% found acceptable. There were some interesting variations in the level of support for this option according to the various categories of respondents:

- By age group, 48% of those aged 45-64 and 46% of those aged 25-44 supported this option – in contrast to 36% of those aged 65-74 and 34% of those aged 75+.
- Just under half (49.6%) of those resident in the Highlands less than 5 years found the proposal acceptable – compared with 43.9% of those resident in the Highlands for more than 10 years.
- By employment status, 51% of those who are unemployed selected this option – compared with 47% of those who are employed and 38% of those who are retired.

Two of the other options were each chosen by just under 1 in 3 of the sample – (32.5%) and increasing charges (32.5%). The final two options were supported by just over 1 in 8 - the provision of more services by telephone or on-line (13%) and the closure of some facilities (12.7%).

Not-for-profit organisations

To explore views on alternative approaches to service delivery, the Citizens’ Panel was asked a general question

“Should we rely more on not-for-profit organisations?”

Some 92% of the sample answered this question and of them **76%** answered **“yes”** and **24%** answered **“no”**. A higher percentage of respondents from Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (80%) answered “yes” than the other two areas (72% and 73%). This result is statistically significant. Support for more reliance on not-for-profit organisations was also particularly strong amongst those unable to work (86%).

Respondents were then asked a follow-up question:

“Which types of services should the Council be using not-for-profit organisations for?”

Some 30% of the sample responded to this question. The suggestions found in the table below are those which were mentioned by at least 1% of the entire sample. Museums are a leading suggestion.

Services the Council should use not-for-profit orgs	% of All Survey Respondents
Leisure Centres/ Swimming Pools/ Outdoor Centres	5%
Maintaining Public Parks/ Open Spaces	4%
Museums	4%
Respite Services/ Home Help	4%
All Services	3%
Community Centres/ Village Halls	3%
Libraries	3%
Street Cleaning	2%
Care Homes	2%
Breakfast & After School Clubs	2%
Recycling	2%
Sports Clubs/ Activities Groups/ Ranger Service	2%
Youth Work	2%
Community Learning/ Adult Education	1%
Public Toilets	1%
Handyperson/ Gardening Services	1%
Childcare/Nursery	1%
Lunch Clubs	1%

N= 471

Can we reduce Library provision?

Qualitative analysis

The following analysis has been undertaken on responses received to questions posed as part of the Council's budget consultation. Nearly 300 separate comments were received in response to the following question and its options:

We are seeking your views on whether we can reduce library provision.

Closing up to 17 small local libraries

Closing one major library

Reducing library opening hours by 10%

Removing seven school librarian posts

Ceasing the Bookstart service

Comments were generated from all consultation sources with good use made of the internet (including the blog, e-mails and the on-line questionnaire) and all 13 ward forums feedback views alongside other forums including Highland Youth Voice, the Community Safety Tasking Group and the People First Focus Group. Written comments were received also by letter and eight petitions were submitted. The petitions received were in relation to the retention of libraries in Wick (2500 signatories); Helmsdale (414 signatories); Muir of Ord (400 signatories); Lochcarron (337 signatories); Invergordon (154 signatories); Plockton (151 signatories); Nairn (41 signatories); and by Unison Scotland for all libraries (45 signatories).

The main theme emerging from the feedback was for libraries to be protected from cuts in funding. This view was fed back in terms of the high value placed on library services, through pleas made for saving particular local libraries and by suggestions on how to make the library service more affordable. Of the five options presented in the budget consultation, the least harmful option was seen to be the reduction in opening hours. These views are described more fully below.

The value of libraries generally

A strong message from the consultation was that libraries have a vital role in communities for learning and for social interaction. Their use for the whole community was commented on; for older people, children, students, people seeking work, parents, tourists and for people with disabilities. The services they offer were seen as essential for borrowing books and other material and for access to the internet. Their cultural value was also commented on.

Libraries in rural communities are seen to be particularly important, with fears expressed if more reliance is to be made on the mobile library service as it is seen as operating too infrequently at the moment. Others commented that it is the only local facility left in their community or that it is co-located with other services and closure would undermine those too.

The support for particular libraries

In addition to the seven petitions received for particular libraries, comments in support of the following local libraries were received: Achiltibuie; Ardersier; Bonar Bridge; Broadford, Coigath; Cromarty; Culloden; Drumnadrochit; Edderton; Golspie; Helmsdale; Invergordon; Inverness; Knoydart; Kingussie; Lairg; Lochcarron; Mallaig; Muir of Ord; Nairn; Plockton; Tain; Ullapool; and Wick. Others feedback their support for the mobile service.

Most comments were about the personal value derived from the service and the high standard of service available for individuals and for the wider community.

Options to keep libraries open

As a way to keep libraries open and the service accessible to everyone, several options were proposed in the feedback. As the consultation asked about reducing opening hours, there were many comments on this option. For many of those commenting, this was seen as preferable to closures.

Other options suggested included co-location, particularly with schools or instead of sharing buildings, to share staff across school and community libraries. Others suggested that income could be raised in libraries for fines or other charges for services or to rely on more volunteers. Greater use of ICT in libraries was seen as a way of reducing costs. Compared to other community learning and leisure facilities in the consultation, there were very few people favouring transfer of libraries to a Trust or other organisation.

Other consultation questions

Views were feedback on the other options posed in the consultation.

For the Bookstart service some respondents could not see the need for the service as libraries are available for everyone and thought the service was sometimes wasteful of material; however others could see how the Bookstart service could reach children who otherwise would not be encouraged to read or find enjoyment in reading. For them Bookstart is an essential preventative early years service.

While few respondents agreed with closures, those favouring closure tended not to provide their reasons.

Mixed views were provided on reducing the number of school librarians. Those favouring a reduction tended not to provide reasons, while those against the reduction, including a parent council and professional associations, regarded the school librarian as an essential service.

Quantitative Analysis

For libraries, we asked the Citizens' Panel about the potential for shared buildings and other ways of reducing costs.

For shared buildings 77% of respondents (of 1463 answering this question) said they were willing to see a library run in a shared building. Co-locating libraries was favoured strongly across all groups in the survey regardless of age, gender or disability.

On the question of reducing running costs for libraries the following responses were received:

Libraries: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Provide more services by telephone or on-line %	No Response %
Libraries	8.5	40.5	36.6	23.3	16.7

N who responded = 1,246

Some 83.3% of the sample found one or more of the options presented for Libraries acceptable; although none of the options were selected by a majority of respondents.

The option gaining the most support was the transfer of management to not-for-profit organisations (40.5%); although there were pronounced variations in the pattern of support for this option according to the various categories of respondents:

- By age group, 44% of those aged 25-44 and 42% of those aged 45-64 found this option acceptable but there was markedly less support for it amongst those aged 65-74 (34%) and those aged 75 + (26%).
- Some 47% of those respondents resident in the Highlands less than 5 years found the proposal acceptable – compared with 39% of those resident in the Highlands for more than 10 years.
- By employment status, 49% of those who are unemployed selected this option – compared with 43% of those who are employed and 33% of those who are retired.

A reduction in opening hours was deemed acceptable by 36.6% of the sample gaining the most support from people aged 75+ (46%) and those aged 65-74 (43%) and people who were retired (43%) – more of whom selected this option than selected the transfer of management to not-for-profit organisations.

Provision of more services by telephone or on-line was selected as an acceptable option by 23.3% of the entire sample but support for this varied widely from 25% of those aged 25-44 to 8% of those aged 75+.

Closure of some libraries received the endorsement of around only 1 in 12 of the entire sample (8.5%).

Can we reduce the number of swimming pools?

Quantitative Analysis

We asked the Citizens' Panel questions about community facilities including swimming pools. We said:

“Thinking about where you live and the facilities in your local community now and in the future, please tell us which of these you would be willing to see run in a shared building?”

62% of respondents were willing to see swimming pools in shared buildings. Support for swimming pools to be located in shared buildings is found amongst a majority of respondents in all categories bar one – those aged 75+ of whom only 43% are willing to see this happen. In addition, the majority in favour of this proposition amongst those aged 65-74 is small (52%). It is in the younger age groups that there is much greater support for this suggestion (it is endorsed by 68% of those aged 25-44 and 63% of those aged 45-64).

We also asked for views on how to **reducing running costs**. We said:

“As well as considering sharing some buildings we have to consider other options to reduce costs.... As well as considering sharing some buildings, what else would be acceptable to consider to reduce costs?”

The responses for swimming pools are shown below.

Swimming Pools: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	No Response %
Swimming Pools	5.3	50.8	18.2	37.4	14.6

N who responded =1,294

Some 85.4% of the sample found one or more of the options presented on Swimming Pools acceptable. However, only one option was selected by a majority of all those surveyed namely, to transfer the management of swimming pools to not-for-profit organisations - and at 50.8% this is a slim majority.

There are marked differences in support for this measure according to the various categories of respondents:

- By age group, while a majority of those aged 25-44 (53%) and 45-64 (52%) support this option, only a minority of those who are 65-74 (43%) and 75+ (36%) consider this acceptable.
- By employment status, support from a majority comes from those in the following categories: people who are unemployed (56%); people unable to work (53%); and

people who are employed (50.5%). But the percentage of those who are retired (44%) who consider the option acceptable is notably smaller.

- By length of residence in the Highlands support for this measure comes from those who have been resident for less than 5 years (59%) – a level much higher than is evident in people resident in the Highlands for more than 10 years (48%).

Increasing charges is acceptable to fewer than 4 in 10 (37.4%) while the reduction in opening hours is acceptable to fewer than 1 in 5 (18.2%) - and the closure of some swimming pools is acceptable in the eyes of only around 1 in 20 (5.3%).

Qualitative analysis

The following analysis has been undertaken on responses received to questions posed as part of the Council's budget consultation. Over 360 separate comments were received in response to the following questions:

Can we reduce the number of swimming pools?

*We would like your views on whether we should use travel time of half an hour between existing pools as the key criteria for determining whether pools should close. This would suggest closing Alness, Tain and Nairn pools. Alternatively, should we use other criteria?
If so, what criteria should the council use to identify potential pool closures?*

Comments were generated from all forms of contact available: from face to face meetings and discussions at ward forums and with special interest groups, notably Highland Youth Voice; and people with learning disabilities through the People First Focus Group and the Sight Action Focus Group. Written feedback was received through over 100 letters, over 60 e-mails, the internet questionnaire and through the blog.

In addition, six petitions were received for retaining all three swimming pools named in the consultation. There were three petitions to retain Nairn Swimming pool (with 2105, 683 and 178 signatories), two petitions to retain Tain Swimming Pool (with 2807 and 1285 signatories) and one petition to retain Alness Swimming Pool (1860 signatories). In addition 75 letters were received from Coulhill Primary school pupils in Alness supporting the retention of the Alness Pool and many of the 275 postcards submitted by Nairn Academy pupils supported the retention of Nairn swimming pool.

A facebook campaign to save Nairn swimming pool with the support of 2469 people was reported.

Can we reduce the number of swimming pools?

No to closure

A strong theme from the responses was that **swimming pools should not be closed**. While some respondents answered in this way in relation to all pools, most responded in opposition to the closure of their local pool in Alness, Tain or Nairn. The reasons for opposing closure tended to be similar across named or all pools in general and these focused on:

- The **impact of closure on those using the swimming pool** and notably for; current users, young learners, older people and people with disabilities, swim clubs and especially high achieving local competitive clubs.
- The **benefit derived from swimming** at a personal level in terms of improved health, water safety and accident prevention. Swimming as a way to improve physical fitness and mental well-being and to encourage healthy weight featured as a strong theme. Those responding in this way expressed concern about any savings from pool closures simply displacing costs elsewhere, including to the health service.
- The **wider impact of pool closures in the towns selected**, with detrimental impact expected on local economies (especially Nairn where the importance of tourism was highlighted), on young people with no other all-weather activities available and for particular communities (with people in Alness seen to be even more disadvantaged given deprivation levels).
- The need instead to **make swimming pools more financially viable**. Those responding in this way suggested finding new ways to increase usage including extending opening hours and better marketing and promotion of the pool, reducing energy bills by installing renewable energy systems, increasing the cost of or means testing the Highlife card or taking swimming lessons out of the Highlife scheme and charging more for using the pool. Reducing opening hours to busy times was suggested. Others favoured a different business model for running swimming pools including community run pools with community fundraising or a trust model of management.

Analysis of responses highlighting particular features of themes for the named swimming pools is provided below.

No to closing Nairn pool

In addition to broad public use of the club, respondents noted the use made of the pool by the long standing Nairn and District Amateur Swim Club (NDASC) and the Synchronised Swimming Club. For some the membership of local clubs has led to their involvement in the Highland Swim Team. It was noted that Nairn clubs have competed successfully at a national level. Nairn club swimmers also compete for Scotland in international events. Over 100 children are said to be involved in these clubs plus others attending for swimming lessons for which there are waiting lists. A common view was that these clubs would cease if the pool closed. One respondent wrote:

'Nairn is the only synchronised swim club north of the central belt and just happens to be the most successful one in Scotland having held 40 Scottish and Open National titles since the mid 80's and current holder of six. This has been achieved from a town the size of Nairn, which in terms of National competition, is nothing short of amazing given the level of competition in English clubs.'

Another said:

'The swimming club would not get the pool time required elsewhere, temporary closure in 2009 demonstrated swimmers are unwilling to travel elsewhere.'

The pool also provides swimming for local schools. The use of the pool by older people was also mentioned and that they would be unable or unwilling to travel if the pool closed. The Nairn Access Panel also commented on the use of the club for people with disabilities following recent improvements made.

A strong theme from those opposing closure of Nairn Swimming Pool was the health benefits of attending it; not just for swimming and water exercise, but also because as a local pool many people walk or cycle there. Some mentioned particular health conditions they suffer from and how the pool helps to alleviate their symptoms. Health referrals to the pool are reported to have grown. Others seemed perplexed in their response that the pool might close when there is a need to promote healthy lifestyles.

Those opposing closure also saw water safety in Nairn as very important as a seaside and beach town as well as a tourist destination, highlighting the importance of Nairn pool to the local economy. Others saw the impact of closure affecting young people in particular. A typical view was:

'The swimming pool is a way of life for a lot of the children in Nairn if they need something to do during the weekend or school holidays all they do is call one or two of their friends and arrange to meet at the pool.'

Suggestions to make Nairn swimming pool more financially viable and to avoid closure were:

1. Increase income
 - Provide more pool use to fee paying groups
 - More flexible staff shifts for pool time (early and late) to increase usage
 - Run more events and activities
 - Offer special deals for tourists
 - Increase charges
2. Reduce costs
 - Review management costs and overheads
3. Change management arrangements, by transferring to an arms length trust to run.

No to closing Tain pool

Tain is regarded as a busy swimming pool with a long list of preschool age children waiting for swimming lessons. The popularity of the daily swimming lessons, aqua aerobics, swimming club and stroke development groups were all noted, along with the high regard for swimming coaches and parent helpers. Concern was expressed about the impact on Tain members in the Highland swim team and about the pupils of the eight feeder primary schools using the pool. Parents queried if swimming was part of the school curriculum and they expressed doubts about savings made if pupils are to be transported to Invergordon or Golspie for lessons. One ten year old swimmer said:

'Please don't close down our pool. I go there for swimming club and I think it is the best thing I do. I will be really upset if you close down the pool because I will have to stop swimming because there is no other proper club near to my home. I think swimming is really good exercise and it keeps you safe when you live next to water. I have learned

so much since I started going there and that means other children won't be able to do this.'

Respondents using the pool also expressed how they valued the club as a way of keeping fit, with older people saying how it was the best way to exercise for them and with some advised to swim for health reasons by their doctors.

A variety of concerns about disabled access was expressed for Tain Swimming Pool. This included the use by pupils with special needs attending St Duthus School and concerns about the loss of therapy for them if the pool closes. Others queried why improvements to disability access were underway when the pool may be closed.

Suggestions for making Tain swimming pool more financially viable and to avoid closure included:

1. Increasing income

- Charging separately for swimming lessons and not as part of the Highlife scheme (this was seen as better than having to pay for transport family members to Golspie or Invergordon).
- Increase Highlife scheme membership (£30 a month was suggested instead of £21.80 for a family, others mentioned an extra £1 a month for an adult)
- Charging more for school holiday clubs, play schemes and intensive swimming courses.
- Increasing the concession charge of 50p per swim to £1.
- Seeking sponsorship from big businesses (Asda, Tesco and British Gas were mentioned)
- Advertising pool sessions in local papers to increase usage

2. Reducing costs

- Turning pool heating down
- Installing solar heating for water
- Paying minimum wage for young people as pool attendants would be sufficient.

Others noted that if the pool was closed many would cancel their Highlife membership, which would reduce income further for the Council.

No to closing Alness pool

Alness pool is regarded as well used by all ages in the community. It is seen as especially beneficial to children able to swim on their own or with friends at little or no cost. Its use for pupils from Alness, Evanton and Ardross schools was noted. Coulhill primary school pupils all wrote to keep the pool open. Swimming lessons are especially popular with positive comments made about the instructors. Concern was expressed that Invergordon would not have capacity to provide more swimming lessons if Alness closed and that, as a leisure pool, Invergordon is less suitable for swimming galas, lifeguard training, lifesaving and swimming clubs. Others explained that the Alness pool had enabled them to achieve high standards in their swimming (with badges and awards). Parents expressed concern about what young people would do in Alness without the pool.

Strong pleas were made to recognise the health benefits of swimming in Alness. This point was made particularly for people who may need non-weight bearing exercise e.g. elderly, disabled and obese people, and for people who experience poverty and disadvantage

because they are more likely to also have poor health (with some noting that Alness has recognised concentrations of deprivation). Mention was made of the GP referral scheme for exercise and the benefits of this in avoiding hospital admissions with weight related problems such as cardiac, diabetic and orthopaedic conditions.

Others responded about the wider impact of the pool, not just in health benefits, but in employment and training benefits. The pool supports a variety of jobs and has provided training which has led some people into further careers in the health sector. Closure would impact on those currently employed and remove opportunities for others in the future.

Closure of the pool was also seen as damaging to the improvement of the town and the growth in civic pride.

Suggestions for making Alness pool more financially viable and thus avoid closure were:

- to get another organisation to run the pool, with trust status and not-for-profit;
- to advertise it locally to encourage others to attend;
- to increase admission charges;
- to keep it open until an energy saving pool is provided;
- to co-ordinate pool opening times across Dingwall, Alness and Invergordon to have a smaller cohort of trained staff working across the three centres.

Yes to pool closures

Support for closure of pools was weak. Those responding in this way all agreed that travel time of 30 minutes should determine which pools close. All of these respondents lived outwith the three towns where closures were mooted; so they would be unaffected by the proposals.

Undecided on closure

Where respondents did not express an opinion on whether pools should close, they tended to have views on whether travel time was acceptable in determining closure. This provided a range of views including the need to consider usage and demand for pools as criteria, questions whether Wick or Thurso would be brought into scope for closure and some agreeing that travel time had merit.

We would like your views on whether we should use travel time of half an hour between existing pools as the key criteria for whether pools should close. This would suggest closing Alness, Tain and Nairn pools.

Travel time of half an hour was seen as problematic for a number of reasons as set out below.

30 minutes travel time

A general theme was that if 30 minutes travel time was used, then the pools named would not necessarily close because many swimmers already travel to these pools and the journey would be longer than 30 minutes to get to the next nearest pool. There was little agreement that travelling time from Nairn to the aquadome would be 30 minutes, with many stating it takes over 30 minutes to get through Nairn and Inverness traffic. Others questioned why Culloden Academy Pool would not close if the 30 minute travel time applied.

Ease of travel

Travel time alone was seen as too simplistic as a criterion for closure and that the ease of travel should also be taken into account. This included: the use and connections for public transport (not generally well regarded); the cost of the travel (highlighting that not everyone could afford this especially older people or people reliant on benefits); and that travelling with children, (especially young children) for swimming and on public transport would be awkward and take more than 30 minutes. Others mentioned that the need to travel for at least 30 minutes would mean older children in Alness, Tain and Nairn would no longer be able to go swimming independently.

One respondent detailed the difficulties he would experience if Tain pool closed. He said:

'This facility serves not only the immediate environs of the Royal Burgh but also a much wider area, including to the north and west of the town. For the first time in, at least, 25 years it is possible to access a swimming pool from Invershin, Bonar-Bridge and Ardgay by public transport. As all of these villages are served by the scheduled public bus service which originates in Lairg and terminates in Tain - operated by Macloed's Coaches. The swimming pool manager arranges with the coach company, as authorised by Highland Council, for this bus route to be extended on one day per week (the specific day can vary from month to month dependant upon the requirements of Tain Academy), from its terminus in Lamington Street to arrive at the pool by 1150 to marry into a public swimming session. The bus departs from the pool at 1255. Closing Tain pool would remove the opportunity for those without maybe the means, or the ability to travel by private vehicle, or those like me who would have difficulty in walking to / from a bus stop or train station, to benefit from aquatic exercise. No other pool in either Sutherland or Ross-shire is accessible by public transport in this way.'

Another respondent highlighted accessibility to Invergordon pool stating:

'From the nearest bus stop it is over a mile to the pool and back and there is no footpath beyond the Academy so it is dangerous for pedestrians. Nearly half of Alness folk have no cars. It would cost a family of four from the West End £18 in bus fares to get there and back...'

Frequency of travel

Questions were asked about whether it was affordable to transport pupils for swimming and whether there was enough time in timetables to allow for this when trips would be required regularly. Some doubted that any cost saving could be made when these school travel costs were included. Respondents associated with Nairn swim clubs were not convinced that they would be able to continue to train four times a week if that meant travelling at least 30 minutes each way four times a week.

Carbon footprint

Encouraging more travel for journeys of at least 30 minutes was regarded as too high an environmental cost for some, especially when a benefit of local pools is the ability to get there actively on foot or by cycling.

Capacity and suitability of other pools

Waiting lists were reported for swimming lessons in pools, for those identified for potential closure and for those pools to cover a larger geography, such as Invergordon and with one parent citing a 29 month waiting list for swimming lessons at the aquadome.

Capacity was of a concern not just for learners, but for all swimmers. Those opposing the closure of Tain pool for example unable to see how the pools at Golspie or Invergordon could cope with demand. Others noted the potential conflict across club swimming, lane swimming and leisure swimming with fewer pools left open.

Others noted that facilities in pools varied with e.g. the Alness pool suited to lane swimming, training and competitions whereas Invergordon pool was more suited to leisure swimming with flumes. The Nairn pool was noted as the only pool suitable for synchronised swimming. Assuming a switch from one to the other would not necessarily meet the needs of swimmers.

Alternatively, should we use other criteria?

If so, what criteria should the council use to identify potential pool closures?

With the key theme of opposition to pool closures, few suggestions were made on criteria for closures. Difficulties with using travelling time as a criterion are outlined above; although two alternatives were mentioned, the need to take into account usage at pools and the need to take into account levels of deprivation.

Can we close the Floral Hall in Inverness?

Quantitative Analysis

No questions were asked of the Citizens' Panel regarding the Floral Hall.

Qualitative analysis

The following analysis has been undertaken on responses received to questions posed as part of the Council's budget consultation. Around 50 separate comments were received in response to the following question:

'We would like your views on whether the Floral Hall should be closed if more cost effective ways of running it cannot be identified'.

Most comments were generated from e-mail contact, primarily using the on-line questionnaire, the blog and e-mails. Feedback also came from a Ward Forum and letter. One petition was received for retaining the Floral Hall (316 signatories).

The strongest theme emerging from the responses is to keep the Floral Hall open. For many this reflected the value they placed on the Floral Hall. It is seen as:

- an important and unique venue for residents and visitors;
- hugely beneficial for training people with learning disabilities;
- a way of promoting interest in horticulture;
- a focus for volunteers (cactus club and step it up walking group for people with disabilities);
- the only place for housing a plant collection built up over many years and including donations and bequests, which could not be replaced if lost.

Others provided views on how it could stay open and be run more cost effectively. This focused on: increasing income; reducing costs or using a different business model.

Ideas for increasing income were to increase the use of the Floral Hall by better marketing and promoting more events to be run there and to generate more income from its use through charging more, running horticulture classes and events for tourists. Ideas for reducing costs were to install energy efficient and renewable energy systems to reduce bills. Of those promoting the use of another business model, this focused on transferring the Floral Hall to a social enterprise to run. Reasons provided for this option included: knowledge of how this worked elsewhere (Inspire in Aberdeen City); access to grant funding; more dynamic management; general preference for community enterprises providing self-financing services; and more opportunities for volunteering. Another suggestion was to transfer it to the private sector to run.

An uncommon view was to close the Floral Hall. No explanation was provided for this view.

Can we reduce the number of public toilets?

Quantitative Analysis

We asked the Citizens' Panel

"As well as considering sharing some buildings, what else would be acceptable to consider to reduce costs?"

Six types of facilities were listed and for each there were up to 5 options presented.

Respondents were invited to "tick all that apply".

In relation to public toilets, respondents were asked which of the following options to reduce costs would be acceptable:

- Close some facilities
- Transfer management to a non-profit making organisation
- Reduce opening hours
- Increase charges

Facilities	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	No Response %
Public Toilets	12.5	43.1	8.8	36.1	18.9

Some 81.1% of the sample found one or more of the suggestions acceptable. There was a substantial variation in the response rate by age group, with older people, especially those aged 75+ less likely to select more than one option. No one option gains the support of the majority of respondents – the best supported is the transfer of management to not-for-profit organisations which was deemed acceptable by 43% of respondents. An increase in charges is regarded as acceptable by 36%. Closing some public toilets is endorsed by just 1 in 8 respondents (12.5%) while even fewer (9%) back a reduction in opening hours.

With a high response to this question (95% confidence level with +/- 3% confidence interval) these results can be seen to be representative of the adult population as a whole.

Qualitative analysis

The following analysis has been undertaken on responses received to questions posed as part of the Council's budget consultation. Just under 200 separate comments were received in response to the question

'Can we reduce the number of public toilets?'

Most comments were generated from face to face meetings and discussions at ward forums, with partners and special interest groups, notably Highland Youth Voice, Sight Action and the Deaf Forum. Internet feedback was generated from the blog, the on-line questionnaire and e-mails. In addition, a petition was received regarding the public toilets at Corrieshalloch Gorge, with 1226 individuals requesting the retention of the facilities there.

Opinion on this area of the consultation was divided between those who were supportive of reducing the number of public toilets and those against. A further group of respondents did not express an opinion either way.

Views in favour

A number of respondents felt it would be possible to reduce the number of public toilets. It was noted that provision was already limited therefore the impact would be limited and also that the standard in many was poor. It was suggested that closure could be undertaken in areas where there was low usage and a query whether the provision of public toilets should be the Council's responsibility.

Considerations

Of those supportive of the proposal to reduce the number of public toilets, many felt this should only be undertaken where alternative provision either already exists or could potentially be provided. There was support for working with businesses to provide facilities, but that this should be agreed prior to the closure of current facilities. A range of potential alternative premises were suggested by respondents including hotels and restaurants, village halls and community centres, supermarkets and pubs. A further suggestion was that the Council should consider co-locating public toilets in public buildings, perhaps in a service point. Respondents were supportive of extending the current Comfort Scheme already in operation.

It was noted that if the Council was to work with businesses to provide facilities, then there would be a need to ensure any alternative provision would be DDA compliant. Respondents also felt that there may be a need to compensate businesses for the use of their facilities, for example it was stated that in England a grant is available for those providing facilities for use. A further suggestion was that this could be a token reduction in business rates. Respondents noted that it would be important to ensure clear signposting to alternative provision and that the Comfort Scheme in general needs to be advertised.

Additional ways to reduce costs

In addition to supporting the reduction in the number of facilities, respondents made a number of suggestions for reducing costs. It was suggested that the Council should start charging for the use of all facilities or that the opening hours could be reduced. Further ideas related to the ownership of facilities. A variety of options were suggested including community ownership, privatisation, remaining in Council ownership but run by volunteers or sponsorship by a local business.

Concerns

Of the respondents supportive of the proposal to reduce public toilet provision, there were still concerns noted. It was reported that it could be difficult to find alternative provision in rural and remote areas, so there would be a need to retain provision in these locations and that there was a need to ensure some form of provision around picnic and play areas. There was also a concern about the need to ensure provision existed in the evenings. Concerns were raised about the impact of closure on tourism but an alternative view expressed was that Visit Scotland should be providing such facilities for tourist usage.

Views against

Principle

Although there was support for the proposal to reduce the number of public toilets, there was equal support against. Respondents noted that there were already too few facilities available and that there should be an increase so that each community had at least one public toilet. It was felt that there was a need to improve the current available provision and that they should be open all year round for use by the whole community, not just in the tourist season.

Respondents reported that many businesses do not want non-paying customers using their facilities and the alternative, public buildings, are not open all the time. It was felt that the provision of public toilets should be a statutory function.

Concerns for specific groups

Amongst those against the proposal, concerns were noted for specific groups. Respondents reported that a number of disabled people with specific conditions relied on the availability of public toilets and that groups of elderly people may also struggle without available provision. There were also concerns noted for tourists and felt there could be a negative impact upon tourism without the availability of public conveniences.

Alternatives to closure

Rather than reducing provision, respondents suggested a number of alternatives to reduce running costs. The general view was that charges should be introduced, on average 20p, although a minority felt all provision should be free. Further suggestions included the reduction of opening hours – only open in the summer -, reducing staffing levels, providing self-clean facilities and making use of energy saving technology such as rainwater for flushing. A further idea was that the community, perhaps the community council, could take on the running of the facility, or that it could be sponsored by a local business.

Others against closure reported a reduction in facilities may be possible but only if an alternative facility could be provided and that it would be location dependent. There was considerable concern about maintaining provision in rural locations and specific tourism destinations.

Neither in favour or against

Some respondents were unsure regarding this matter and did not give a firm view either way. It was acknowledged that this is a difficult area but that a reduction may be possible.

Considerations

Respondents reported that any reduction would ultimately be location dependent. It may be possible where there are alternatives, but that it would probably be easier in towns and urban centres like Inverness than in rural locations where fewer businesses exist to act as alternatives and where there are often large distances in between settlements. It was noted that in rural areas, any alternative provision would be less likely to be open in the evening which should be considered.

As with respondents both for and against the proposal, concern was noted about the potential impact on tourism especially within rural communities and a need to recognise that any reduction could be an issue for visitors.

There was support for working with businesses to look at alternatives and look at capacity. One view was that businesses could receive a contribution towards cleaning costs from the Highland Comfort Fund to support this development, however, an alternative view was that businesses should be providing their facilities free as they do in Europe. It was queried whether facilities could be provided by other agencies, for example the Forestry Commission.

Alternatives to reduce costs

There was further support for the introduction of charging and a suggestion regarding the use of solar panels for lighting in an attempt to reduce running costs. One respondent noted that in the future, portaloos may be a more effective and efficient way of providing toilet provision than the current fixed buildings.

Views on specific provision

In addition to the general points made, several representations were made regarding specific provision. It was noted that currently Invergordon has no public toilet provision and that this has caused problems given the tourism flow from cruise ships. In addition, various respondents requested that closure of current provision should not take place in Skye, particularly Portree, Inverness and at the Corrieshalloch Gorge.

Can we provide our services differently?

Would local people be willing to work with us to identify all the buildings in public use locally and to work with us to agree how to change the use for their community, reduce the number and find savings?

If we cannot afford to maintain and run all of the local facilities, what is the best way of finding out how to reduce the number and still provide the services needed?

Can we transfer the running of swimming pools and leisure centres, archives and museums, community centres and libraries to a not-for-profit organisation to reduce costs and avoid some closures?

Do people using these services mind whether the Council or another organisation provides the service if it means fewer closures?

Quantitative Analysis

The Citizens Panel were asked a range of questions related to budget question 6.

Respondents were asked which community facilities would they be willing to see run in a shared building. Respondents placed the following at the top of the list of facilities they are willing to see shared:

- Library Services (77%) and Community Centres (77%) with Day Care Facilities (73%), Leisure Centres (70%) and Village Halls (70%) not far behind.
- Attracting the support of at least 6 in 10 respondents were Service Points (66%), Swimming Pools (62%) and Museum Services (60%). Public toilets (55%) also received support from a majority of the sample.
- However, fewer than 4 in 10 wanted to see a Primary School (38%) or a Secondary School (37%) brought into a shared facility.

In addition to considering sharing some buildings, the Panel were asked what else would be acceptable to consider to reduce costs. Respondents were given the options of:

- Closing some facilities
- Transferring management to not for profit organisations
- Reducing opening hours
- Increasing charges

In relation to the transfer of facilities the Panel reported:

Facility	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %
Swimming Pools	50.8
Inverness Community Centres	49.4
Museum Services	44.0
Libraries	40.5

Full details of the analysis on these questions can be found at Appendix 1.

Qualitative Analysis

Just over 140 separate comments were received in response to the question

'Would local people be willing to work with us to identify all the buildings in public use locally and to work with us to agree how to change the use for their community, reduce the number and find savings?'

Most comments were generated from face to face meetings and discussions at ward forums, with partners and with special interest groups, notably Highland Youth Voice, Inverness Business improvement District and the Economic Forum. Electronic feedback was generated from the blog, the on-line questionnaire and e-mails and came predominantly from individuals and Community Councils.

Views in support

Individuals, the Community and Community Groups

A keen interest was expressed for community involvement in identifying local buildings with a view to changing their use and reducing their number. Respondents answered this question in different ways – from an individual point of view and their willingness to participate personally; from a community view point - that they believed the wider community would want to participate; or finally by identifying specific groups who should do this on behalf of the community, for example Community Councils.

There was considerable support from individuals to being involved in examining the use of community facilities. From a personal perspective, individuals indicated that they wished to be involved whilst other respondents noted the interest the wider community would have in such an exercise. Respondents suggested that wide community consultation would be appropriate, perhaps through a door-to-door survey, and noted that it would be important to advertise the opportunity as local people would want to be involved. A further view was that given the Council should have knowledge of current usage, plans should be drawn up centrally based on usage and then discussed with the local community. It was regarded as important that both the elderly and young people should be involved in the process.

The alternative view however was that local community and interest groups would be best placed to assist the Council in this task, reporting that these groups would be able to provide good practice examples. It was also noted that Community Councils could take on this role as this is part of their purpose. Some respondents noted that it was people who use the facilities that should be targeted for this approach whilst a further view, from someone currently unemployed, that unemployed individuals could assist with this as a way of giving something back to the community.

Factors to encourage participation

Respondents noted a range of factors which would encourage them to participate in this process. Many felt that it would be important that any consultation was honest and open and that communities were provided with the facts. Any consultation would need to ensure that community views were taken on board and that people felt their contributions were appreciated. A number of respondents viewed this as an opportunity, to have a say on where savings are made and to contribute to a positive change within their community.

However, it was also noted that communities would want to see action and results from any consultation.

A further view was that any consultation would need to generate interest and enthusiasm within local communities. It was also noted that strong and effective leadership would be required given that many people are 'emotionally invested' within their communities.

It was suggested that incentives could encourage people to take part however this was a minority view and the more common view was that if views were listened to and appreciated then people were happy to contribute.

Examples of where this could work

Respondents also provided a range of circumstances where there were opportunities to reduce the number of buildings. It was suggested that

- schools could become more of a community centre and central hub
- libraries could be located within schools
- libraries could be located within community centres
- all services could be delivered from one building
- look at flexible delivery methods e.g. using village halls to deliver services locally

Respondents also identified where work had already been undertaken to reduce the number of buildings or where there were opportunities to do so:

- reducing the number of buildings already happened in Nairn and in Golspie
- many buildings in Alness are already community run
- Black Isle leisure centre could be used more like the facility in Strathpeffer
- Move the Service Point in Lochcarron into the Library

Views against

An alternative view expressed unwillingness for communities working with the Council to identify how to rationalise buildings locally. In the main this objection was based upon a view that this is not the role of communities but that of the Council. It was noted that the Council should already know what is available locally and how these could be reduced, and also that this was the role of elected representatives.

A further view was that if anyone locally should be involved in such an approach, it should not be individuals but groups such as Community Councils. There was concern noted however that in many areas there is little interest in such organisations so that only a small group in each area are likely to be involved.

There was a degree of scepticism reported on the offer, noting that given the savings to be made it is unlikely there will be real choices available.

Just over 150 separate comments were received in response to the question

'If we cannot afford to maintain and run all of the local facilities, what is the best way of finding out how to reduce the number and still provide the services needed?'

Most comments were generated from face to face meetings and discussions at ward forums and with partners and special interest groups, notably Highland Youth Voice, Inverness Business Improvement District, the Compact Partnership, Sight Action and People First. Electronic feedback was generated from the blog, the on-line questionnaire and e-mails and came predominantly from individuals and Community Councils.

Consultation

A strong view from respondents to this question was that consultation with local communities would be critical in determining how to reduce the number of facilities but still provide the services required. Some respondents felt this should be a consultation with the whole community, whilst others focused upon consultation with services users and employees. An alternative view was that any consultation should focus upon community groups and volunteers, considering whether the community would be willing to take on any facilities.

There was also a suggestion that there would be a role for Community Councils, either consulting directly with them or utilising them to assist with consulting the public. Ward forums were suggested as a further vehicle for local consultation whilst an alternative view was that ward forums do not reach the wider community. It was noted that communities would need to provide solutions and not problems to this debate.

Criteria

Respondents noted that an alternative way in which to determine how best to reduce the number of local facilities was to base any decision upon criteria. The use of facilities was provided as the primary indicator whilst some suggested that usage should be considered alongside the area's population, therefore taking into account that some facilities are provided in areas of low population. One view was that if the facility is underused then it should be shut and sold. A further suggestion was that the Council should undertake a full survey based upon usage and the value of the service by users and then consult locally.

Of further consideration, respondents noted the distance to the nearest alternative facility and whether there was public transport availability and frequency of that transport. It was noted that it was important to consider whether there was a local need for the facility and a further view that the Council should only be closing facilities where there is an alternative available.

An alternative view to that of the need for criteria was that the future of each facility should be considered independently.

Impact of closure

Whilst a number of respondents suggested that criteria should identify where to reduce facilities, it was also suggested that the impact upon individuals and communities should be considered. Although acknowledging some facilities will need to close, it was noted that this should be where there is limited impact on the population. The impact upon the community was regarded as important and a further view that any decision should consider whether

communities are being disproportionately affected. It was noted that not all communities would have the capacity to take on the running of facilities if the Council chooses to close them and therefore community capacity should also be considered.

How to maintain services

Whilst some respondents concentrated on suggesting areas that would assist in identifying how best to reduce the number of facilities, others provided a range of suggestions on how best to maintain services locally.

Amalgamate facilities

Respondents noted that one of the key ways in which to retain services locally was better use of existing community facilities. It was noted that there was a need to combine services within one building and make premises more multi-functional, for example the school providing a focus for the delivery of other services. Examples of where this already operates effectively were provided by respondents as an illustration of how this could work, these included:

- The social work office and GP surgery operating from the new wing of the hospital in Nairn
- The service point in Ullapool provided within the nursing home
- The library and leisure centre in Ullapool provided from the High school.

A number of third sector respondents – the Compact Partnership, Sight Action and People First - all noted that the Council should consider running public services from buildings owned by the third sector and therefore making best use of local resources. A further suggestion was that communities and community groups would be willing to take on running community facilities in order to retain them locally. This would result in the reduction of back office and senior management posts therefore reducing costs

Greater innovation

A further suggestion to retain services locally was that the Council needs to become more innovative and entrepreneurial. Respondents suggested that the Council needs to start charging for certain services and/or increase the charges on others e.g. Highlife. One suggestion was that charges could be increased in high use facilities in order to subsidise those provided in rural communities. A further proposal was that the Council should generate income from increased business rates on large projects or that it should be a planning condition for wind farms that free energy is provided for community facilities.

An alternative suggestion was that the opening hours of facilities could be reduced or perhaps facilities could close one day a week, in order to reduce costs. It was suggested that evening use of facilities should be maximised and charges levied accordingly. Respondents also noted that there could be a more efficient use of staff, for example sharing staff between facilities by altering the opening hours.

Council's role

An opposing view was that this is not the role of the public and that the Council should be taking these decisions.

180 separate comments were received in response to the question

'Can we transfer the running of swimming pools and leisure centres, archives and museums, community centres and libraries to a not-for-profit organisation to reduce costs and avoid some closures?'

Most comments were generated from face to face meetings and discussions at ward forums and with partners and special interest groups, notably Highland Youth Voice, Inverness Business Improvement District, Sight Action and the Deaf Forum. Electronic feedback was generated from the blog, the on-line questionnaire and e-mails and came predominantly from individuals and Community Councils.

Views in favour

Support for transfer was a strong theme from the responses, although additional considerations were also proposed.

Who services should transfer to

There was a degree of confusion from respondents whether the question of transfer to a non-profit making organisation was to one body for the Highland area or to local groups and organisations. Some respondents have responded to the question generally whilst others have on the basis of transfer to a local organisation.

Respondents noted that if transfer was to progress, it would be important for the body to be a not-for-profit organisation, either a charitable or community trust, whilst another respondent noted it should follow the Glasgow model. The ability of voluntary organisations to raise additional funding, which could result in an improvement to current facilities and services, was noted as an advantage. There was a minority view that the private sector should also be considered as the receiving body.

One set of views were where communities feel strongly about losing facilities then they should be able to run them. It was highlighted that this would take commitment from the local community. It was noted however, that if a not-for-profit organisation is not available for services to be transferred in to or not willing to do so, the Council should retain running the service. These latter points were made from the position of local organisations taking on the services.

Considerations prior to transfer

Although in support of the potential transfer of services to another organisation, a number of conditions were noted by respondents to be considered prior to transfer. It was noted that the transfer to any other organisation would need to ensure the sustainability of the service and that there would need to be a long-term agreement and an appropriate framework in place. It was felt transfer could be positive if it would keep services open and prevent closures. It would be important that any transfer organisation would run services to the same standard and that service priorities should remain the same. Respondents also noted that services for the disadvantaged must be maintained and transfer must not disadvantage those most in need. Consultation with local communities was considered important.

It was reported that transfer should go ahead but only if the transfer was cost effective, that costs are lower and that the service can be run without a loss. It would be important that services remain properly funded even to an arms-length organisation. Respondents noted that there would need to be careful monitoring of the finances of the alternative organisation

to ensure it does not go in to debt. An alternative view was that even with transfer and a reduction in costs, some closures would be inevitable.

A further consideration noted by respondents was the availability of an organisation willing to take on Council services. It was noted that any organisation taking on Council services would need expert advice and support to ensure services and facilities do not deteriorate. This could be from Councillors and existing Highland Council departments such as legal, planning, TEC services and insurance.

Answering from the perspective of transferring services to communities, it was noted that there would be a need to support volunteers to ensure there was not volunteer fatigue and to share experience and good practice across communities. The Compact Partnership highlighted that it may take a crisis point – the potential closure of a service - before communities would be willing to take on services and noted that there would be a need to look at the social return on investment.

What should be transferred

Whilst general support for transferring services was found, some respondents were specific about what should and should not be transferred. A number of respondents noted that only certain services should be transferred and that there was a need to consider each one separately. There was support for retaining libraries within Highland Council operation and also some support for the retention of museums. However an alternative view was that given a number of museums are already owned and run by the voluntary sector then this would be an appropriate model to follow. There was some support noted for transferring leisure services, although there was also a view that that these services may be better in private hands.

A further view was that in addition to leisure services, the Council should consider transferring care services to a not-for-profit organisation.

A number of respondents noted that a number of services across Highland already operate in the suggested manner and that this is already undertaken by other Local Authorities. Examples of this elsewhere in Highland included:

- The Inverness Aquadome
- The Ullapool swimming pool and leisure centre
- Community hall in Kingussie

Views against

Lack of information

Some concern was expressed with the proposed transfer of services to a not-for-profit organisation. There was concern at the lack of information provided and a view that prior to any transfer progressing, there would be a need to look at the costs in more detail and also review whether this approach has worked elsewhere. It was noted that where this has happened in other Local Authorities, the purpose was not to save money.

Retention of services locally

There was concern about why there are proposals to change the provision of services which currently operate well and a desire to retain services within the local community. It was

noted that if services were to transfer, communities would either have to do the Council's job for them or risk losing the services. This was regarded as inappropriate. It was noted that some communities are already overburdened and would be unable to take on additional service provision.

Financial concerns of transfer

A number of respondents noted financial concerns regarding the proposal to transfer service. It was queried where the savings would come from and why a not-for-profit organisation could make savings when the Council cannot. One respondent viewed that it was inappropriate for the Council to pass on existing funding problems to another organisation.

There was also concern that the new organisation would struggle to cover all its running costs, which may then result in the closure of services in order to save money. The alternative would be that the organisation would inevitably concentrate on profitable services leading to the decline and closure of services in rural communities. A further view was that transfer was likely to result in the increase in charges for services which people will not be able to afford.

Over 150 separate comments were received in response to the question

'Do people using these services mind whether the Council or another organisation provides the service if it means fewer closures?'

Most comments were generated from face to face meetings and discussions at ward forums and with partners and special interest groups, notably Highland Youth Voice, Inverness Business Improvement District and the Compact Partnership. Electronic feedback was generated from the blog, the on-line questionnaire and e-mails and came predominantly from individuals and Community Councils.

Views in favour

A strong theme was that respondents did not mind who provides Council services, noting that it is the service which matters and not the provider. One respondent highlighted that many people would be unaware which services the Council run and which ones it doesn't. It was noted that the Council is not always the most efficient provider.

Preventing closure

Respondents reported that, if it was a way of maintaining services locally and reducing closures, then it does not matter who provides the service. The long-term security and sustainability of the service was noted as most important and keeping services at the heart of the community

Standards and quality

A further consideration for respondents was that the level of service provided would be maintained and service priorities retained. Respondents noted that it did not matter who provided the service if it was the same service and that the standards were either the same

or better. The quality of the service provided was also considered important and any new provider would need to run services efficiently and effectively.

Respondents noted that it would be important to maintain public scrutiny of standards and the quality of service provided.

Finance

Although noting that it is not important who provides the service, respondents also noted that it was vital that any change did not result in increased charges for people. Charges to access the service must remain affordable and not be out of reach of the people who need and use the service.

However respondents also noted that any alternative organisation must be commercially viable. It must ensure it identifies efficiencies, for example discontinuing with the current management structure. It was also noted that the conditions of employment for current staff should not be compromised.

Other considerations

Although most respondents noted that there was not an issue with another organisation providing Council services, there were additional considerations for some respondents. It was noted that consultation would be required in each individual case and that service users should be consulted to determine whether they would mind another organisation operating the service. There was also concern that whilst this may work in some areas of high community spirit, in others it wouldn't.

A number of respondents were also of the view that it depended upon the type of service, with a number against any proposal for libraries to be provided by another organisation. However it was also noted that the Aquadome in Inverness is currently provided in this way and that people are not concerned about this.

Views against

Another view was that it does matter if another organisation is providing Council services. It was noted that the Council is more accountable for the services that it provides and therefore retaining services in Council provision would allow greater control over public finances. There was also concern that if services were provided by another organisation, the same standards and quality of service would not be maintained.

Of further concern was the long term sustainability of the service if another organisation was to provide and concern that this may result in the unintentional closure of services.

One respondent did note however that, whilst against another organisation operating Council service, if the only alternative was closure then this would have to be accepted.

Additional Citizens' Panel Analysis

The Panel were asked:

Thinking about where you live and the facilities in your local community now and in the future, please tell us which of these you would be willing to see run in a shared building?"

A list of 11 different facilities was presented and respondents "please tick all that apply".

A total of 92 % of the sample answered the question. Their responses are presented in the table below.

Percentage of Respondents Willing to See these Facilities Run in a Shared Building

Facilities	Respondents willing to see Facility in a Shared Building %
Library Services	77
Community Centres	77
Day Care Facilities e.g. Lunch Club	73
Leisure Centres	70
Village Halls	70
Service Points	66
Swimming Pools	62
Museum Services	60
Public Toilets	55
Primary School	38
Secondary School	37

N = 1,463

Respondents placed the following at the top of the list of facilities they are willing to see shared:

- Library Services (77%) and Community Centres (77%) with Day Care Facilities (73%), Leisure Centres (70%) and Village Halls (70%) not far behind.
- Attracting the support of at least 6 in 10 respondents were Service Points (66%), Swimming Pools (62%) and Museum Services (60%). Public toilets (55%) also received support from a majority of the sample.
- However, fewer than 4 in 10 wanted to see a Primary School (38%) or a Secondary School (37%) brought into a shared facility.

The first pattern evident when **looking at the results by the categories of users** (i.e. by gender, age, disability, corporate area, length of residency in the Highlands, employment status, housing status) is that there is **clear support from a majority of users in each and every category for the following seven facilities to be located in a shared building:**

- **Library services** (support ranges from 71% to 81% through all categories)
- **Community Centres** (support ranges from 70% to 86%)
- **Day Care Facilities** (support ranges from 67% to 78%)
- **Leisure Centres** (support ranges from 59% to 78%)
- **Village Halls** (support ranges from 58% to 76%)
- **Service Points** (support ranges from 58% to 73%)

- **Museums** (support ranges from 54% to 63%)

Support for **swimming pools** to be located in shared buildings is found amongst a majority of respondents in all categories bar one – those aged 75+ of whom only 43% are willing to see this happen. In addition, the majority in favour of this proposition amongst those aged 65-74 is small (52%). It is in the younger age groups that there is much greater support for this suggestion (it is endorsed by 68% of those aged 25-44 and 63% of those aged 45-64).

Support for locating **public toilets** in a shared building is found in most of the categories (e.g. 62% of those respondents living in Ross, Skye and Lochaber and 60% of those aged 25-44). However there is one group that is split 50:50 (people with a disability) and 4 groups where only a minority support the idea: people aged 65-74 (43%); those aged 75+ (46%); people living in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (46%); and people who are retired (47%).

Across all categories of users, support for locating **primary schools** in a shared building reaches its peak at 48% of people resident in the Highlands for 5 to 10 years and 47% of respondents living in Ross, Skye and Lochaber. But less than 1 in 3 of the respondents living in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (32%) back the idea and an even smaller percentage of those who have a disability (30%) indicate their willingness to see this happen.

Similarly for **secondary schools**, there are no categories of users where a majority support the inclusion of these schools in a shared building. Support for inclusion is at its highest amongst people living in Ross, Skye and Lochaber (43%) while it is particularly low amongst respondents from Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (28%).

The Panel were also asked a series of question about Reducing Running Costs. The Panel were asked:

“As well as considering sharing some buildings we are having to consider other options to reduce costs.... As well as considering sharing some buildings, what else would be acceptable to consider to reduce costs?”

Six types of facilities were listed and for each there were up to 5 options presented. Respondents were invited to “tick all that apply”. Some options were not offered because they were obviously inappropriate (as will be seen) for the service in question.

Note that in each of the Tables 5 to 10 there is a column on the far right headed ‘**No Response**’. This shows the percentage of the entire sample of 1,586 who did not respond to any of the set of options for each type of facility. The ‘No Response’ option is not one which appeared in the survey form. But since the only way that respondents could show that they did not consider any of the options acceptable was simply not to respond any of them it is important that it be included.

Note also that respondents could – and did – select more than one option per facility.

Swimming Pools: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	No Response %
Swimming Pools	5.3	50.8	18.2	37.4	14.6

N who responded = 1,294

Some 85.4% of the sample found one or more of the options presented re Swimming Pools acceptable. However, only one option was selected by a majority of all those surveyed namely, to transfer the management of swimming pools to not-for-profit organisations - and at 50.8% this is a slim majority.

There are marked differences in support for this measure according to the various categories of respondents:

- By age group, while a majority of those aged 25-44 (53%) and 45-64 (52%) support this option, only a minority of those who are 65-74 (43%) and 75+ (36%) consider this acceptable.
- By employment status, support from a majority comes from those in the following categories: people who are unemployed (56%); people unable to work (53%); and people who are employed (50.5%). But the percentage of those who are retired (44%) who consider the option acceptable is notably smaller.
- By length of residence in the Highlands support for this measure comes from those who have been resident for less than 5 years (59%) – a level much higher than is evident in people resident in the Highlands for more than 10 years (48%).

Increasing charges is acceptable to fewer than 4 in 10 (37.4%) while the reduction in opening hours is acceptable to fewer than 1 in 5 (18.2%) - and the closure of some swimming pools is acceptable in the eyes of only around 1 in 20 (5.3%).

Inverness Community Centres: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	No Response %
Inverness Community Centres	15.9	49.4	17.9	20.9	19.6

N who responded = 1,188

Some 80.4% of the sample found one or more of the options re Inverness Community Centres acceptable. Before we look in detail at the findings it is important to note that there is a variation in the percentages of people from the three corporate areas who responded to this part of the question. While 80% of those living in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey found one or more of the options acceptable, the percentage drops to 72% for people living in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross and to 70% for those living in Ross,

Skye and Lochaber. None of the options presented attracted the support of a majority of the entire sample although one does attract the support of just under half – the option to transfer management of Inverness Community Centres to not-for-profit organisations (49.4%).

By categories of respondents there are some marked differences in the levels of support for this idea:

- By age group, backing for the proposal is strongest amongst those aged 25-44 (55%) and those aged 45-64 (51%) – but is noticeably weaker amongst those aged 65-74 (38%) and 75 + (34%);
- Strong support for this option is evident amongst people resident in the Highlands for less than 5 years (61%) but for those resident in the Highlands for more than 10 years it is markedly less (47%);
- A majority of respondents living in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (52%) find this proposal acceptable – a much higher percentage than emerges from those living in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (38%) and Ross, Skye and Lochaber (42%).
- By employment status a majority of both those who are unemployed (54%) and employed (51%) find the idea acceptable but a markedly smaller percentage of those who are retired (41%) back the idea.

Increasing charges at Inverness Community Centres is acceptable to 20.9% while the reduction in opening hours to 17.9% and closure of some facilities to 15.9%

Museum Services: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	Provide more services by telephone or on-line %	No Response %
Museum Services	12.7	44.0	32.0	32.5	13.0	19.6

N who responded = 1,334

Some 89.1% found one or more of the options re Museum Services acceptable. However note that there is a marked difference in the responses to this part of the question by the age of people who engaged in the survey. While 76% of those aged 75+ found one or more of the options acceptable, this percentage is much lower than the 91% of the 45-64 age group, the 90% of the 25-44 age group and the 85% of the 65-74 age band. None of the options attained the support of a majority of the respondents to the survey.

The option that came closest to getting support from a majority was “transfer management to not-for-profit organisations” which 44% found acceptable. Again there were some interesting variations in the level of support for this option according to the various categories of respondents:

- By age group, 48% of those aged 45-64 and 46% of those aged 25-44 supported this option – in contrast to 36% of those aged 65-74 and 34% of those aged 75+.
- Just under half (49.6%) of those resident in the Highlands less than 5 years found the proposal acceptable – compared with 43.9% of those resident in the Highlands for more than 10 years.
- By employment status, 51% of those who are unemployed selected this option – compared with 47% of those who are employed and 38% of those who are retired.

Two of the other options were each chosen by just under 1 in 3 of the sample – (32.5%) and increasing charges (32.5%). The final two options were supported by just over 1 in 8 - the provision of more services by telephone or on-line (13%) and the closure of some facilities (12.7%).

Libraries: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Provide more services by telephone or on-line %	No Response %
Libraries	8.5	40.5	36.6	23.3	16.7

N who responded = 1,246

Some 83.3% of the sample found one or more of the options presented re Libraries acceptable. None of the options were selected by a majority of respondents.

The one gaining the most support was the transfer of management to not-for-profit organisations (40.5%). Once again there were pronounced variations in the pattern of support for this option according to the various categories of respondents:

- By age group, 44% of those aged 25-44 and 42% of those aged 45-64 found this option acceptable but there was markedly less support for it amongst those aged 65-74 (34%) and those aged 75 + (26%).
- Some 47% of those respondents resident in the Highlands less than 5 years found the proposal acceptable – compared with 39% of those resident in the Highlands for more than 10 years.
- By employment status, 49% of those who are unemployed selected this option – compared with 43% of those who are employed and 33% of those who are retired.

A reduction in opening hours was deemed acceptable by 36.6% of the sample gaining the most support from people aged 75+ (46%) and those aged 65-74 (43%) and people who were retired (43%) – more of whom selected this option than selected the transfer of management to not-for-profit organisations.

Provision of more services by telephone or on-line was selected as an acceptable option by 23.3% of the entire sample but support for this varied widely from 25% of those aged 25-44 to 8% of those aged 75+.

Closure of some libraries received the endorsement of around 1 in 12 of the entire sample (8.5%).

Service Points: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Reduce opening hours %	Provide more services by telephone or online %	No Response %
Service Points	15.2	31.8	54.7	22.0

N who responded = 1,148

Regarding Service Points the percentage of the entire sample who selected one or more of the options as acceptable was 78%. Note though, this overall figure masks a substantial variation in the percentages who did not respond to any of this question – especially according to age group. Whereas some 84% of those aged 25-44 and 80% of those aged 45-64 and 71% of those aged 65-74 found one or more option acceptable, only 47% of those aged 75+ found one or more option that they could endorse.

One of the choices – “provide more services by telephone or on-line” – was chosen as acceptable by a majority of all respondents (54.7%). But this level of support also hides major differences in the extent of the support for this idea:

- While this option is endorsed by 64% of the 25-44 age group and 56% of those aged 45-64, support for it amounts to 39% of respondents aged 65-74 and just 18% of those aged 75+.
- By employment status too, a marked difference is also noticeable – 60% of those who are unemployed and 58% of those who are employed find the idea acceptable but only 37% of those retired find it so.
- While 53% of those who do not have a disability find this option acceptable, only 39% of those who have a disability support it.

A reduction in opening hours is thought of as being acceptable by slightly less than 1 in 3 (32%) while the closure of some service points is chosen by just 15%.

Public Toilets: Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	No Response %
Public Toilets	12.5	43.1	8.8	36.1	18.9

N who responded = 1,205

Some 76% of the sample found one or more of the suggestions re Public Toilets acceptable. Once more though there is a substantial variation in the response rate by age group. While 83% of those aged 25-44 and 82% of those aged 45-64 and 77% of those aged 65-74 select one or more option, that figure falls to 62% of those aged 75+.

No one option gains the support of the majority of respondents – the best supported is the transfer of management to not-for-profit organisations which was deemed acceptable by 43% of respondents. The only category where a majority of respondents supported this idea is found in those who have been resident in the Highlands for less than 5 years (53%). An increase in charges is regarded as acceptable by 36%. Closing some public toilets is endorsed by just 1 in 8 respondents (12.5%) while even fewer (9%) back a reduction in opening hours.

Tables 5 to 8 combined. Views on Options for Reducing Costs

Facility	Close some facilities %	Transfer management to not-for-profit organisations %	Reduce opening hours %	Increase charges %	No Response %	Provide more services by telephone or on-line %
Swimming Pools	5.3	50.8	18.2	37.4	14.6	NA
Inverness Community Centres	15.9	49.4	17.9	20.9	19.6	NA
Museum Services	12.7	44.0	32.0	32.5	19.6	13.0
Libraries	8.5	40.5	36.6	23.3	16.7	NA