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| Agenda Item | 11. |
| Report No | EDU/06/20 |

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education Committee

Date: 27 February 2020

Report Title: Review of Statutory Consultation – Closure of Stoer Primary School

Report By: Chief Executive

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following the conclusion of a statutory consultation process, this report seeks Members' agreement to a recommendation to discontinue the provision of education at Stoer Primary School.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to recommend that the Highland Council discontinues education at Stoer Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Lochinver Primary School.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource - These are set out in the table at Appendix 5 of the attached documentation.
- 3.2 Legal - The statutory consultation has complied with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - The Equalities impact is assessed at Section 15 of Appendix A. The Proposal is not anticipated as having any effect on poverty issues. The Proposal Paper at Appendix A also assesses the rural school and community issues.
- 3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever – The attached report details the implications in relation to school buildings and school transport. It is estimated that in terms of the Council's carbon emissions, the proposal will see a net reduction.
- 3.5 Risk - The main risks associated with the recommendation relate to the potential for call-in by Scottish Ministers. Officials have sought to mitigate the risk through review and

evaluation to ensure that procedurally the requirements of the Act and statutory consultation process have been met.

3.6 Gaelic – None.

4. Background

4.1 On 29 May 2019 the Care, Learning and Housing Committee agreed to commence a statutory consultation, per the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, to discontinue the provision of education at Stoer Primary School. The school has been mothballed since July 2016. Currently there are 3 children of primary school age in the catchment.

5. The Proposal

5.1 The proposal for decision, (Appendix 1) and appendices; and the original proposal issued for consultation and its appendices; are attached. They provide details of all consultation comments received, the report from Education Scotland, and the Council's response to comments arising from the consultation.

5.2 The views of the pupils attending Lochinver Primary School (including the Stoer pupils) can be viewed at Appendix 3i. Of the 32 pupils who expressed a view, 15 thought that it would be best to close Stoer Primary, whilst 12 thought we should re-open it. Five pupils suggested that we keep the school mothballed for longer. There were also 6 written responses received from stakeholders, all of which opposed closure. One of these was received after the closure of the consultation period and is identified as such in Appendix 1. None of the responses came from parents of current primary school age pupils although one came from the parent of a pre-school pupil who will enter P1 in August 2020. Three of the six responses argued that the school should remain mothballed to allow more time for the number of children to increase.

5.3 The public meeting was well attended given the very small local population, (see **Appendix 2**). A number of questions were raised but a majority of those present accepted the school was no longer viable.

5.4 The legislation requires that any proposal for decision must be published at least 3 weeks in advance of the meeting at which any decision may be made, to allow time for further representations. The Consultation Report was published on 4 February 2020. Any further representations that are received will be tabled at the meeting for the attention of Members.

5.5 In their report, Education Scotland recognised that Highland Council's proposal has clear educational benefits which are currently being experienced by the children. Inspectors noted that the children who had previously attended Stoer Primary who spoke to HM Inspectors enjoy coming to Lochinver Primary School and being with friends. They enjoy the opportunity to participate in team sports and enjoy learning and playing together. They like working collaboratively with different groups of children as part of their learning. A few have fond memories of Stoer Primary School but believe that there are not enough children for the school to remain open. Staff at Lochinver Primary School all agree with the proposal. They think that children who would previously have been educated at Stoer Primary School have benefited from being part of a larger school and have more opportunities to develop their social skills and build resilience. Staff highlighted that the mothballing of Stoer Primary School was welcomed by some parents as the numbers had become so small.

- 5.6 Education Scotland identified one issue for further consideration. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders and encourage continued growth in the links between Lochinver Primary School and the community of Stoer. This will be progressed in conjunction with the newly appointed Head Teacher of Lochinver Primary.
- 5.7 Following consideration by the Committee, if the recommendation is agreed, the following timeline will be followed as required by the legislation.
- The recommendation of the Committee will be considered by the full Highland Council.
 - If ratified by full Council, the Council must, within 6 working days of the Committee decision, advise Scottish Ministers of the decision it has reached, provide them with the proposal paper and consultation report, and publish a notice stating that Ministers have been advised and the process through which representations may be made to Ministers regarding call-in of the proposal.
 - From the date of the Council decision, there is a period of 3 weeks in which representations to Scottish Ministers regarding call-in of the proposal can be made by any interested party.
 - Scottish Ministers then have a further up to 5 weeks in which to decide whether they will issue a call-in notice.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 5 February 2020

Authors: Brian Porter, Head of Resource and Ian Jackson, Education Officer

Background Papers: Final Consultation Report and Appendices;
Original Proposal Paper and Appendices



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

CARE AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT STOER PRIMARY SCHOOL, RE-ASSIGNING ITS CATCHMENT AREA TO THAT OF LOCHINVER PRIMARY SCHOOL

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:

- To discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School.

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting held at Rhu Stoer Hall on 24 June 2019.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Care, Learning and Housing (CLH) Committee, at its meeting on 29 May 2019, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Stoer Primary School, re-assigning its catchment to that of Lochinver Primary School.
- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B, Bi and C** are the appendices to the original proposal.
- 1.3 Stoer Primary School has been mothballed since July 2016. At the time the school was mothballed there were two pupils. There were three children in the catchment at the time of writing this paper.
- 1.4 It is the Council's view that re-opening Stoer Primary would have a negative educational impact, both on the pupils from Stoer itself, and the pupils who

remain at Lochinver Primary. Further details on this are provided in Sections 6, 7, 8 and 11 below.

1.5 Stoer Primary School is designated as a rural school under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In that context, the Council has had special regard to:

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal; alternatives were considered at Sections 7-10 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and have been reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 6 - 11 below.
- the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community. The effect on the local community was considered at Section 11 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and is further considered at Sections 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 below, taking into account representations received during consultation.
- the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to;
- the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact; effects on school transport were considered at Section 12 of the Proposal Paper, (**Appendix A**) and reconsidered in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 6 and 11 below.

2.0 Consultation process

2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Tuesday 4 June 2019 to Friday 30 August 2019. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:

- (i) Parents of pupils attending Lochinver Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) The Parent Council of Lochinver Primary School.
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
- (iv) Staff of Lochinver Primary School;
- (v) Trade Union representatives;
- (vi) Assynt Community Council
- (vii) Highland Youth Convenor

2.3 The proposal document was also advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held in Stoer on 24 June 2019. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and Facebook page, and in the *Northern Times*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

3.0 Review of proposals following the consultation period

3.1 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.

3.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by a range of Council officials. This ensured that the Council met the requirements of the 2010 Act.

3.3 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

4.0 Responses received

4.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**. There were 5 written responses received during the public consultation period (not including the pupil questionnaires). Copies of these responses can also be found at Appendices 3i-3vi. One further response was received after the close of the consultation period, and a copy is at Appendix 3vii.

4.2 The views of pupils at Lochinver Primary School (which includes the pupils living within the Stoer catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire completed by the pupils. The views of the pupils are summarised at Section 5 below.

5.0 Issues raised during the consultation period

5.1 Of the 32 pupils who returned questionnaires, 15 thought that it would be best to close Stoer Primary, whilst 12 thought we should re-open it. Five pupils suggested that we keep the school mothballed for longer.

5.2 The various arguments advanced by the pupils are addressed at Issues 1-5 below.

5.3 The 5 written responses received from parents and local residents were opposed to the closure of Stoer Primary. None of the responses came from parents of current primary school age pupils although one came from the parent of a pre-school pupil who will enter P1 in August 2020. Two of the responses argued that the school should remain mothballed to allow more time for the number of children to increase.

5.4 The note of the public meeting can be found at **Appendix 2**. A total of 47 questions and answers are recorded in the note. Those issues not fully answered on the evening itself are set out at Issues 17 and 18 below, and addressed at Responses 17 and 18.

5.7 The main arguments put forward are summarised below, together with the responses from the Council. Where different responses raise similar issues these have been "grouped" for the purposes of the response.

6.0 Responses to the Issues raised in Public Consultation

6.1 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of closing Stoer Primary, or continuing to mothball, are set out at Issues 1-3 below, and addressed at Responses 1-3.

Issue 1

There are not enough children in Stoer.

The children in Stoer can have more friends by coming to Lochinver.

The Stoer children enjoy coming to Lochinver School.

It's better for Lochinver School to have more children.

Response 1

The Council notes and agrees with the views expressed above.

Issue 2

It would cost too much to have a school in Stoer.

Response 2

The Council agrees it would cost more to re-open the school, although this is not the reason that the Council is proposing to close it.

Issue 3

It would be very hard to find anyone willing to teach children in Stoer.

Response 3

Although Highland Council can have problems with finding teachers for small rural schools, if the school re-opened we would find a teacher.

6.2 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of re-opening Stoer PS are set out at Issues 4-5 below, and addressed at Responses 4-5.

Issue 4

It's not fair that children from Stoer have to travel so far to get to school.

Response 4

The Council agrees that the travel time from the Stoer catchment to Lochinver is the main adverse effect of the proposal. We feel though that the educational benefits that arise from closure outweigh the adverse effects of the longer travel distances. The 3 pupils from Stoer currently attending Lochinver have travel times of between 15-30 minutes

Issue 5

Children in Stoer should have the choice of going there or to Lochinver.

Response 5

Highland Council places all its communities within designated school catchments. Pupils enrol into the designated school for their home address, at both primary and secondary level. This system is necessary for the efficient planning of educational provision. If parents choose another school, then this must be by means of what we term a placing request. These are normally granted but can be refused where acceptance of the request would result in additional expenditure. Transport is not provided for children attending a school other than their catchment school.

Highland Council will apply the same principles to pupils from the Stoer catchment as to other schools in Highland.

Therefore, if Stoer Primary re-opened, any children from Stoer enrolling in school in future would be expected to go to Stoer school and would not get transport to Lochinver. Special arrangements would however be applied to any children from Stoer who were already at Lochinver.

- 6.3 The arguments advanced in written responses are set out at Issues 6-16 below, and addressed at Responses 6-16.

Issue 6

The local hall was not booked and the meeting took place as planned because on the day of the meeting the singing group already booked agreed to stand down. It was not advertised locally. We realise it was a tick the box meeting but the community should have been well informed beforehand that it was taking place. I believe it was advertised on highland council web site and two days before on Assynt Activity. Not good enough. More people would have been there if aware it was happening.

Response 6

Due to the issues raised by this representation, a reply was sent on 26 June 2019, as follows:

"I must apologise for the Highland Council's failure to book Rhu Stoer Hall prior to the meeting. I had asked for a booking to be made and had thought the Council had received an email confirmation to this effect. I was therefore bewildered when on the evening I was told by Hall Committee members that the Hall had not been booked. On investigating this the following day, it transpired that a booking had mistakenly been placed for a Rhu Hall in Argyll! The email confirmation had an address that referred simply to Rhu Hall, so I had not realised this was the wrong place. My colleague who made the booking received a phone call on Tuesday from the person in Argyll who had opened their hall for us, only for no-one to show up.

This was a case of human error, arising from the similarity of the names. We did not intend to inconvenience the local community in Stoer and I unreservedly apologise for doing so.

In terms of the publicity for the meeting, the details were published on the Highland Council website on 4 June (the first day of the consultation period). The meeting was also advertised on the Highland Council's Facebook page and public notices were published for 2 weeks in advance in the *Northern Times*. All parents of children attending Lochinver Primary and Lochinver Pre-School Centre were sent individual letters advising them of the consultation period and the date of the meeting, as was any other parent of a pre-school age child, if we knew of them. Assynt Community Council was also notified by letter of the consultation exercise and the date of the meeting.

I would highlight that the public meeting is but one aspect of the overall consultation exercise, which extends to 30 August. If you have any views on the future of Stoer Primary, I would urge you to submit them in writing. Neither the consultation exercise nor the public meeting are "tick-box" exercises. Any views submitted during will receive careful consideration and will be responded to in the Review of Consultation Report.

I hope the above is helpful, and apologies once again for the mix-up over the hall booking."

Issue 7

The details of the proposal as set out by Highland Council indicate that within the local community there is by no means unanimous opposition to the closure of Stoer Primary School. The extent to which an acceptance of closure exists within the community probably reflects as much the low expectations of residents of the general level of service provided to those in isolated communities as it does any educational rationale. Once the school is closed it is gone for ever and the writers of this letter have great sympathy for the view that at the very least the school should be continued to be mothballed.

Your report acknowledges the fact that school numbers are increasing. Time needs to be allowed for this to continue.

Since our Scottish Government passed laws 'with the presumption against rural school closures and lays down strict obligations on the part of the Council to prove any closure will bring educational benefits. I suggest that the school remains mothballed.

Response 7

Comments made at the public meeting, and by those who spoke to Education Scotland, suggest there are many people in the area who accept that Stoer Primary is no longer viable.

The original Proposal Paper suggested that over the next few years there could be a maximum of 6 pupils attending a re-opened Stoer Primary. The Council has re-examined the projections in the light of the updated school and pre-school enrolments in session 2019-20. Based on the new figures, the maximum number of children attending Stoer Primary between now and session 2025-26 would not exceed 4 pupils. Even this figure assumes that 100% of the Stoer pupils currently at Lochinver Primary would transfer back to Stoer in the event it re-opened. The past history of placing requests between the schools would suggest such an outcome would be unlikely.

Issue 8

The journey times quoted for children having to travel from as far away as Drumbeg or Nedd to get to Lochinver Primary School seem to be on the optimistic side and take little account of seasonal variations in traffic, road conditions and the paucity of gritting in recent years. To say that the closure of Stoer Primary will have no impact on changing transport arrangements does not reflect the possibility of changes in the pattern of location of children in the future. It seems strange that the Council should support creating a situation where a five-year-old child from say Drumbeg is expected to travel some 17.5 miles a day each way to and from school. The additional 20 minutes claimed by the Council effectively doubles the length of journey for such a child. To complete the journey in the claimed 40 minutes on a regular basis is a tall order given the seasonal variations mentioned above. Many things have been attempted on the B869 but maintaining such a schedule as is proposed may not be one of the most successful. Tellingly the Council itself admits in para. 17.5 that there will be adverse effects on the children from the additional travelling time.

If a child was to travel from Drumbeg, which is within the catchment area, the report says twenty minutes would be the maximum additional travel time. This must have been calculated before NC500!

At the moment my son is only able to attend nursery one day a week, due to the distance and lack of transport. He will be four when he starts school and will have approximately a thirty-minute journey either end of the school day, which will be quite an undertaking. I also feel that in this age of environmental awareness that it is very sad he won't ever be able to walk or cycle to school.

Response 8

The B869 is a secondary route and is gritted in line with the winter service policy. Secondary routes are treated between 6am and 6pm Monday and to Friday. The gritters are sent out in line with assessed weather conditions.

Grit needs to be worked into the road surface for it to be effective. On some roads in the Assynt area, usage is low therefore more grit isn't a solution. It is also understood that brine is to be used in this area as opposed to grit which may help.

The 40-minute travel time from Drumbeg to Lochinver Primary was taken from Google maps, a neutral source for such information. Additionally, the public meeting held in Stoer on 24 June was attended by the local school transport driver, who when asked, advised that she collected from Drumbeg at 0750 each morning and arrived at Lochinver Primary at 0830, and that the timings were much the same in the afternoons. This advice fits well with the statement within the original Proposal Paper, of a 40-minute journey from Drumbeg to Lochinver Primary.

As mentioned above, the Council's Proposal Paper acknowledged that the additional travel time to and from school was the main adverse effect arising from the closure proposal. This has to be balanced against the educational benefits that would arise from closure. It should also be noted that Stoer Primary was originally mothballed after the majority of Stoer parents voluntarily placed their children in Lochinver Primary School, by making placing requests.

Issue 9

The Council's paper claims in para. 16.1 That "In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position" We beg to differ. What would not change the current position is continuing to mothball the school. Closing the school is likely to result in the Council selling off the premises and this does represent a change and a loss of a facility to the community. In addition, whilst funded transport it appears will be provided for P1-7 pupils it is admitted that funded transport will not be available to nursery age children from Drumbeg and Stoer. If this is the case, and whilst the Council allows that such children can attend preschool education at Lochinver Pre School Centre, and no funded transport is available this offer means little to a parent who has no private transport or who is unable to drive. The reason for this situation is stated in the paper [para 17.4] to be that "...low population densities ... means that it is not possible to provide preschool facilities close to every parent in the area". Sorry, but from how we see it, it is not the low population density that is the cause of a lack of preschool education but rather the discretionary rather than statutory nature of preschool education in itself coupled to the lack of willingness of the Council to spend money on preschool education that is the cause. What the Council is suggesting is virtually blaming the victims for the lack of preschool education.

Response 9

Since Stoer Primary was mothballed children from the area have attended Lochinver Primary and have travelled between their homes and that school. It was on this basis we made the statement that "in practical terms" a closure of Stoer Primary would not change the current position, and the Council stands by that statement. The Council acknowledges of course that the closure of Stoer Primary will represent a change in legal terms, and that is the reason for the statutory consultation.

The Highland Council currently operates 155 local authority nurseries and provides financial support to a further 62 nurseries and childminders who are commissioned by the Council to provide early years services. There are a further 211 registered childminders who can become commissioned if they complete a Profile of Education to become eligible for funded 3 & 4-year-old children.

There is no legal requirement to provide transport for nursery age children and the Council's School Transport Policy specifically states that transport will not be provided for children of pre-school age. Nor is the Council funded to provide transport for pre-school children.

Due to the fact the school is currently mothballed, the formal closure of the school will not change the current position for the one pre-school child currently in the Stoer catchment.

Issue 10

Highland Council aim that all pupils should be educated in schools that are rated in Category B both for condition and suitability. Stoer Primary School, the document indicates, is rated Category C for educational suitability and Category B for building condition [para 4.8]. The paper gives little indication as to what would be required to bring the building up to Category B for educational suitability. From the paper the current Lochinver Primary School has the same ratings as Stoer Primary School [para 5.5] for the same categories that is C and B. It can hardly be argued that moving children to Lochinver has historically or will in the immediate future represent any improvement in the educational experience of children as defined by the category classifications employed by Highland Council to describe the standard of the provision the children enjoy.

4.8 and 5.5 - both schools have same rating, therefore there is no obvious advantage regarding building status.

Response 10

As highlighted in the Proposal Paper, the Council assesses all of its schools for building Suitability and building Condition, in line with the Scottish Government's School Estate Management guidelines. Schools are assessed on a scale with the ratings "A" (good) "B" (satisfactory), "C" (poor) and "D"

(bad). These ratings relate only to the school building and are quite separate from the educational benefits that would arise within the classroom, and which were set out at Section 6 of the Proposal Paper at Appendix A.

Highland Council does of course agree that Stoer Primary and Lochinver Primary have the same ratings in terms of building suitability and condition. As the representations acknowledge, this information was taken from the Council's own Proposal Paper.

In assessing the educational suitability of the Stoer Primary School building, the following factors were noted:

- No games hall or grass pitch for PE
- No changing facilities
- Classrooms are not accessible for a wheelchair user
- No staffroom or pupil social areas
- There is no level access to the school
- There is no reception. Visitors would need to travel through a classroom to access the school office.
- Tared section of playground is small and sloping.

To bring the building to a "B" standard for suitability would require improvements to the accessibility and security of the school, as well as addressing some of the functional issues identified above.

Issue 11

The attitude that appears to lie behind some of the unsubstantiated value laden comment in the Councils paper are to be deplored. The way we are perceived by those in Council headquarters is clear as para. 17.5 states "The population in this area is accustomed to making long journeys to access things that people in urban areas take for granted" Just because we may be used to making long journeys to access things does not make that situation fair or right. The African woman who has to walk miles every day to get clean water may be used to doing so but that does not mean that we should not push for a borehole and a piped clean water supply in her village. Just because we send our children some distance to school does not in or of itself make this right or necessarily the best solution for them. For these reasons we oppose the closure of Stoer Primary School.

It is inappropriate and rather judgemental to say that the population is accustomed to making long journeys, and then relate this to a daily commute to school.

Response 11

The points above are well made. It remains generally true that very remote rural areas are not, and realistically cannot be, provided with the same level of services that are available in towns and cities.

Issue 12

I grew up in Switzerland in a tiny hamlet with a school - since then, the school closed and it was more or less the end of this hamlet - it would be sad, if this would be the case for Stoer as well... Is it only a question of money as always in our world today?

Response 12

The Council's Proposal Paper made it clear that the case for closing Stoer Primary was on the basis of educational benefit and not financial savings.

Issue 13

There are plans to build more council houses here - do you really think that people move up here WITHOUT a school?

People planning to move here may be deterred if there is no local school available.

The Assynt Development Trust recently commissioned the Highlands Small Community Housing Trust to undertake an in-depth local analysis of housing need and future demand.

The Survey clearly demonstrated housing need for a variety of housing tenures, with the highest demand for social rent. The Trust believes that by providing a range of housing locally, this will help to sustain the long-term future of the community. The survey was done both within and out with the local community.

Therefore, I believe more time should be given to Stoer School to allow for the possibility of people with families moving into the area.

I understand that Uig Primary was mothballed in 2010 and is only now at the consultation stage. I judge from this that there is no standard time given for the process of mothballing.

In the Proposal it mentions the fact we have a village hall for any activities but fails to see the wider issue of keeping small communities like this viable. We want to encourage young people to stay in the area and families to move in and a good school is an integral part of that.

Response 13

It is the Highland Council's understanding that only an initial feasibility study has been carried out at the request of a local community group, and there has been no agreement of house types / sizes. Nor is there funding in place for housing in Stoer.

Even were funding and a suitable site available today, any new housing would not be complete for about 2 years.

The table below, extracted from the Council website:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/16355/highland_housing_register_prospects

shows social housing demand and supply as at 1/4/19 – in summary, 3 people want either a 1 bed or 2 bed house and 2 people want a 3-bed house.

It is notable that when Stoer School was mothballed the roll had fallen to 2, but that a number of families within the Stoer catchment had opted to send their children to Lochinver Primary on placing requests. This would suggest that some parents see value in their children attending a larger school where there are more opportunities to form friendships and participate in groups, and would welcome the opportunity to live in a catchment served by a larger school.

Past analyses of rural locations in Highland that have experienced school closures has established no clear relationship between school closures and population patterns. Additionally, the Report of the Scottish Government's Commission on Rural Education, published in 2013, found a number of examples of communities which continued to depopulate despite the presence of a school. The Commission's review of the scientific and other literature on school closures found there was a lack of robust evidence on how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of closure) links to the sustainability of communities.

The Statutory Guidance on mothballing suggests is only appropriate for a temporary period and should be subject to regular review, at least annually, against the same requirements which led to the original decision to mothball the school (or stage of education). The maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote. Both Stoer and Uig come within the category of "very remote rural".

In the case of Stoer, the Highland Council's review of mothballing suggested that the school would not be viable, and the closure proposal was advanced accordingly.

Issue 14

The Council's paper indicates that a small school provides "...significant impediments" to the education of children and their social and interactional development. Yet there is little hard evidence produced or research quoted in the Council's paper to support this conclusion. It can as well be asserted that young children are as likely to readily gain emotional support, build long lasting strong interpersonal relationships and develop a social awareness of

the needs of others in small groups in small schools as they are likely to in an environment with five or six times as many children.

Paragraph 4.5 of the Council's paper asserts that single teacher schools with student numbers in single figures present significant impediments to learning with reference to the current curriculum and states the reasons for this view are set out in Section 5 [ibid.] To these readers Section 5 does little to demonstrate any educational rationale for such a claim and is mainly a descriptive account of the current primary school at Lochinver. It can as well be argued that the historical evidence locally amply demonstrates that single teacher schools with relatively low numbers of children provided a stable, safe, rich and challenging set of learning environments for their pupils.

It would be strange if Highland Council claimed anything other than pupils from Stoer are deriving educational benefits from their attendance at Lochinver Primary School. What the paper does not so clearly demonstrate is if these are in addition to what might be attained if pupils were educated at Stoer. For example, paras 6.3, 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8 overstate the case in each instance and really do not clearly demonstrate why these characteristics and outcomes can be better attained in a school of thirty as opposed to a school with children numbering in single figures. The paper asserts "...very small learning groups have a number of disadvantages" and in an imbalanced analysis makes little or no attempt to identify any positives in such a situation such as those referred to above.

I am writing to say that I disagree with the proposal to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School and Nursery. This is mainly because of the excellence of the education that has always been provided at this school.

I received part of my own education in Stoer school, so I can speak with personal knowledge of the quality of the education given within a small school.

I benefitted greatly from the inclusive experience of being educated there.

I valued this so much that I made the decision to relocate from Glasgow in order that my children would experience the same unique educational provision.

The number of pupils has fluctuated. When I attended, there were ten pupils and when my daughter started, in 1983, there were five, but the ethos and quality of education provided, remained the same. There were always high expectations of the pupils.

I was able to witness the same beneficial aspects of small school life when I was employed as management and supply teacher for six years in Stoer School. I was also management and supply teacher in another excellent school – Assynt Primary.

As a peripatetic additional support needs teacher, travelling to schools throughout Sutherland, I was aware of the pros and cons of being educated in schools with varying pupil rolls.

I was also aware of the many excellent inspection reports given to small rural schools.

The benefits experienced by pupils in small rural schools should never be underestimated.

In my personal and professional experience, there are many advantages of being part of a smaller school. These include the development of collaborative and negotiating skills needed to interact successfully both in the school and in the playground.

There is great value in the ability to 'get on' with others who may not share the same interests and the ability to relate to children of different ages. Social skills are developed in finding common ground for girls and boys playing and working purposely together.

There is a very strong element of the older children nurturing the younger ones and the younger pupils having a close association with the older children who become role models.

There is an opportunity to develop organisational and imaginative skills to play successfully.

Tolerance, cooperation, compromise and understanding of other pupils' strengths can lead to real inclusion within a small school.

These complex and highly developed social skills are extremely valuable and lifelong. In my view they develop maturity and personal responsibility and can foster lifelong friendships.

It could be argued that the intensity and depth of social interaction within a small diverse group is richer and wider than social interaction limited only to children of a similar age.

I can understand the logic of Highland Council making an economic case for closing Stoer School.

However, I fail to understand the assertions made in the report that claim there are educational benefits for closure.

No evidence is given for this assertion and I am unaware of any research done which corroborates this.

Therefore, I do not believe that this case can be successfully made.

I have personally observed many fine examples of collaborative and team working within groups of various ages while following the Curriculum for Excellence in a small school.

Successful and productive teamwork can be achieved by pupils of different ages and abilities on Curriculum for Excellence work. This is differentiation and is what skilled teachers in small schools have always done. It is not always necessary for group work to have to be undertaken by children of the same age or ability to be successful.

Regarding the report, in 1.1, the rationale given for making the proposal, items three and four are opinions and cannot be substantiated.

Item five refers to the roll of another school and is therefore not relevant.

4.9 - no inspection recently, but Stoer School has a fine HMle record.

6.3 – you say that you have formed a view that the children from Stoer have 'derived educational benefits'. How has this 'view' been reached? How is it possible to measure an educational experience against an experience which did not take place?

6.5 – the ability to work with others within the curriculum can be carried out successfully with a small number of pupils.

6.6 – leadership skills are not unique to a larger school but are well developed within a small school by the very nature of the child eventually becoming the oldest and having the opportunity to lead which a quiet child may never have experienced when 'one of many'.

6.12 – to the best of my knowledge, all 12 points are applicable to the opportunities that were provided by Stoer school.

The headteacher of Stoer school ensured that pupils were involved with their community and that every opportunity was taken to work with other schools whenever possible.

Having read the educational benefits outlined by the Council in the Proposal Paper, I wonder how much of this is based on factual evidence and not just opinion?

I disagree with the Council's belief that pupils should be members of "an age appropriate peer group". Being in a class of boys and girls of varying age groups enables you to mix and relate with more confidence and awareness, an invaluable life skill.

I would like to have seen school inspection findings included in this report as a more factual insight into education standards. I know Stoer School has always done well – a very good school indeed.

I attended Stoer School for 7 years and received an excellent education. The numbers varied; always remaining low, but we never missed out on anything, in fact quite the opposite – even yoga! All the benefits listed by the Council could easily apply to Stoer School, and do in my experience, even in the case of larger group learning as the schools have always worked together on a variety of things. Unfortunately there is no list setting out the benefits that arise from attending a smaller school, such as more teacher time and being in a class with all ages and levels, which can encourage you to push yourself and have an awareness of say, P7 maths in P3.

Response 14

The Council disagrees that the statements in paragraphs 6.3, 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8 of the Proposal Paper overstate the case. Paragraph 6.3 is a general statement introducing the more detailed proposals that follow, and paragraphs 6.5-6.8 provide a clear rationale for how collaborative working benefits the curricular areas cited. The educational case does of course carry on with a description of further educational benefits that arise from larger numbers, set out at paragraph 6.5 and paragraphs 6.9-6.13.

The Council notes the arguments advanced in favour of small schools. We would not seek to downplay the commitment of the staff at Stoer Primary in the past nor the standards of education achieved there. However, as mentioned at the public meeting, Scottish Education has moved on and under Curriculum for Excellence it is very important that children are educated in larger peer groups, working through collaborative groups and talking to one another. Learning becomes much easier for children when they can be part of an appropriate age group.

Comments made at the public meeting (see Qs 33-37 at Appendix 2) indicate that some former pupils of Stoer Primary recognise the difficulties that arise with such small numbers.

Whilst Lochinver Primary is a much larger school than Stoer Primary, Lochinver itself is a 2-classroom school with a roll of just 28 for session 2019-20. The school has a P1-4 class with 18 pupils and a P5-7 class with 10 pupils. Both classes within Lochinver Primary therefore cover a range of ages.

The report by Education Scotland (Appendix 4) concludes that *“The Highland Council’s proposal to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School has clear educational benefits which are currently being experienced by the children. Children and staff are agreed about the educational benefits of the proposal.”*

The last Inspection of Stoer Primary took place in 2012. The Council agrees that the school received a good Report, and HM Inspectors pronounced themselves satisfied with the provision of education at that time.

Issue 15

At a meeting regarding the proposal to close Stoer School, I was taken aback to learn that everything had already been removed from the building. As you are no doubt aware, 'mothballed' means 'stop using a piece of equipment or a building but keep it in good condition so that it can readily be used again'. I am not sure therefore that this is correct procedure.

Response 15

It is now over 3 years since Stoer School was mothballed. The resources within the school were bought with public funds and it is far better they be used for the benefit of local children than lie unused in a school that is not operational. The resources have gone to Lochinver PS which is of course the school that children from Stoer currently attend. All schools in Highland are under the management of Highland Council. If Stoer PS were to re-open, the school would be adequately resourced, on the same basis as any other school in Highland.

Issue 16

8.1 – the report states that the projected roll will always be in single figures. This is an assumption. How can this be accurately predicted?

Response 16

It's never possible to predict future school rolls with 100% accuracy, but the roll projections are more than just assumptions.

The Council keeps its school rolls under continuous review and projects rolls for up to 15 years into the future. A detailed and accurate assessment of likely residential developments is a key factor in school roll forecasting. Since 2016, the annual Housing Land Audit has been prepared in parallel with the creation of the annual school roll forecasts. An allowance for smaller scale 'windfall' development sites is also applied to the forecasts. This windfall rate is based on the prevailing average for the primary school catchment in the previous two years.

The ratio of additional pupils expected to derive from newly constructed housing (the Pupil Product Ratio or PPR) is the major influence on increasing school rolls. The rates used in Highland are 0.3 primary pupils and 0.13 secondary pupils per new home. These figures are comparable with those used across many Scottish Local Authorities.

- 6.4 The note of the public meeting is at **Appendix 2**. Forty-seven questions and comments are recorded. The majority of these were answered during the discussion and can be found in the note. Others were also raised in the written responses and are covered above. Further responses to two of the issues are provided below. These should be read alongside the answers provided in the note of the meeting at Appendix 2 (at questions 26-30 and question 44).

Issue 17

Highland Council's Education Department needs to work with other parts of the Council to promote the economic regeneration of this area, and create employment opportunities.

Response 17

The Highland Council's Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan 2018 seeks four overarching outcomes for the plan area: Growing Communities: Employment: Connectivity and Transport: Environment and Heritage:

The Plan's Strategy for future development aims to address the priorities for the area through the above four outcomes. The Plan does not attempt to identify all the specific development proposals that might come forward for economic regeneration and the creation of employment opportunities, but rather it provides a framework for assessing proposals that do come forward and for supporting sustainable development.

The Plan is supportive of communities working together to produce and lead on the implementation of their own Community Plans. If they are aligned this can help when considering planning applications or making development decisions. Community Plans can also help to focus communities to develop local facilities and support networks.

Partnership working is essential to support existing businesses to grow, attracting new businesses to the area and maximising inward investment, for example Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership and the North Highland Initiative.

Issue 18

What are the arrangements for the maintenance of the building while it remains mothballed? There have been reports of water ingress.

Response 18

A Highland Council Maintenance Officer visited Stoer Primary in September 2019. His overall opinion was that the property was in reasonably good condition, with no significant structural concerns observed nor evidence of significant water ingress or damp. However, he did note the following issues:

- Classroom walls have a number of hairline cracks in the plaster work.
- Carpets rippled in classroom areas and a couple of "soft" flooring areas in the main corridor.
- A few double-glazing unit windows blown (internal condensation present) between the panes.
- External grounds overgrown and some evidence of animal faeces.

These issues would be addressed in the event the school were to re-open.

7.0 Late Submission

- 7.1 A further response to the consultation exercise was received on 14 January 2020, more than 4 months after the close of the public consultation exercise.
- 7.2 Although the response was submitted outwith the public consultation period, Highland Council has considered the letter. The issues raised are set out at Issue 19 below, and responded to at Response 19.

Issue 19

Although there would only be 6 children attending the school in the next year, this number is anticipated to rise over the next few years, with children having to travel from outlying areas such as Drumbeg and Nedd. The journey from these areas to Lochinver would take more than 30 minutes, particularly in winter.

It has been suggested that a small roll is disadvantageous to children from the point of view of social interaction, but in fact the children are more likely to benefit from going to school nearer their homes, where they would be more likely to be able to socialise with their friends after school hours.

The provision of the school in Stoer would also create much needed employment in the area, and possibly even bring other families to Assynt.

If the decision is made not to re-open the school, we would request that it at least continue to be mothballed to see what changes take place in the next few years.

Response 19

Then Council acknowledged that the potential figure of 6 pupils attending a re-opened Stoer Primary School is taken from its own Proposal Paper, that Paper also made it clear that the figure of six was a maximum one, based on the assumption that 100% of the Stoer pupils currently attending Lochinver Primary would enrol in the re-opened school at Stoer.

The Proposal Paper projected there would be 4 P1-7 pupils from within the Stoer catchment during the school year 2019-20. In the event, there were only 3 pupils, suggesting the Council's projections may have been over-optimistic.

Response 16 above outlines the basis of the Council's roll projections. Having reviewed the evidence, the Council does not anticipate any significant future rise to the number of children living within the Stoer Primary School catchment.

The issue of travel from the Stoer catchment to Lochinver Primary School was addressed in Responses 4 and 8 above.

The Council is also clear that the merger of the two schools will allow the Stoer children to have greater opportunities for socialisation than would be the case at Stoer Primary. HM Inspectors from Education Scotland also highlighted this as a benefit of the Proposal. Further details are set out in their Report at **Appendix 4**, and a summary of their views can be found at paragraphs 8.3 and 8.4 below.

8.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland, and Council Response

- 8.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4**.
- 8.2 In their report, Education Scotland recognised that the Highland Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School, has clear educational benefits which are currently being experienced by the children.
- 8.3 In their report, Education Scotland Inspectors noted that the children who had previously attended Stoer Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors enjoy coming to Lochinver Primary School and being with friends. They enjoy the opportunity to participate in team sports, such as basketball and football, and enjoy learning and playing together. They like working collaboratively with different groups of children as part of their learning. A few have fond memories of Stoer Primary School but believe that there are not enough children for the school to remain open. They are disappointed that they cannot walk or cycle to Lochinver Primary School and the bus journey can be tiring for the younger children.
- 8.4 Inspectors also noted that staff at Lochinver Primary School all agree with the proposal. They think that children who would previously have been educated at Stoer Primary School have benefited from being part of a larger school and have more opportunities to develop their social skills and build resilience. Staff highlighted that the mothballing of Stoer Primary School was welcomed by some parents as the numbers had become so small.
- 8.5 Lastly, Education Scotland Inspectors met with a few members of the local community although no parents of children currently attending from the Stoer catchment area were present at the meeting. Stakeholders spoke positively about the quality of the education previously provided at Stoer and the school's place within a small local community. The community do not feel as well-connected to Lochinver Primary School. The community is hopeful that this aspect can be developed further with the new headteacher. A majority of the stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors objected to the closure at this time. They feel that a longer period of mothballing would give more opportunity

for the community to work with the council to encourage more families to move to the area. However, representatives of the Assynt Community Council did not consider this to be a realistic ambition.

- 8.6 One issue was identified for further consideration, and is set out below.

Issue 20

In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders and encourage continued growth in the links between Lochinver Primary School and the community of Stoer.

Response 20

The Council accepts this recommendation. A new Head Teacher took up post at Lochinver Primary on 6 January 2020. The above recommendation has been brought to the attention of the new HT and the Council will monitor how the improved community engagement is implemented.

9.0 Effects on the Community

- 9.1 Section 13 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council's assessment of the effects of closure on the local community, noting that the community has the use of a village hall for public events, and that the primary school building was temporality leased to a community group.
- 9.2 Further discussion on the potential community use of the school building took place at the public meeting on 24 June 2019 (see Questions 43-47 at Appendix 2). The issue was also covered in the Report by Education Scotland (Appendix4), who commented that, if the school were to close, the building has the potential to be used by the community for a different purpose to complement the use of the nearby village hall. In the event the closure is approved, the Council would welcome a community bid for the future use of the building.
- 9.3 The consultation exercise did not identify any other effects on the community from the proposal.

10.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

- 10.1 One response suggested that the reference to meals being cooked at the school prior to mothballing (see paragraph 4.10 of the Proposal Paper) is incorrect and that no meals were cooked on the premises before mothballing.
- 10.2 It does appear that this was an error. Prior to mothballing meals were served but not cooked at the school. A cook was employed for 6.25 hpw. Cleaning staff were employed at 6.75 hpw.
- 10.3 The above figures require a minor adjustment to the Financial Analysis, a revised version of which is attached at **Appendix 5**. The original calculation

showed an annual saving of £90,444 in closing Stoer Primary, as compared to a situation in which it was re-opened. In the revised analysis, the equivalent annual saving is £86,362.

- 10.4 The Council has carefully considered the impact of this inaccuracy on the Proposal, but has concluded it does not represent a material consideration relevant to the Authority's decision as to implementation of the proposal. The closure proposal is advanced on the basis of educational benefit, and those factors are unaffected by the inaccuracy relating to the arrangements for catering and cleaning.

11.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure

- 11.1 Throughout the consultation the Council has had special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In particular, the Council has had special regard to the following:

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Paragraph 7.1 of the Proposal Paper identified the following alternatives to closure:

- to re-open Stoer Primary School, either with its current catchment area or an extended catchment area, or;
- to continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement.

- 11.2 No further alternative to closure was suggested during the consultation exercise:

- 11.3 There are presently 3 pupils from Stoer within P1-7 at Lochinver Primary for session 2019-20, one less than was predicted in the Proposal Paper published in June 2019. There is no indication that the roll figures at a re-opened Stoer Primary would be any higher than was suggested in the Proposal Paper. On the contrary, updated roll figures suggest that the Proposal Paper issued in June over-estimated the potential number of pupils at Stoer Primary. There is also nothing in the projected rolls that would support the suggestion that the roll at Stoer is likely to rise to a point that would allow the school to become viable.

- 11.3 Three of the responses disputed the Council's view of the educational benefits derived from the closure of the school, as set out in Section 6 of the Proposal Paper (See Appendix A). The Council has carefully considered the points made. Our views are set out at Response 14 above. Education Scotland are clear that the Council's Proposal *"has clear educational benefits which are currently being experienced by the children. Children and staff are agreed about the educational benefits of the proposal."* (See Appendix 4).

- 11.4 Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Section 6 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal.

- 11.5 The Council has also reconsidered the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to; (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

The potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper and is further considered at Section 9 above. Several respondents to the consultation exercise raised wider issues relating to the community impact of the Proposal, set out at Issue 13 above. These are addressed at Response 13. Education Scotland also commented on the need for the Council to promote links between Lochinver Primary and the community of Stoer (see Issue/Response 19 above).

- 11.6 The Council has further reconsidered the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact, (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities.

The impact of the proposal on travel time was considered at Sections 11 and 17 of the Proposal Paper and again at Responses 4 and 8 above. As Stoer Primary School has been mothballed since July 2016, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. It would however be reasonable in these circumstances to compare the travel arrangements under the Proposal with those that would apply were Stoer Primary to re-open.

The Council has always accepted that the additional travel time for pupils was the main adverse effect of the proposal, even though children are already adjusted to the additional travel. The Council's Proposal Paper suggested the maximum *additional* transport time would be 20 minutes. The figure was derived from Google maps, which is a neutral source of information on travel times. It has been disputed by two of those who responded to consultation, both of whom felt the additional travel would actually be longer. The point was however discussed at the public meeting (see Qs 9-13 of Appendix 2) where the local school taxi driver, who attended the meeting, confirmed the travel times set out in the Proposal Paper.

12.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers

- 12.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 5 March 2020 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant

representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so up until midnight on 25 March 2020. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 29 April 2020 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.

12.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to close Stoer Primary School is asked to email schoolclosures@gov.scot or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ** by midnight on **25 March 2020**.

12.3 Until the outcome of the eight week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

13.0 Legal issues

13.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

13.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000). As with all Council duties, the Council also has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value, and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). Each of the above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

14.0 Financial Implications

14.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as Appendix C to the Proposal Paper. Following the identification of an error, a revised Financial Analysis can be found at Appendix 5.

15.0 Equality Impact Assessment

15.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was issued with the proposal paper and can be found at Section 15 to the Proposal Paper. The consultation exercise did not identify any additional equality issues.

16.0 Conclusion

16.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern.

These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 10 and 11 above. For the reasons set out in detail in sections 5-11 above, Highland Council considers that implementation of the closure proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.

- 16.2 Education Scotland staff visited Lochinver Primary School, and the site of Stoer Primary School, to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses.
- 16.3 Council officials, having reviewed the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; concludes that the proposal offers educational benefits and that implementation of the Proposal in full is the most appropriate response to the reason for formulating the Proposal. The reasons for this conclusion are set out at Sections 5-11 above.

17.0 Recommendation

- 17.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School.

Brian Porter
Head of Resources, Care and Learning
4 February 2020

MINUTE OF PUBLIC MEETING HELD AT RHU STOER HALL
24 JUNE 2019

**CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE PROVISION OF
EDUCATION AT STOER PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Panel

Richard Gale, Councillor (Chair)
Norma Young, Area Care and Learning Manager (West)
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Highland Council

Apologies: Maree Todd MSP

9 members of the public attended the meeting.

The Chairperson began by welcoming everyone to the meeting, by introducing himself as the Chair of the Sutherland County Committee, and introducing the officials present. He advised that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to formally close Stoer Primary School, (as set out in the recommendation to the Proposal Paper). The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures. Copies of the Proposal Paper and appendices were distributed. The Proposal Paper identified various options, and the Chairperson explained that we could also discuss any other options or alternatives to closure which those present would like to raise. The Chairperson then asked Ian Jackson to describe the consultation process.

Ian Jackson advised that the meeting was part of a set statutory procedure relating to a school closure. We are in the initial phase of that consultation, which was due to end on 30 August 2019. The Proposal Paper sets out a proposal to close the school, but clearly there are other options and these are identified in the paper. People are entitled to express their views on those other options, or indeed any others that the Council should be considering. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather views, and we would try to answer any questions that are raised. Any questions that cannot be answered tonight, and which require further research, will be responded to in due course. There is a very clear obligation on the Council to consider each and every one of the comments received, including those made at the meeting tonight.

The formal process has a number of stages and gives ample opportunity for views to be expressed to the Council before any final decision is made. Once the public consultation ends on 30 August, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper, the note of the meeting tonight, and any written representations, and will form a view on the educational benefits of the proposal. Education Scotland will visit Lochinver Primary in the autumn, and they will be keen to meet with any parents who wish to make their views known. The Council has to take account of Education Scotland's view on the educational benefits and respond

to any points raised by their report, as well as any representations received as a result of the consultation process. Following the completion of that stage, the Council will take a Final Report to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee of the Council. As part of the inclusive process, the Final Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, and anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be invited to make "further representations" during those 3 weeks. Any further representations that are made are submitted to the members of the Committee, either in advance or tabled on the day, so that members are fully informed of any issues that may have arisen. Members will also see copies of the original responses and the note of this meeting. If, hypothetically, the decision of the CLH Committee is to implement the closure, that decision has to be confirmed by the full Council. That is not however the end of the process, as the Scottish Ministers have a right of call-in for any school closures proposal, so even after the Council has made its decision there is a further 3-week period in which people can raise concerns with the Scottish Government. Any such representations might lead to Scottish Ministers calling-in the proposal. If the decision is called in, there would be a further review process. If the decision is not called-in, the Council would then implement its proposal. It is a very slow and measured process, with multiple opportunities for review.

The Chairperson then asked Norma Young to explain the educational aspects of the proposal.

Norma Young asked those present to turn to section 6 of the Proposal Paper, the section on educational benefits. She did not propose to rehearse the wording that was in the report, but highlighted some of the key sections.

The opening section at 6.1 set out the Council's view on the quality of the school environment. It would be fair to acknowledge that when Stoer PS last operated, although it was a small school, it had staff that were very committed. However, Scottish Education has moved on and under Curriculum for Excellence it is very important that children are educated in larger peer groups, working through collaborative groups and talking to one another. Learning becomes much easier for children when they can be part of an appropriate age group. Section 6.5 expands on this. Section 6.7 sets out how very small groups can have educational disadvantages. At Section 6.12, we've listed the opportunities that children have at Lochinver Primary. Section 6.14 sets out the projected school roll for Lochinver Primary, which is expected to fall to 29 in August 2019. If a decision were taken to re-open Stoer Primary, the roll at Lochinver would fall further. Splitting such small numbers between the two schools would be of benefit to neither group.

There was a lot of information in the paper, and everyone would have the opportunity to ask questions tonight, or to submit comments in writing within the timescales specified earlier.

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

Q1 – My daughter received an invite to the meeting but she can't attend as she has a toddler to look after. I'm here in her place. I hope that's alright?

The Chairperson advised that it was a public meeting open to anyone.

Q2 – It's a public meeting? Where was the meeting advertised?

A2 (Ian Jackson) - It was on the Highland Council's website and Facebook page, and a notice was put in the *Northern Times* for two consecutive weeks.

Q3 (follow-up) – There was an article in the Northern Times but there wasn't an advert.

Q4 (comment from another member of the public) - The article was in the *Assynt News*.

A4 (Ian Jackson) – It would have been in the public notices section of the *Northern Times*.

Q5 – I normally get the notices for the hall and I didn't receive anything.

A5 (Ian Jackson) - We didn't send it to the hall, but we did send it to the newspaper.

Q6 – I'm quite sure a lot more people would have been here if there had been a notice in the hall.

A6 (Norma Young) - If there is anyone not present tonight who wants to put in comments, they should do so in writing. If there is any other mechanism that the community uses to publicise events, then let us know.

Q7 – Posters are the best way of getting news round this community.

A7 (Norma Young) – Well we can do that then. We can get some posters drawn up.

(Ian Jackson) – All parents have already been notified by individual letter.

(Norma Young) – This is in no way an attempt by the Council to make sure that people don't know of the proposal. Our aim is that as many people as possible do know.

Q8 – A quick question, when you said that all parents had received a letter, does that include parents of pre-school children?

A8 (Ian Jackson) – As long as we knew of them. Information was sent to parents of children attending Lochinver Pre-school Centre and any other pre-school parents we knew of. This lady [who had asked question 1] confirmed her daughter had received notification by letter.

Q9 – Could I raise a question about Section 6.2 of the Proposal Paper – point number 5? What is the travel time from Drumbeg to Lochinver PS?

Q10 (comment from local school taxi driver) – In the morning I leave at 7.50am and having made all the pick-ups I arrive at Lochinver PS at 8.30am.

Q11 (follow-up) – So that's a 40-minute journey time. Is it the same at night?

Q12 (response from local school taxi driver) – Yes, much the same at night.

A12 (Ian Jackson) – If I can draw your attention to paragraph 17.1 of the Proposal Paper, we've tried there to assess the adverse effects that may arise from closure. We've put in that paragraph that the *additional* travel time for someone from Drumbeg is 20 minutes, by which I mean that anyone travelling from Drumbeg to Stoer would have a travel time of 20 minutes, and the additional travel time to Lochinver is another 20 minutes.

Q13 – It's stated in paragraph 6.2 that the travel time to primary school shouldn't be more than 30 minutes.

A13 (Ian Jackson) – Agreed. Normally it shouldn't be.

Q14 (follow-up) - There is one pre-school child in that area, so when they go to school they will have a very long journey. I do appreciate that parents have at some extent voted with their feet by sending local children to Lochinver, but it is a very long time for a young child to travel to school.

A14 (Ian Jackson) – It's a very important point. Thank you for raising it.

Q15 – I find it interesting that the paper is full of points about the advantages of being in a bigger school, but nowhere do I see anything about the advantages of having been educated in Stoer School.

A15 (Ian Jackson) – This paper is the Council's proposal for closure, and we are setting out what we see as the benefits of that, although the paper does include a section on possible adverse effects – section 17 as we referred to earlier. Highland Council does think that children benefit from being with other children their own age. Any points that you want to make that are contrary to that, by all means make them tonight or send them in writing, or both.

Q16 – I think it is a matter of opinion, and I do think there would be benefits to children from attending Stoer School

Q17 (Comment from another member of the public) – You can't have a school with just two pupils though. That doesn't work.

Q18 (Comment from another member of the public) – I agree. When I was at Stoer School, there were 18 pupils. Two or three just isn't viable.

Q19 (follow-up to Q15) – In the 1980s there was talk about closing Stoer School, and there was a public meeting which was very well-attended. The Community didn't want to lose their school, and we saved it for a few more years. At that point there were six children here. I can say categorically that the education that children received here then was top-class, second to none. P1 girls learned to relate to P4/5 boys, and the other way around. In the town, children tend only to be friends with their own age group. Here, there's a wonderful social benefit from children mixing, whether they are boys or girls and whether they are five or twelve. Stoer School had a fantastic atmosphere. My daughter is over forty but when she attended Stoer they used to start every morning with yoga. Recently I heard of a totally different technique for teaching art, and when I told my daughter she said "Oh yes, we used to get that at Stoer School." My son learned to knit and sew at Stoer Primary, so I'm not convinced that was second-class education. I realise the school will probably close, in the current economic climate, but I don't think we should create the impression that the whole community wants it to close, because that's not true. My daughter lived in Lochinver and moved back home here for that school. It was a fantastic school and a real centre for the community.

A19 (Norma Young) – I think I acknowledged that in my opening remarks - that the staff of the school had provided an excellent education. However, as one person pointed out, things became more difficult when numbers began to fall. As was also mentioned earlier, many parents voted with their feet and sent their children to Lochinver, and that split the community a bit. When everybody decided to send their children to Lochinver, we got that social benefit back, since there were no longer those separate groups.

Q20 – I was asked to make a point tonight on behalf of someone who couldn't be at the meeting. We are expecting to get some new housing in this area, and one of the things people are concerned about is that Stoer and Drumbeg could end up as retirement zones, and families will not want to move to this area because their children will have such a long journey to school. School is something that families look for when deciding on a move. I do see your problem with numbers, but closing a school perpetuates the problem.

A20 (Norma Young) – I can understand the point you make, and what I'm about to say may not apply in your community, but we've had other communities where schools have been mothballed and there has been a lack of clarity about the future of the school, and that made it difficult for families to decide whether they wanted to come. Communities can benefit from having that stability of knowing that their children's school has a healthy roll and won't be threatened with closure for the next 10, 20 or 30 years.

Q21 - I would like some clarification about paragraphs 17.3 and 17.4, and access to transport for pre-school children who need to travel to Lochinver. If we are shutting the school at Stoer, including the pre-school class, could you clarify for us what the

issues are in the Council providing transport to Lochinver for pre-school children? I appreciate that supervision may be an issue.

A21 (Norma Young) – Although we are rolling out provision of 1140 hours of pre-school provision across Highland, that is something that is being pushed by the Scottish Government, who are expecting local authorities to fund the provision. We have been provided with some money by the Scottish Government for the purpose, but it doesn't cover the provision of transport to pre-school. The elected members and staff of Highland Council understand that this is an issue for rural communities. It's not something that Highland can solve on its own; we would need to work alongside other rural authorities in talking to the Scottish Government. It's not a problem for urban areas, since they don't have the issues that we do in terms of distance to nearest provision, combined with lack of public transport. Parents in Highland are asked to access provision that is within – and here's the rub – reasonable travelling distance.

Q22 – This is an issue that comes up again and again. I can appreciate the argument that a school with 2 pupils is not viable, but if the Council argues, as it does, that pre-school education is beneficial to children, then it needs to think about the issue of how children attend pre-school education, if their parents don't have access to a car. The Council needs to find a way of funding that transport.

A22 (Norma Young) – School transport is a multi-million pound budget for Highland Council, and that's just for the P1-S6 element, so you can see why, with the Council's current financial position, we can't look at expanding that, but we acknowledge that in rural communities it's a real issue.

Q23 – You're saving money though by closing the school, so why can't some of that be spent on nursery transport? It would be a relatively small amount of money to pay for the children from Stoer to get nursery transport to Lochinver.

A23 (Norma Young) – We would have to consider other areas of legislation such as car seats, booster seats etc, but we recognise the issue.

The Chairperson commented that identification of this sort of issue was one of the benefits of this type of meeting being held.

Q24 – The same issue must arise in areas not very far away. Achfary and Altnaharra are other schools that have recently closed. The same sort of issues must arise there.

A24 (Norma Young) – It's an issue for communities right along the west coast.

(Ian Jackson) – I wouldn't want to create the impression that we're going to go back to the office and sort this straight away. There are issues around funding and things like supervision of very young children, as was identified earlier, but part of what we're about tonight is thinking about the issues you raise.

(Norma Young) – Highland Council has a strategic board on Early Learning and Childcare, and I bring rural issues to that board all the time. Recruitment and retention of staff is another issue particular to the rural areas, and that is often linked to the availability of housing for staff. We have a representative from the Scottish Government on that board, and he is really interested in these issues, that make it difficult to deliver Early Learning and Childcare in rural locations.

Q25 - I think rural communities feel generally that the Scottish Government doesn't have much of an ear for what goes on in these sorts of areas.

Q26 – I think that hits on a wider concern, which is depopulation in rural communities. Whilst I think it would be tragedy if Stoer School closed, I think it is a proposal that makes sense on many levels. What doesn't make sense is the fact that Scottish Government and Highland Council are not joined up in their economic development thinking in terms of seeing that rural areas need more support, and if support isn't forthcoming the demographic picture is bleak. We recently did some demographic projections for this area, and we concluded that the roll at Lochinver Primary could drop to zero in the next 10-15 years.

A26 (Ian Jackson) – It was only a few years ago that parents at Lochinver School were concerned about the school dropping from three classes to two. That was because the roll had fallen below 48, which is the number at which Highland Council provides 3 teachers for a school. Now the roll is 35 and it's about to drop to 29 in August.

Q27 – We concluded that sometime between 2027 and 2037 there will be no children left at Lochinver Primary School, unless something radical happens.

A27 (Ian Jackson) – I'm hoping it won't be quite that severe but we are in broad agreement that the number of children in the area is falling.

Q28 – Many people are now seriously concerned about Ullapool High School, because of the falling roll there and the potential reduction in the range of subjects offered. The numbers at Ullapool have dropped from about 270 ten years ago to about 190 now. This affects all of us in the north-west. It's fine for Highland Council to consider the closure of Stoer School, but what about Highland Council considering the whole issue of the population of this area?

The Chairperson commented that this was something the Sutherland County Committee were very aware of. Local elected members have been in discussion with Highlands and Islands Enterprise to see how we can regenerate the economy of the northwest, and east Sutherland as well, since the falling numbers are everywhere. The projected depopulation of both Caithness and Sutherland was a real concern. An aging population puts strains on other services as well. The scenario you outline is a worst case one, but we do recognise that we need to

mitigate that worst-case possibility, and to work with HIE in creating employment opportunities in the area.

Q29 – I'm not sure it is a worst-case scenario. The Hub Institute in Dundee has projected a 25% decline in population by 2046 in these sparsely populated parts of Scotland, which will strip out the working age population, which means no kids at school. Some people say there has been a 10% decline here in Assynt in the last 6-7 years. If Highland Council's Education Department isn't talking to other parts of the Council, it isn't doing its job, so you need to take that on board and go back to other parts of the Council. Stuart Black, the Director of Infrastructure and Development, needs to be on board with all these issues.

The Chairperson repeated that this was something that was high on the agenda of elected members, and was discussed frequently with HIE and other organisations that could bring inward investment to the area, but it is very difficult. The basic infrastructure of the area was weak – transport links were weak, broadband was weak, so there was a need to provide the services that businesses required.

Q30 – So will this school closure consultation feed into that process in any formal sense?

A30 (Norma Young) – There would be no problem in bringing your point to Stuart Black's attention. Your local councillors will be able to do that, and I would be prepared to drop him an email as well. We can see whether Stuart or his officers could come and engage with the local Community Council.

The Chairperson commented that Highland Council would welcome any suggestions and ideas from the local community. These could be fed through the Community Council or the local ward members of Highland Council.

Q31 – It isn't just here though, that's the point I am making.

A31 (Norma Young) – No indeed, but it's just that we are here tonight. We realise though you are talking in general terms.

The Chairperson agreed and commented that there was a need for input from communities across the Highlands.

(Norma Young) – Our new Chief Executive, Donna Manson, who started at the end of October 2018, has been to a lot of communities across Highland. This is something she would be very interested in as she has been out and about most weekends meeting people and trying to get a feel for each community.

Q32 (Comment from the floor) – Yes, she has been here and we're waiting for her to come back.

Q33 – I think it is inevitable that the school is going to be closed. As a former pupil, I think that would be sad, but I agree with the point made earlier on. It's not feasible to

run a school with only three or four pupils, and it would take a huge influx of people to change that.

Q34 (Comment from another member of the public) – I don't think it could operate with 3 or 4 but say if we had six?

Q35 (follow-up to Q33) – Even if there were six I'd be doubtful. When I was here there were between 6 and 10 pupils. It wasn't really a viable unit then. You couldn't get a game of football, even when we added in the girls, and in those days girls didn't play football! (Laughter).

Q36 (follow-up to Q34) – I was thinking about football, and that was the only thing that I could think of where I would say the children weren't advantaged by being here. I was looking at the list at paragraph 6.12 of the Paper, and it's very hard to think of anything on that list that the children didn't get when they were at Stoer.

Q37 (follow-up to Q35) – Even if you look at Lochinver, a school of 29 is not a massive school. I would be very sad to see Stoer School closed. I went there, my father went there before me, my sister was there, but I honestly don't think it is viable.

Q38 (follow-up to Q36) – I think that too, but we don't want them to go away thinking that we *want* the school to close.

The Chairperson commented that Highland Council would be very happy if there was a healthy roll at Stoer Primary, but as it stands that's not the case.

Q39 (follow-up to Q37) – I think closure is inevitable, and I thought that when it was mothballed. I know people who have come to the area and have sent their children to Lochinver Primary, for the simple reason they were used to their children attending a bigger school. Also there was after-school childcare available in Lochinver, but they had no qualms about sending their children to Lochinver rather than Stoer.

Q40 (follow-up to Q36) – That wouldn't have happened 10 years ago.

Q41 – I would like to make a point about paragraph 6.12 of the Proposal Paper. Having worked in Stoer Primary, and having had my two children taught there, I would like to say that all of these things were accessible to the children, and I would have to say that a lot of them were taken to Lochinver by Angela [former HT at Stoer, then HT at Lochinver]. There were a lot of transition arrangements to High School, that were in place at Stoer before they were ever introduced at Lochinver. The Stoer children used to be taken to Lochinver a lot, for performances and so on.

Q42 – If it goes the way that these things always seem to, when will the final decision be made?

A42 (Ian Jackson) – Once this consultation ends on 30 August, we have to consult with Education Scotland for 3 weeks, so that will take up September. After that we have to consider all the points raised and respond to them, which is a time-consuming task. Then we have to publish the report and allow 3 weeks for further representations, and with the Christmas period that will probably take us into New Year. Following that we have to go back to the Care and Learning Committee, which usually meets in January and in March. At the moment I'm anticipating it will go the March Committee and be ratified by full Council in May. Thereafter Scottish Ministers have 8 weeks to consider the Council's proposal, so it wouldn't be until about this time next year that we would have a final decision.

Q43 – If closure is recommended at all levels, what will happen to the building?

A43 (Norma Young) – The Council could consider a Community Asset Transfer, but we can't engage in any discussion about that at present, because that would be a presumption of closure. However, in past cases we have had communities come together and put up a business case for an asset transfer. If a community has a firm plan then it might be possible for them to start using the building in advance of closure, on the basis of a "licence to occupy" that would restrict usage to something which would not affect the building being used as a school once more. This happened at Inverasdale in Wester Ross, where the community used the school building to create a museum about the WWII Arctic convoys.

Q44 – Given that the building has now been mothballed for 2 years, and is facing another year of west coast weather in that state, what would be the position with the Council handing over a building that has suffered significant weather damage? There have been definite reports of water ingress.

A44 (Norma Young) – We need to get the Maintenance Officers to look at that.

Q45 – It's been suggested to me that the school building should be sold and the money given to Lochinver Primary for investment.

A45 (Norma Young) – I understand the point you are making, but many years ago, there was an agreement across Highland, that all receipts from the sale of assets go into the Centre. The reason for that was that you may be in a community that never has additional funds as the result of a sale, and so you would never get the benefit. I suppose when it's in your own community you would like to keep it.

The Chairperson commented that retaining asset receipts in the local area was something else the Sutherland County Committee were working on. The idea is that the County Committee should decide what that money gets spent on.

Q46 – Is that one of those processes where everyone votes and the west coast always loses out as we have fewer people?

The Chairperson advised that if the process were agreed it would be decided by local members.

Q47 – So can I just clarify, if this thing happens, do the community get first dibs on the building?

A47 (Norma Young) – The first people who can express an interest are the Highland Council. We would ask all the other Departments in the Council whether they would have a use for the building. The next phase would be the opportunity for a community asset transfer, and a sale on the open market would come after that.

There being no other comments, the **Chairperson** reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 30 August 2019 – and of where responses should be sent, either via letter or via email, or by using the online form. A record of this meeting would be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Care, Learning and Housing Committee that considered the results of consultation. The members of the Committee would have a chance to see the note and all other representations before the meeting. Following the decision of the Committee, the minutes would be submitted to the full Council for ratification.

MEETING CLOSED.

**List of Respondents to Statutory Consultation Exercise – Proposal to
Discontinue the Provision of Education at Stoer Primary School**

1. Responses from pupils attending Lochinver Primary School
2. Mrs Morag MacKenzie
3. Dr J F and Mrs J Morgan
4. Mr Christian Danuser
5. Mrs Aileen Hall
6. Miss Ailsa Kinnaird
7. Assynt Crofters' Trust (response received after close of public consultation)

HELLO EVERYONE!

CAN YOU HELP HIGHLND COUNCIL WITH AN IMPORTANT DECISION?

For a while Highland Council has been trying out an idea for pupils from Stoer to go to Lochinver Primary, instead of Stoer Primary.

Now we have to decide what to do for the future. We have 3 choices:

1. Close Stoer Primary for good, with children from Stoer going to Lochinver Primary instead.
2. Re-open Stoer Primary, so pupils from Stoer would go to that school and not to Lochinver.
3. Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer before we decide for good.
 - a. Which idea do you think is best? In the table below, place a tick next to which one you think is best.

| | |
|--|---|
| Idea No. 1 – Close Stoer Primary for good. | ✓ |
| Idea No. 2 – Re-open Stoer Primary. | X |
| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | X |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

because stoer children
have got lots of
friends here!
and to far to travel!

HELLO EVERYONE!

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3. Why did you give the answer above?

because we have to do it

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30-5-19

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3. Why did you give the answer above?

Then pupils won't have to travel long distances to get to School.

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2. Why did you give the answer above?

~~1~~ because
they
get
to
choos they g

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3. Why did you give the answer above?

Because the people here probably enjoy our school.

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3. Why did you give the answer above?

because I don't know any
one that could teach the
people that would go there.

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| Idea No. 2 – Re-open Stoer Primary. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

there is no kids
in Store

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| | |
|--|---|
| Idea No. 1 – Close Stoer Primary for good. | ✓ |
| Idea No. 2 – Re-open Stoer Primary. | |
| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

I think we should close Stoer for good because its saving money keeping it closed cause the power and theres no one to teach their

HELLO EVERYONE!

CAN YOU HELP HIGHLND COUNCIL WITH AN IMPORTANT DECISION?

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

The people from Stoer enjoy it hence

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2. Why did you give the answer above?

beacly anyone will
got to it because
most people will have
moved on to high school.
I think use should
just leave it as a
place to take pictures
till some on bldys it.

HELLO EVERYONE!

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. |  |

2. Why did you give the answer above?

because there isn't a lot of people to go there.

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2. Why did you give the answer above?

So more people come
to our school

HELLO EVERYONE!

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2. Why did you give the answer above?

I had a v

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| Idea No. 2 – Re-open Stoer Primary. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2. Why did you give the answer above?

the building might turn into something useful.

HELLO EVERYONE!

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

Because they wont have to travel for long

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2. Why did you give the answer above?

I think it needs
a but more to
to get more Ideas

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| Idea No. 2 – Re-open Stoer Primary. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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3. Why did you give the answer above?

because i like going to
this school.

HELLO EVERYONE!

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

because I think it
would be really, really
fun.

HELLO EVERYONE!

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | |

2. Why did you give the answer above?

I don't know I just want to re-open it.

HELLO EVERYONE!

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2. Why did you give the answer above?

I don't think that's
it's fair that people
in stoer have to travel
So far!

HELLO EVERYONE!

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2. Why did you give the answer above?

because it would be nice for other children a change.

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2. Why did you give the answer above?

At the moment the children at Stoer are still small but they should have the chance to go to a school closer to them.

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

I think we should re-open it because ~~the~~ people who live there dont have to travelle far to get to school.

HELLO EVERYONE!

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

because ~~peal~~
people that live
from ~~away~~ from are
school.

HELLO EVERYONE!

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2. Why did you give the answer above?

There are more kids in
this school than Stoer

HELLO EVERYONE!

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| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | ✓ |

2. Why did you give the answer above?

So I want friends a bit longer.

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| Idea No. 2 – Re-open Stoer Primary. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Why did you give the answer above?

Because I want more people coming to Lochinver Primary.

Fiona Livingstone

From: Education Consultations
Sent: 26 June 2019 11:58
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Stoer consultation comments

From: School consultation [mailto:donotreply@highland.gov.uk]
Sent: 26 June 2019 11:54
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Stoer consultation comments

Privacy notice:

Confirmation

Ticking this box indicates that you have read the privacy notice

Name of consultation: Stoer

Your comments: The local hall was not booked and the meeting took place as planned because on the day of the meeting the singing group already booked agreed to stand down. It was not advertised locally. We realise it was a tick the box meeting but the community should have been well informed beforehand that it was taking place . I believe it was advertised on highland council web site and two days before on Assynt Activity not good enough. More people would have been there if aware it was happening.

Upload documents or letters :

I am commenting as: Local resident

I am commenting on behalf of:

Name:

| Title | First name | Last name |
|-------|------------|-----------|
| | | |

Address:

postcode_search

Choose address

Did you find the address on the list above?

Yes

Email address:

From: Education Consultations
Sent: 02 September 2019 11:25
To: Education Consultations
Subject: proposal to close Stoer School

From: Sent: 30 August 2019 16:27
To: Education Consultations
Subject: proposal to close Stoer School

30/08/2019

Dear Mr Jackson,

I am writing to say that I disagree with the proposal to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School and Nursery.

This is mainly because of the excellence of the education that has always been provided at this school.

My other concern is that people planning to move here may be deterred if there is no local school available.

The Assynt Development Trust recently commissioned the Highlands Small Community Housing Trust to undertake an in-depth local analysis of housing need and future demand.

The Survey clearly demonstrated housing need for a variety of housing tenures, with the highest demand for social rent. The Trust believes that by providing a range of housing locally, this will help to sustain the long-term future of the community.

The survey was done both within and out with the local community.

Therefore, I believe more time should be given to Stoer School to allow for the possibility of people with families moving into the area.

I understand that Uig primary was mothballed in 2010 and is only now at the consultation stage. I judge from this that there is no standard time given for the process of mothballing.

At a meeting regarding the proposal to close Stoer School, I was taken aback to learn that everything had already been removed from the building.

As you are no doubt aware, 'mothballed' means

'stop using a piece of equipment or a building but keep it in good condition so that it can readily be used again'

I am not sure therefore that this is correct procedure.

I received part of my own education in Stoer school, so I can speak with personal knowledge of the quality of the education given within a small school.

I benefitted greatly from the inclusive experience of being educated there.

I valued this so much that I made the decision to relocate from Glasgow in order that my children would experience the same unique educational provision.

The number of pupils has fluctuated.

When I attended, there were ten pupils and when my daughter started, in 1983, there were five, but the ethos and quality of education provided, remained the same.

There were always high expectations of the pupils.

I was able to witness the same beneficial aspects of small school life when I was employed as management and supply teacher for six years in Stoer School.

I was also management and supply teacher in another excellent school – Assynt Primary.

As a peripatetic additional support needs teacher, travelling to schools throughout Sutherland, I was aware of the pros and cons of being educated in schools with varying pupil rolls.

I was also aware of the many excellent inspection reports given to small rural schools.

The benefits experienced by pupils in small rural schools should never be underestimated.

In my personal and professional experience, there are many advantages of being part of a smaller school.

These include the development of collaborative and negotiating skills needed to interact successfully both in the school and in the playground.

There is great value in the ability to 'get on' with others who may not share the same interests and the ability to relate to children of different ages. Social skills are developed in finding common ground for girls and boys playing and working purposely together.

There is a very strong element of the older children nurturing the younger ones and the younger pupils having a close association with the older children who become role models.

There is an opportunity to develop organisational and imaginative skills to play successfully.

Tolerance, cooperation, compromise and understanding of other pupils' strengths can lead to real inclusion within a small school.

These complex and highly developed social skills are extremely valuable and lifelong.

In my view they develop maturity and personal responsibility and can foster lifelong friendships.

It could be argued that the intensity and depth of social interaction within a small diverse group is richer and wider than social interaction limited only to children of a similar age.

I can understand the logic of Highland Council making an economic case for closing Stoer School.

However, I fail to understand the assertions made in the report that claim there are educational benefits for closure.

No evidence is given for this assertion and I am unaware of any research done which corroborates this.

Therefore, I do not believe that this case can be successfully made.

I have personally observed many fine examples of collaborative and team working within groups of various ages while following the Curriculum for Excellence in a small school.

Successful and productive teamwork can be achieved by pupils of different ages and abilities on Curriculum for Excellence work. This is differentiation and is what skilled teachers in small schools have always done.

It is not always necessary for group work to have to be undertaken by children of the same age or ability to be successful.

Regarding the report,

in 1.1, the rationale given for making the proposal, items three and four are opinions and cannot be substantiated.

Item five refers to the roll of another school and is therefore not relevant.

4.8 and 5.5 - both schools have same rating, therefore there is no obvious advantage regarding building status

4.9 - no inspection recently, but Stoer School has a fine HMIe record

4.10 – no meals were cooked on the premises before mothballing

6.3 – you say that you have formed a view that the children from Stoer have ‘derived educational benefits’. How has this ‘view’ been reached? How is it possible to measure an educational experience against an experience which did not take place?

6.5 – the ability to work with others within the curriculum can be carried out successfully with a small number of pupils

6.6 – leadership skills are not unique to a larger school but are well developed within a small school by the very nature of the child eventually becoming the oldest and having the opportunity to lead which a quiet child may never have experienced when ‘one of many’

6.12 – to the best of my knowledge, all 12 points are applicable to the opportunities that were provided by Stoer school.

The headteacher of Stoer school ensured that pupils were involved with their community and that every opportunity was taken to work with other schools whenever possible

8.1 – the report states that the projected roll will always be in single figures.

This is an assumption. How can this be accurately predicted?

17.1 if a child was to travel from Drumbeg, which is within the catchment area, the report says twenty minutes would be the maximum additional travel time. This must have been calculated before NC500!

It is inappropriate and rather judgemental to say that the population is accustomed to making long journeys, and then relate this to a daily commute to school.

Your report acknowledges the fact that school numbers are increasing.

Time needs to be allowed for this to continue.

Since our Scottish Government passed laws ‘with the presumption against rural school closures and lays down strict obligations on the part of the Council to prove any closure will bring educational benefits’, I suggest that the school remains mothballed.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Livingstone

Appendix 3 iv

From: Education Consultations
Sent: 02 September 2019 11:27
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Stoer consultation comments

From: School consultation [mailto:donotreply@highland.gov.uk]
Sent: 28 August 2019 21:10
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Stoer consultation comments

Privacy notice:

Confirmation

Ticking this box indicates that you have read the privacy notice

Name of consultation: Stoer

Your comments: It is always said when a school is closing. We just live opposite this beautiful building and it would be lovely to see again children attending there school.

I grew up in Switzerland in a tiny hamlet with a school - since then, the school closed as well and it was more ore less the end of this hamlet - it would be sad, if this would be the case for Stoer as well... Is it only a question of money as always in our world today?

There are plans to build more council houses here - do you really think that people move up here WITHOUT a school? I don't think so....

Upload documents or letters :

I am commenting as: Local resident

I am commenting on behalf of:

Name:

Title

First name

Last name

Address:

postcode_search

Choose address

Did you find the address on the list above?

Yes

Email address:

Fiona Livingstone

From: Education Consultations
Sent: 02 September 2019 11:27
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Stoer consultation comments

From: School consultation [mailto:donotreply@highland.gov.uk]
Sent: 30 August 2019 10:19
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Stoer consultation comments

Privacy notice:

Confirmation

Ticking this box indicates that you have read the privacy notice

Name of consultation: Stoer

Your comments: 29/08/2019.

Dear Madam/Sir

Re. STOER PRIMARY SCHOOL – PROPOSED CLOSURE

As residents living within the community served by Stoer Primary School we wish make the following comments in opposition to the proposed closure of that school.

The details of the proposal as set out by Highland Council indicates that within the local community there is by no means unanimous opposition to the closure of Stoer Primary School. The extent to which an acceptance of closure exists within the community probably reflects as much the low expectations of residents of the general level of service provided to those in isolated communities as it does any educational rationale. Once the school is closed it is gone for ever and the writers of this letter have great sympathy for the view that at the very least the school should be continued to be mothballed.

The journey times quoted for children having to travel from as far away as Drumbeg or Nedd in order to get to Lochinver Primary School seem to be on the optimistic side and take little account of seasonal variations in traffic, road conditions and the paucity of gritting in recent years. To say that the closure of Stoer Primary will have no impact on changing transport arrangements does not reflect the possibility of changes in the pattern of location of children in the future. It seems strange that the Council should support creating a situation where a five year old child from say Drumbeg is expected to travel some 17.5 miles a day each way to and from school. The additional 20 minutes claimed by the Council actually effectively doubles the length of journey for such a child. To complete the journey in the claimed 40 minutes on a regular basis is a tall order given the seasonal variations mentioned above. Many things have been attempted on the B869 but maintaining such a schedule as is proposed may not be one of the most successful. Tellingly the Council itself admits in para. 17.5 that there will be adverse effects on the children from the additional travelling time.

The Council's paper claims in para. 16.1 That "In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position" We beg to differ. What would not change the current position is continuing to mothball the school.

Closing the school is likely to result in the Council selling off the premises and this does represent a change and a loss of a facility to the community. In addition whilst funded transport it appears will be provided for P1-7 pupils it is admitted that funded transport will not be available to nursery age children from Drumbeg and Stoer. If this is the case, and whilst the Council allows that such children can attend preschool education at Lochinver Pre School Centre, and no funded transport is available this offer means little to a parent who has no private transport or who is unable to drive. The reason for this situation is stated in the paper [para 17.4] to be that "...low population densities ...means that it is not possible to provide preschool facilities close to every parent in the area". Sorry, but from how we see it, it is not the low population density that is the cause of a lack of preschool education but rather the discretionary rather than statutory nature of preschool education in its self coupled to the lack of willingness of the Council to spend money on preschool education that is the cause. What the Council is suggesting is virtually blaming the victims for the lack of preschool education.

Highland Council aim that all pupils should be educated in schools that are rated in Category B both for condition and suitability. Stoer Primary School, the document indicates, is rated Category C for educational suitability and Category B for building condition [para 4.8]. The paper gives little indication as to what would be required to bring the building up the Category B for educational suitability. From the paper the current Lochinver Primary School has the same ratings as Stoer Primary School [para 5.5] for the same categories that is C and B. So it can hardly be argued that moving children to Lochinver has historically or will in the immediate future represent any improvement in the educational experience of children as defined by the category classifications employed by Highland Council to describe the standard of the provision the children enjoy.

The Council's paper indicates that a small school provides "...significant impediments" to the education of children and their social and interactional development. Yet there is little hard evidence produced or research quoted in the Council's paper to support this conclusion. It can as well be asserted that young children are as likely to readily gain emotional support, build long lasting strong interpersonal relationships and develop a social awareness of the needs of others in small groups in small schools as they are likely to in an environment with five or six times as many children.

Paragraph 4.5 of the Council's paper asserts that single teacher schools with student numbers in single figures present significant impediments to learning with reference to the current curriculum and states the reasons for this view are set out in Section 5 [ibid.] To these readers Section 5 does little to demonstrate any educational rationale for such a claim and is mainly a descriptive account of the current primary school at Lochinver. It can as well be argued that the historical evidence locally amply demonstrates that single teacher schools with relatively low numbers of children provided a stable, safe, rich and challenging set of learning environments for their pupils.

It would be strange if Highland Council claimed anything other than pupils from Stoer are deriving educational benefits from their attendance at Lochinver Primary School. What the paper does not so clearly demonstrate is if these are in addition to what might be attained if pupils were educated at Stoer. For example paras 6.3, 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8 overstate the case in each instance and really do not clearly demonstrate why these characteristics and outcomes can be better attained in a school of thirty as opposed to a school with children numbering in single figures. The paper asserts "...very small learning groups have a number of disadvantages" and in an imbalanced analysis makes little or no attempt to identify any positives in such a situation such as those referred to above.

The attitude that appears to lie behind some of the unsubstantiated value laden comment in the Council's paper are to be deplored. The way we are perceived by those in Council headquarters is clear as para. 17.5 states "The population in this area is accustomed to making long journeys to access things that people in urban areas take for granted" Just because we may be used to making long journeys to access things does not make that situation fair or right. The African women who has to walk miles every day to get clean water may be used to doing so but that does not mean that we should not push for a borehole and a piped clean water supply in her village. Just because we send our children some distance to school does not in or of itself make this right or necessarily the best solution for them. For these reasons we oppose the closure of Stoer Primary School.

Yours Faithfully

Upload documents or letters : STOER PRIMARY SCHOOL 29 08 19.docx

I am commenting as: Local resident

I am commenting on behalf of:

Name:

Title

First name

Last name

Address:

postcode_search

Choose address

Did you find the address on the list above?

Yes

Email address:

To: Ailsa
Subject: RE: Stoer School

From:
Sent: 30 August 2019 17:54
To: Education Consultations <Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk>
Subject: Stoer School

Dear Mr Jackson,

Please find below a copy of the letter submitted online on Wednesday. I just want to make sure it was definitely sent. I feel very strongly about this matter and don't want to see yet another rural school closed too quickly. Small schools provide excellent educations and skills for life to children who are lucky enough to attend them. The overall implication of your proposal paper would suggest the opposite, small roll = poor education. How wrong this is and quite the insult to those who have been educated in a small school and to those who currently are.

Again, I sincerely hope that the school won't be closed and that a chance will be given for the numbers to increase.

Ailsa Kinnaird

Your reference number is FS-Case-139969462

Thank you for submitting School consultation

Privacy notice:

Confirmation

By logging in we assume that you have read the privacy notice

Name of consultation: Stoer

Your comments:

Dear Mr Jackson,

I am writing in response to the proposal to discontinue education at Stoer School and nursery I am a former pupil and parent

Having read the educational benefits outlined by the council in the proposal paper I wonder how much of this is based in factual evidence and not just opinion?

I attended Stoer School for seven years and received an excellent education. The numbers varied over the years, always remaining low, but we never missed out on anything, in fact quite the opposite, even including yoga! All the benefits listed by the council could easily apply to Stoer School, and do in my experience, even in the case of larger group learning as the schools have always worked together on a variety of things. Unfortunately there is no list setting out the benefits that arise from attending a smaller school. Such as more teacher pupil time and being in a class with all ages and levels, which can encourage you to push yourself and have an awareness of, for example, P7 maths in P3

I also have to disagree with the council's belief that "Pupils should be members of an age appropriate peer group". Being in a class with boys and girls of varied age groups enables you to mix and relate with more confidence and awareness, an invaluable life skill.

At the moment my son is only able to attend nursery one day a week, due to the distance and lack of transport. He will be four when he starts school and will have approximately a thirty minute journey either end of the school day, which is quite an undertaking. I also feel in this day and age of environmental awareness that it is very sad that he won't ever be able to walk or cycle to school.

There is also the impact the school closure will have on the community. In the proposal it mentions the fact we have a village hall for any activities, but fails to see the wider issue of keeping small communities like this viable. We want to encourage young people to stay in the area and families to move in and a good school is an integral part of that.

I would have liked to have seen School Inspection findings included in this proposal as a more factual insight into educational standards. I know Stoer School has always done well - a very good school indeed.

I don't think the council has proven the educational benefits of moving to a larger school. Therefore it's my sincere hope that Stoer School will continue to be mothballed and protected for a longer period of time. I would very much like my son to attend Stoer School and live in the anticipation that more families with children will move into the catchment area and make the school viable again.

Yours sincerely

Ailsa Kinnaird

Upload documents or letters:

I am commenting as: Parent

I am commenting on behalf of:

Name:

| Title | First name | Last name |
|-------|------------|-----------|
| Miss | Ailsa | Kinnaird |

Address:

| postcode_search | Did you find the address on the list above? | Address line 1 | Address line 2 | Address line 3 | Town | Postcode |
|-----------------|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-------|----------|
| IV27 4JG | No | Old Schoolhouse | Actonacamm | | Stoer | IV27 4JG |

Email address:

 Download PDF [Continue >](#)

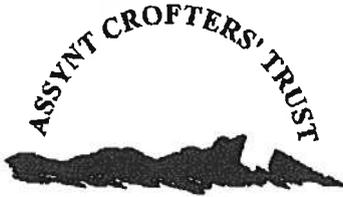
From:
Sent: 14 January 2020 20:23
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Stoer School Closure
Attachments: stoer school.doc

Dear sirs

We appreciate that we may be too late to make representation regarding this matter, but as the owners of the estate in which the school lies, we do not want to see it close, and would be grateful if you would consider the attached letter.

Regards

Jeanette McCarthy
Administrator
Assynt Crofters' Trust



North Assynt Estate
STOER
Assynt
Sutherland IV27 4JG

education.consultations@highland.gov.uk

Dear Sirs

Re: Stoer Primary School

As the owner of North Assynt Estate, the land surrounding Stoer primary School, we wish to register our objection to the closure of the school.

Although there would only be 6 children attending the school in the next year, this number is anticipated to rise over the next few years, with children having to travel from outlying areas such as Drumbeg and Nedd. The journey from these areas to Lochinver would take more than 30 minutes, particularly in winter.

It has been suggested that a small roll is disadvantageous to children from the point of view of social interaction, but in fact the children are more likely to benefit from going to school nearer their homes, where they would be more likely to be able to socialise with their friends after school hours.

The provision of the school in Stoer would also create much needed employment in the area, and possibly even bring other families to Assynt.

If the decision is made not to re-open the school, we would request that it at least continue to be mothballed to see what changes take place in the next few years.

Yours truly

The Directors
Assynt Crofters' Trust



Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School.

September 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Highland Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers and the special provisions that apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the school; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- visits to the site of Lochinver Primary School and Stoer Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Stoer Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

2. Consultation process

2.1 The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 Stoer Primary School has been mothballed since July 2016, following a progressive drop in its roll. Since August 2016 children from the area have attended Lochinver Primary School. The potential school roll is low with only four children currently living in the Stoer catchment area. The number of children is not expected to rise beyond six in the next three years. The consultation ran from 4 June to 30 August 2019. Information on the proposal was available at Lochinver Primary School and Far North Mobile Library and a letter was sent to all relevant consultees. Information was placed on the council website, along with an electronic means of responding to the consultation. A public meeting was held on 24 June 2019 in Rhu Stoer Village Hall which was attended by council staff and nine members of the public. The proposal was discussed with children attending Lochinver Primary School and they all completed a simple consultation form. There were five written responses to the consultation from members of the local community. Three responses asked if the mothballing could be extended in the hope that a strategy could be put in place to increase numbers over time.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Lochinver Primary School is a small rural school with two classrooms, a general purpose room, a further small general purpose room, library, canteen, office space and staffroom. The school is currently at around 40% capacity and the children benefit from access to different learning environments across the school. Children also benefit from extensive tarred playgrounds and some grass and wildlife areas for outdoor learning. An early learning and childcare centre for two to five year olds is also located within the school grounds and operated as a partner centre. Staff know the children well and support them in their learning. In addition, all of the children are able to access after-school care nearby with local solutions worked out for children travelling to and from Stoer. HM Inspectors agree that Lochinver Primary School is providing a more suitable environment for learning.

3.2 Children who have previously attended Stoer Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors enjoy coming to Lochinver Primary School and being with friends. They enjoy the opportunity to participate in team sports, such as basketball and football, and enjoy learning and playing together. They like being able to work collaboratively with different groups of children as part of their learning. A few have fond memories of Stoer Primary School but believe that there are not enough children for the school to remain open. They are disappointed that they cannot walk or cycle to Lochinver Primary School and the bus journey can be tiring for the younger children. HM Inspectors note and agree with the positive benefits outlined by the children.

3.3 Staff at Lochinver Primary School all agree with the proposal. They think that children who would previously have been educated at Stoer Primary School have benefited from being part of a larger school and have more opportunities to develop their social skills and build resilience. Staff highlighted that the mothballing of Stoer Primary School was welcomed by some parents as the numbers had become so small.

3.4 HM Inspectors met with a few members of the local community although no parents of children currently attending from the Stoer catchment area were present at the meeting. Stakeholders spoke positively about the quality of the education previously provided at Stoer and the school's place within a small local community. The community do not feel as well-connected to Lochinver Primary School. The community is hopeful that this aspect can be developed further with the new headteacher. A majority of the stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors object to the closure at this time. They feel that a longer period of mothballing would give more opportunity for the community to work with the council to encourage more families to move to the area. However, representatives of the Assynt Community Council did not consider this to be a realistic ambition.

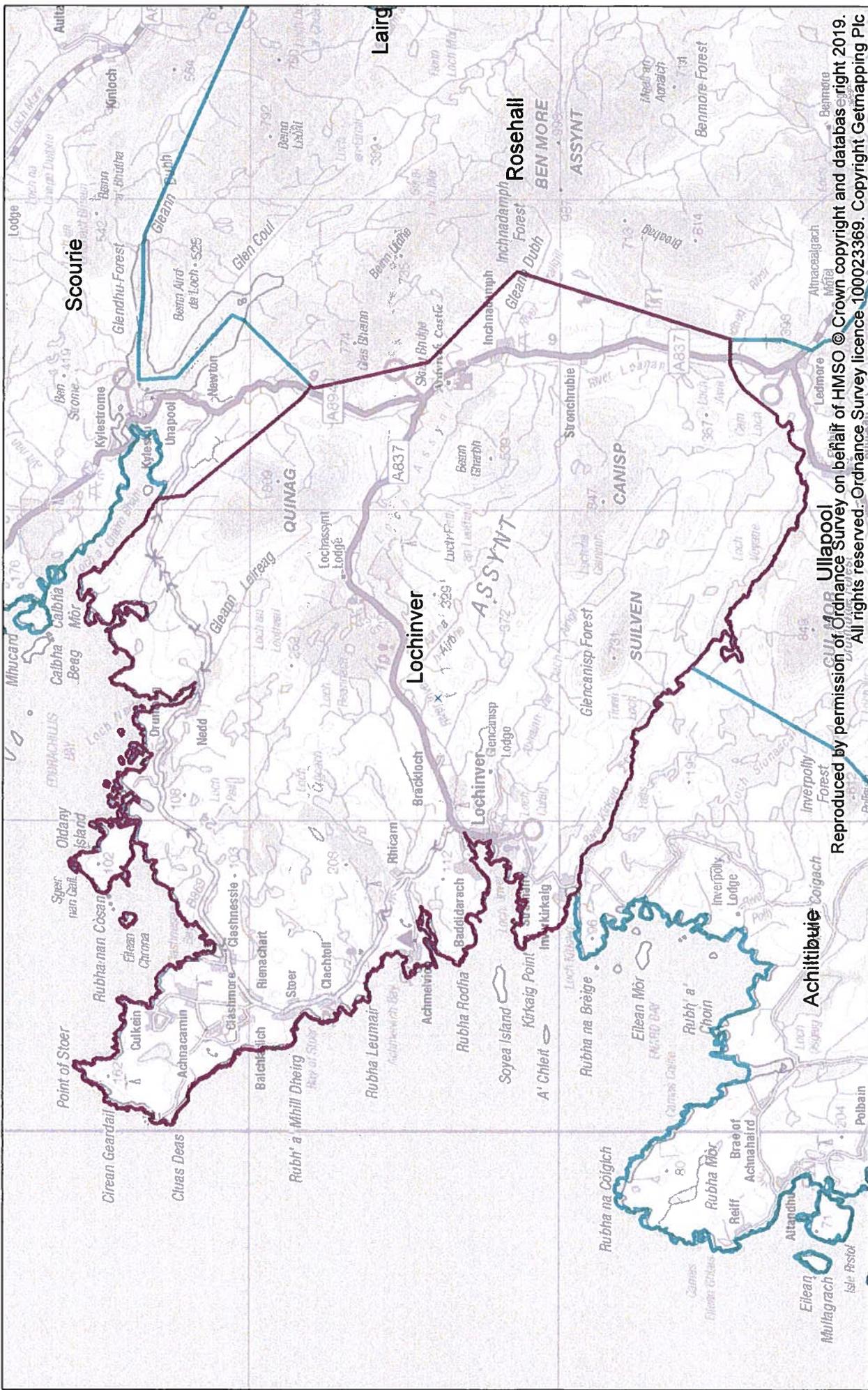
3.5 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard.

3.6 The council considered four options, including the proposal: 1. reopening Stoer Primary School with its current catchment area; 2. reopening Stoer Primary School with an extended catchment area; 3. continued mothballing of Stoer Primary School; 4. closing Stoer Primary School and realigning its catchment area to Lochinver Primary School. In considering these options, the council has taken into consideration the effects on school transport, staff and school management arrangements, impact on the local community and financial aspects. The council has concluded that the most appropriate option would be the last of these. The travel time from Stoer Primary School to Lochinver Primary School is approximately 20 minutes although for some children travel to school can be as much as 40 minutes because of where they live. This is not having a significantly adverse effect on learners. If the school were to close, the building has the potential to be used by the community for a different purpose to complement the use of the village hall located nearby.

4. Summary

The Highland Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School has clear educational benefits which are currently being experienced by the children. Children and staff are agreed about the educational benefits of the proposal. A majority of community representatives who have engaged in the consultation have a preference for the continued mothballing of Stoer Primary School. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders and encourage continued growth in the links between Lochinver Primary School and the community of Stoer.

**HM Inspectors
September 2019**



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Lochinver PS Proposed Catchment Area DRAFT

Date: 06/02/2019

Appendix C.

Financial Template - Stoer PS Closure

| Table 1 Forecast revenue costs for Stoer PS | | Column 1 Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs) | Column 2 Additional financial impact on receiving schools | Column 3 Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 1) |
|--|----------------|--|--|--|
| STOER PRIMARY SCHOOL | | | | |
| School costs | | | | |
| <i>Employee costs:</i> | | | | |
| teaching staff | 72,880 | 21,950 | -51,490 | |
| support staff | 40,418 | 41 | -40,418 | |
| teaching staff training (CPD etc) | 291 | | -250 | |
| support staff training | 0 | | 0 | |
| Supply costs | 2,459 | | -2,459 | |
| <i>Building costs:</i> | | | | |
| property insurance | 31 | | -31 | |
| non domestic rates | 0 | | 0 | |
| water & sewerage charges | 313 | | -313 | |
| energy costs | 5,065 | | -5,065 | |
| cleaning (contract or inhouse) | 2,973 | | -2,973 | |
| building repair & maintenance | 156 | 33 | -123 | |
| grounds maintenance | 0 | | 0 | |
| facilities management costs | 0 | | 0 | |
| revenue costs arising from capital | 0 | | 0 | |
| other | 0 | | 0 | |
| <i>School operational costs:</i> | | | | |
| learning materials | 2,462 | 328 | -2,133 | |
| catering (contract or inhouse) | 8,427 | 550 | -7,877 | |
| SOA costs | 0 | | 0 | |
| other school operational costs (e.g. licences) | 0 | | 0 | |
| <i>Transport costs:</i> | | | | |
| home to school | 950 | 23,212 | 22,262 | |
| other pupil transport costs | 0 | | 0 | |
| staff travel | 199 | 24 | -175 | |
| SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL | 136,024 | 45,580 | -90,444 | |
| <i>Income:</i> | | | | |
| Sale of meals | | | | |
| lets | | | | |
| External care provider | | | | |
| Other | | | | |
| SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL | 136,024 | 45,580 | -90,444 | |
| UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR | 136,024 | 45,580 | -90,444 | |

Note: As Stoer PS is currently mothballed, the costs in column 1 of table 1 above reflect the estimated costs of running the school if it were to reopen. As the school is currently mothballed, these savings are already being realised.

Table 2

| Capital costs | School proposed for closure | Receiving school |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Capital Life Cycle cost | | |
| Third party contributions to capital costs | | |

Table 3

| Annual Property costs incurred (meth-balling) until disposal | |
|--|-------------|
| property insurance | 31 |
| non domestic rates | 0 |
| water & sewerage charges | 221 |
| energy costs | 5,065 |
| cleaning (contract or inhouse) | 0 |
| security costs | 0 |
| building repair & maintenance | 0 |
| grounds maintenance | 0 |
| facilities management costs | 0 |
| other | 121 |
| TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL | 5487 |

Table 4

| Non-recurring revenue costs | |
|--|----------|
| none | 0 |
| TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS | 0 |

Table 5

| Impact on GAE | |
|-------------------|----------|
| none | 0 |
| GAE IMPACT | 0 |

Appendix 5.

Financial Template - Stoer PS Closure

| Table 1 Forecast revenue costs for Stoer PS | | Column 1 | Column 2 | Column 3 |
|--|--|--|--|----------|
| | Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs) | Additional financial impact on receiving schools | Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 1) | |
| STOER PRIMARY SCHOOL | | | | |
| School costs | | | | |
| Employee costs: | | | | |
| teaching staff | 72,880 | 21,390 | -51,490 | |
| support staff | 40,418 | | -40,418 | |
| teaching staff training (CPD etc) | 291 | 41 | -250 | |
| support staff training | | | 0 | |
| Supply costs | 2,459 | | -2,459 | |
| Building costs: | | | | |
| property insurance | 31 | | -31 | |
| non domestic rates | 0 | | 0 | |
| water & sewerage charges | 313 | | -313 | |
| energy costs | 5,065 | | -5,065 | |
| cleaning (contract or inhouse) | 3,202 | | -3,202 | |
| building repair & maintenance | 156 | 33 | -123 | |
| grounds maintenance | 0 | | 0 | |
| facilities management costs | 0 | | 0 | |
| revenue costs arising from capital | 0 | | 0 | |
| other | 0 | | 0 | |
| School operational costs: | | | | |
| learning materials | 2,462 | 329 | -2,133 | |
| catering (contract or inhouse) | 3,515 | 550 | -2,965 | |
| SQA costs | 0 | | 0 | |
| other school operational costs (e.g. licences) | 0 | | 0 | |
| Transport costs: | | | | |
| home to school | 950 | 23,212 | 22,262 | |
| other pupil transport costs | 0 | | 0 | |
| staff travel | 199 | 24 | -175 | |
| SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL | 131,941 | 45,580 | -86,362 | |
| Income: | | | | |
| Sale of meals | | | | |
| lets | | | | |
| External care provider | | | | |
| Other | | | | |
| SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL | 131,941 | 45,580 | -86,362 | |
| UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR | 131,941 | 45,580 | -86,362 | |

Table 2

| Capital costs | School proposed for closure | Receiving school |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Capital Life Cycle cost | | |
| Third party contributions to capital costs | | |

Table 3

| Annual Property costs incurred (moth-balling) until disposal | |
|--|-------------|
| property insurance | 31 |
| non domestic rates | 0 |
| water & sewerage charges | 221 |
| energy costs | 5,065 |
| cleaning (contract or inhouse) | 0 |
| security costs | 0 |
| building repair & maintenance | 0 |
| grounds maintenance | 0 |
| facilities management costs | 0 |
| other | 121 |
| TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL | 5437 |

Table 4

| Non-recurring revenue costs | |
|--|----------|
| none | 0 |
| TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS | 0 |

Table 5

| Impact on GAE | |
|-------------------|----------|
| none | 0 |
| GAE IMPACT | 0 |

Note: As Stoer PS is currently mothballed the costs in column 1 of table 1 above reflect the estimated costs of running the school if it were to reopen. As the school is currently mothballed these savings are already being realised.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

CARE, LEARNING AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

THIS IS A PROPOSAL PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S AGREED PROCEDURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process, to discontinue education provision at Stoer Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Lochinver Primary School. (Maps of the current catchment area are at **Appendices B - Bi**).

For the avoidance of doubt, it should be assumed that the related Pre-School provision is included within any reference below to a Primary School. In particular, any reference to Stoer Primary School should be taken as a reference to both the primary and nursery classes that operated prior to the mothballing of the school.

The proposed changes, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Proposal Paper Published

The proposal paper will be available for inspection, free of charge, at:

- Lochinver Primary School
- Far North Mobile Library

and published on the Highland Council website:

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

Copies of this Proposal Paper are also available on request from:

Business Support Team
Care and Learning Office
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7NE
E-mail: education.consultations@highland.gov.uk

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please also contact the Business Support Team, Care and Learning Office, Camaghael Hostel, Fort William, PH33 7NE.

E-mail: education.consultations@highland.gov.uk

Formal notice of the Proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- (i) Parents of pupils attending Lochinver Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) Ms A Kinnaird, pre-school parent
- (iii) The Parent Council of Lochinver Primary School.
- (iv) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
- (v) Staff of Lochinver Primary School;
- (vi) Trade union representatives;
- (vii) Assynt Community Council;
- (viii) Education Scotland;
- (viii) Highland Youth Convenor.

Advertisement in Local Media

A notice announcing the public meetings will be placed in the *Northern Times*, on the Highland Council's website, and on its Facebook page.

Consultation Period

The consultation for this Proposal will run from Tuesday 4 June 2019 and will end on Friday 30 August 2019. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held, the detail of which is set out below:

Rhu Stoer Hall – 24 June 2019 at 6.30pm

Anyone wishing to attend the public meeting is invited to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Council, will be chaired by a senior elected councillor, and will be addressed by officers of the Care and Learning Service.

The meeting will be an opportunity for the public to hear more about the proposal; to ask questions about the proposal; and to have the views of all stakeholders recorded so that they can be taken into account. A note will be taken at the meeting of questions asked and views expressed. This note will be published on the Council website. The meeting will also be recorded.

The note will be forwarded to Education Scotland, along with other submissions and comments received by the Council during the consultation process.

Meetings with Pupils and Staff

School staff will arrange to discuss the proposal with pupils (who are considered to be of a suitable age and maturity) in the affected schools. A record of questions, responses and views will be taken and this will be published in the Consultation Report.

Responses to the Proposals

Interested parties are invited to respond to the Proposals by making written or electronic submissions on the Proposal to:

Ian Jackson
Care and Learning Office
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7NE
Email: education.consultations@highland.gov.uk

Or via an online form, a link to which can be found on

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

When responding, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “pupil”, “parent”, “carer”, “relative”, “former pupil”, “teacher in school”, “member of the community” etc. However it is not compulsory to do so.

Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically, should know that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may have to be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish their response to be made publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: "I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Councillors and Council Officers of Highland Council". Otherwise, it will be assumed that the person making the response agrees to it being made publicly available. All written responses must be received by the last day of the consultation period, Friday 30 August 2019 at 5.00pm.

Involvement of Education Scotland

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will also be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 23 September 2019, a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period, as well as the summary note of the public meeting that will be held and so far as is practicable a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal, to be completed not later than 3 weeks after they receive the consultation papers – 11 October 2019. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries of people there as they consider appropriate.

Review of Consultation Exercise

Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meeting. It will then prepare a Consultation Report. This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website as well as at the affected schools and local library, free of charge. The Report will include a summary of the written and oral representations made during consultation and a copy of the Education Scotland Report, together with the Council's considered response to the issues raised. The Report will include details of details of any alleged inaccuracies and/or omissions and how these have been handled. The Consultation Report will be published at least 3 weeks prior to being submitted to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee, who will make a recommendation to the full Highland Council.

In publishing the report the Council will invite any person or party to make further representations to the Committee prior to its meeting. A notice to this effect will also be published on the Highland Council website.

At the present time the Council intends to publish its Report in December 2019, prior to submission to the Council's Care, Learning and Housing Committee on in March 2020. However, this timescale may change depending on the nature of issues raised during consultation, and the need to give full consideration to those issues. In the latter event, the Report may not be submitted until a later Committee meeting.

Any proposal approved by the Care, Learning and Housing Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

Scottish Ministers Call-in

In the event that the Council decides to close the school at this stage, it is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of that decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Document and Consultation Report in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 within 6 working days of the decision being made, and to publish on its website a notice that it has done so, detailing the opportunity to make further representations within 3 weeks. The Scottish Ministers have an 8-week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel. Within the first 3 weeks of the 8-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Until the outcome of the 8-week call-in process has been notified to the Council, the Council will not proceed to implement the proposal.

Note on Corrections

If any inaccuracy or omission is discovered in this Proposal paper, either by the Council or any other person, the Council will determine if relevant information has been omitted or, if the paper contains an inaccuracy. The Council will then take appropriate action, which may include the issue of a correction or the reissuing of the Proposal or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period, if appropriate. In that event, relevant consultees and Education Scotland will be advised.

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

Rationale

- 1.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
- No children have attended Stoer Primary School since the end of session 2015-16
 - Current population figures within the school catchment indicate a maximum school roll of around 6 pupils over the next 5 years.
 - A school roll of this size provides significant impediments to the successful implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence (details below) and;
 - A school roll of 6 pupils hampers social interaction opportunities for children, who conversely benefit from attending larger schools amongst more children of their own age.
 - The neighbouring school, Lochinver Primary, is itself projected to experience a falling roll over the next few years.

Informal Consultation

- 2.1 The Proposal has been prepared following informal consultation with local elected members; with Assynt Community Council; Lochinver Primary School Parent Council and with parents and residents within the Stoer catchment. That exercise has suggested that there is a widespread, though not unanimous, acceptance in the community that the school is no longer viable.
- 2.2 Informal discussions with community representatives suggest that some within the community feel the school should remain mothballed in case of a future rise in the roll. One parent of a pre-school child argued that the nursery should re-open.

Legislative Background

- 3.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (S.3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).
- 3.2 Stoer Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (the school is classed as "very remote rural") and the Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the special regard required for rural school closures. The Council has considered the school roll projections for Stoer Primary (see Section 4 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 7-10 below); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 13 below) and to the impact of travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Stoer catchment (Section 11 below). At present the pupils who live within the Stoer catchment attend Lochinver Primary.

Current Details – Stoer Primary School

- 4.1 Stoer Primary School is a small, rural school situated in a remote part of North West Sutherland. The area served by the school extends from Drumbeg to Stoer Point and then to Clachtoll. The school has been mothballed since the end of session 2015-16, since when pupils from the area have attended Lochinver Primary.
- 4.2 Current numbers indicate that, at the start of the new school session in August 2019, there will be four pupils of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school. Two more children from the Stoer catchment are due to enter P1 in August 2020, with a further child due to enter P1 in August 2021
- 4.3 The year group numbers for the 2019-20 session are anticipated as follows:
- P1 – 1
 - P2 – 1
 - P3 – 1
 - P4 – 0
 - P5 – 0
 - P6 – 1
 - P7 – 0
- 4.4 The above figures suggest that, were Stoer Primary School to re-open with 100% of catchment pupils attending the school, the P1-7 roll figures for the forthcoming few years would be:
- 2019-20 - 4
 - 2020-21 - 6
 - 2021-22 - 6
 - 2022-23 - 6
- 4.5 If Stoer Primary were re-opened, it would therefore be as a single teacher school with a total roll in single figures. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching, particularly in terms of the requirements of the current curriculum. Further detail is provided at Section 5.
- 4.6 The school has one classroom plus a further room, which when the school last operated was set up as a nursery.
- 4.7 The school has a permanent capacity of 25. Based on the permanent capacity available, the notional 2019-20 of 4 pupils would represent 16% use of capacity. The notional projected roll of 6 in 2022-23 would represent 24% use of capacity.
- 4.8 The Highland Council assesses all of its schools for Suitability and Condition, in line with the Scottish Government's School Estate Management guidelines. Schools are assessed on a scale with the ratings "A" (good) "B" (satisfactory), "C" (poor) and "D" (bad). The Stoer Primary School building is currently rated as "C" for educational suitability and "B" for building condition.
- 4.9 The school has not been inspected by HMIE in recent years.

- 4.10 Were the school to re-open with the roll figures indicated, the staffing entitlement would be as follows;

Cluster Head Teacher of 1.00FTE, shared with at least 2 other schools,
notional entitlement 0.33FTE

Class Teacher – 1.00 FTE

Clerical Assistant – 16 hours per week

Early Years Practitioner – 23 hpw

In addition ASN teaching and non-teaching staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.

A Cleaning Operative would also be employed at around 5 hours per week.

Prior to the school being mothballed, meals were cooked and served in the school. If the school were re-opened it is likely a Cook 2 would be employed, with the hours required depending on number of pupils having school dinners. Prior to closure it was 15hpw Mon – Friday.

- 4.11 Were Stoer Primary to be re-opened, one potential pupil within the catchment would qualify for school transport.

- 4.12 Annual CO₂ emissions from the Stoer School building are estimated at just over 20 tonnes.

Current Details – Lochinver Primary

- 5.1 Lochinver Primary School is a small rural school. The catchment extends along the coast from Achmelvich to Inverkirkaig. Inland the area served by the school extends from just south of Unapool to just north of Ledmore junction, and includes the village of Inchnadamph. Since the mothballing of Stoer School it has, for practical purposes, also taken pupils from that school's catchment.

- 5.2 The accommodation consists of 2 classrooms, a GP Room, a library, a small First Aid/GP room, an office, staffroom and dining/canteen. There are extensive tarred playgrounds and some grassy and wildlife areas. Within the grounds of the school is the Lochinver Early learning Centre, where 2-5 year olds are provided for by staff operating the facility as a Partner Centre.

- 5.3 The school will have an anticipated P1-7 roll of 29 pupils at the start of session 2019-20, in two classes. This will be a fall from a roll of 35 for the current year. The expected roll of 29 will include 4 pupils from within the Stoer catchment. The school roll is expected to remain around the current figure until 2023-24. A small rise in the roll is projected thereafter, although the figures become more and more uncertain the farther into the future they are projected.

- 5.4 The school has a permanent capacity of 75. The expected 2019-20 roll of 29 pupils therefore represents 39% use of capacity.

5.5 The Lochinver Primary School building is currently assessed as "C" for educational suitability and "B" for building condition.

5.6 The school has not been inspected by HMIE in recent years.

5.7 The anticipated year group numbers for 2019-20 are as follows:

P1 – 1

P2 – 3

P3 – 5

P4 – 3

P5 – 6

P6 – 5

P7 – 6

5.8 The school's 2018-19 staffing entitlement is as follows;

Cluster Head Teacher – 1.00FTE, shared with 1 other school, notional entitlement 0.5FTE

Class Teacher – 2.00FTE

Class Contact Time – 0.2 FTE

Clerical Assistant – 16 hours per week

Early Years Practitioner – 23 hours per week

In addition ASN teaching and non-teaching staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.

The Catering and Cleaning Service employs the following staff at the school;

Cook 2 -15.00 hours per week

Cleaning Operative – 10.00 hours per week.

5.9 Annual CO₂ emissions from Lochinver Primary School building from August 2017 to August 2018 were 56.5 tonnes. This figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Stoer Primary School.

Educational Benefits

6.1 Highland Council is of the view that the school environment should be of a quality that sustains and improves education provision, pupil performance and outcomes for the young people of Highland.

6.2 With the above aim in mind, Highland Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing its' school estate:

1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
2. Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
3. Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.
4. Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.

5. Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary) although it is recognised that this may not always be possible in a rural Council area such as Highland.
 6. School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
 7. School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
 8. Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
 9. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
 10. The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
 11. Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built up community.
-
- 6.3 It is Highland Council's view that the pupils from the Stoer Primary catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at Lochinver Primary School. Formalising the current arrangements would provide a number of such benefits, judged against the Highland criteria set out above.
 - 6.4 Highland Council is of the view that the school environment should be of a quality that sustains and improves education provision, pupil performance and outcomes for the young people of Highland.
 - 6.5. Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the modern school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Lochinver Primary has sufficient pupils to allow the children to work collaboratively on various topics and activities. The class teachers will work with both individuals and groups at each stage of the curriculum, and the group working allows pupils to develop different skills from those that are developed during individual work. For example, pupils in the upper stages at Lochinver Primary have the opportunity to try out conversational French.
 - 6.6 Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.
 - 6.7 Very small learning groups have a number of disadvantages. They are not only limited in size but also static, since there is no possibility of changing the membership. Very small rolls also limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
 - 6.8 As part of the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce the aim is to develop increased awareness of the world of work, social skills and employability skills, including team working, leadership and working with others. Such knowledge and understanding and skills acquisition would very much benefit from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age/stage.
 - 6.9 A healthy school roll of pupils at varying ages allows opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. This applies even to individual

sports, where successful learning of skills is helped by talking and sharing of experiences. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices. At Lochinver Primary, the school are able to use Assynt Leisure Centre for indoor PE, as well as the Culag Playing Field for outdoor sports.

- 6.10 As with sports, larger rolls provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities. School shows, plays and public performances are events that that are much more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers.
- 6.11 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form and reform.
- 6.12 Pupils at Lochinver Primary can access a wide range of additional opportunities in and out of the classroom. These opportunities help to stimulate and motivate the children, and provide them with skills for life. Over the past years these opportunities have included:
- Annual residential trip for P7 to the Abernethy Outdoor Centre
 - Drama/ dance workshops – some out of school and weekend events
 - Save a Life lessons from the Scottish Ambulance Service / P7s Safe Highlanders
 - Green gym + Forest school events/ Target Zero event
 - Orienteering / Kayaking sessions + ASG P7 mountain climb
 - 3 weekly access to the mobile library service
 - After school club run between the Assynt Leisure and the Active Schools Co-ordinator
 - Pottery Plate painting for P3s/7s
 - Kodaly and Youth Music Initiative sessions + access to Feis events
 - Music workshops / plays etc
 - Instrumental tuition – chanter/ drumming/ accordion/guitar/ whistle/ ocarina
 - Visits to the Macphail Centre and Eden Court Theatre
- 6.13 In summary, a number of positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Lochinver and Stoer Primary. Collaborative working within the classroom, language learning, and artistic and sports activities have all benefited from the greater numbers available through the operational merger of the two schools.
- 6.14 The projected roll of 29 for Lochinver Primary in 2019-20 includes 4 pupils from within the Stoer Primary catchment. Clearly therefore, a decision to re-open Stoer Primary would cause the roll at Lochinver to fall to 25 in 2019-20 and 27 in 2020-21. Splitting such small overall numbers between two schools would be of benefit to neither group of children.

Examination of Alternatives to the Proposal

7.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternatives to closure. The alternatives to closure would be:

- to re-open Stoer Primary School, either with its current catchment area or an extended catchment area, or;
- to continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement.

Re-opening of Stoer Primary School with its current catchment

8.1 Although there has been a slight rise in the school age population of the Stoer area since the school was mothballed, it is clear that if Stoer Primary re-opened it would always be a school with a total roll in single figures. Section 6 above discusses in detail the educational issues arising from the low local school roll figures.

8.2 If the school were to re-open, the potential pupils would have shorter journey times to school than they do at present. Further details on travel journeys to school are provided at Sections 11 and 16 below.

Re-Opening of Stoer Primary School with Expanded Catchment Area

9.1 Any extension to the catchment area for Stoer Primary could only come at the expense of the Lochinver PS catchment. As Lochinver PS is itself projected to see a falling roll, any expansion of the Stoer catchment risks undermining Lochinver Primary without increasing the roll at Stoer to a viable number. Any such move would also cause considerable disruption to pupils within the current Lochinver PS catchment.

9.2 Currently, the Stoer Primary catchment extends almost to Achmelvich, which is 4.5 miles/14 minutes from Lochinver Primary and 9.1 miles/23 minutes from Stoer Primary. Moving Achmelvich into the Stoer catchment would mean parents and pupils would be faced with a considerable increase in travel time to school.

Continuation of “Mothballing”

10.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that that would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community. The school has already been mothballed since July 2016 and there is no realistic prospect of a significant rise in the local population of school age children that would allow Stoer PS to become viable. “Mothballing” would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school.

10.2 Scottish Government guidance relating to the mothballing of schools makes it clear that mothballing is a temporary measure and should not be used to undermine the requirements to undertake a statutory school closure consultation.

10.3 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.

10.4 A continuation of mothballing would have no impact on the community.

Effects on School Transport

11.1 As all of the pupils from Stoer are currently travelling to Lochinver, the Proposal will have no impact in terms of creating any differing transport arrangements.

11.2 The cost of transporting pupils between Stoer and Lochinver is currently £23,212 per year. Were Stoer Primary to re-open, the cost would fall to an estimated £950 per year, an annual estimated saving of £22, 262. The annual cost of transport to both schools would vary across time according to where individual pupils lived, but so far the mothballing of Stoer Primary has resulted in additional annual costs of over £20K, and this would continue in the event the school were closed.

11.3 It is estimated that the current arrangements for transporting pupils from Stoer to Lochinver result in additional CO₂e emissions of 4.573kg per day, compared to a scenario in which Stoer PS was re-opened. Based on 190 school days per session, this represents 0.869 tonnes of CO₂e emissions per school year. The figure can only ever be an estimate as emissions are affected by the speed at which vehicles are driven and the type of road travelled.

11.4 The increased annual CO₂ equivalent emissions from the provision of transport (less than 1 tonne) should be set against the annual emissions of approximately 20 tonnes from the Stoer Primary School building itself (see paragraph 3.12 above).

11.5 During the last full school session there was no days in which the school was open but where the education of the Stoer children was disrupted due to the unavailability of school transport in bad weather.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

12.1 As Stoer Primary has not operated since the end of school session 2016-17, there will be no impact on staff and school management arrangements from a formal closure.

12.2 A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements.

12.3 The staffing implications of re-opening Stoer Primary School are set out at Paragraph 4.10 above, whilst the financial implications are set out at Section 14 below, and the associated **Appendix C**.

Effect on the Local Community

13.1 The community of Stoer has a village hall to provide a focus for community activities.

13.2 The mothballed school building at Stoer is currently being used by the Lochinver Community Association, who lease the building on a month-by-month basis and currently use it for storage. The Association are included as a statutory consultee for this Proposal.

Financial Consequences

14.1 The Table at **Appendix C** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger.

14.2 It can be seen from the paper that re-opening Stoer Primary as a school would lead to an increased cost of around £90,000 per year, in comparison to the current arrangement.

Equalities Impact Assessment

15.1 The proposal has been assessed as having no impact on the following Equality areas:

- Disability
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy or Maternity
- Marriage/Civil Partnership
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sexual Orientation
- Looked After Children
- Young Carers
- Children and Young People Living in Deprivation

15.2 In respect of age equality, the proposal relates to 2 primary schools and as such primarily affects children in the 3-12 age group, and their parents. The proposal is advanced on the basis of educational benefit to the children in the area concerned. No negative age related effects arise. Age is not a protected characteristic for the purposes of schools provision.

Rural Impact Assessment

16.1 Although the proposal involves a formal closure of service, the service itself has not operated since the summer of 2016. In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position. The relocation of service (which in practical terms has already taken place) involves moving local school provision from Stoer to Lochinver, a distance of 7.7 miles.

16.2 Stoer School was mothballed when the pupil roll fell to 2. Details of the potential future rolls are provided at paragraph 4.4 above. Section 6 above sets out the educational benefits of closing Stoer Primary

16.3 At present Lochinver Primary School has a pupil roll of less than 50% of the school's capacity. The school is comfortably able to accommodate the pupils from Stoer and no adverse effects for Lochinver Primary are expected to arise.

On the contrary, including the pupils from Stoer within the Lochinver catchment will help to maintain a healthy roll at Lochinver.

Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 17.1 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the length of journey from the Stoer catchment to Lochinver, details of which are provided above. The maximum additional travel time for school pupils to Lochinver is 20 minutes (source: Google Maps). However, as the school has been mothballed since 2016, the current pupils are already making this journey. The population in this area is accustomed to making long journeys to access things that people in urban areas take for granted.
- 17.2 Funded school transport will be provided to P1-7 pupils from Stoer attending Lochinver Primary.
- 17.3 Although funded transport is not provided for nursery age children, these children can attend Lochinver Pre-School Centre for their pre-school education.
- 17.4 There would undoubtedly be an adverse effect on any parent of pre-school children in Stoer who did not have access to school transport. The geography of Highland Council, and the very low population densities across much of the Highland Council area, means that it is not possible to provide pre-school facilities close to every parent in the area.
- 17.5 In overall terms, the adverse effects arising from the additional travelling time for pupils must be balanced against the educational benefits that will arise for pupils set out at section 5 above.

Recommendation

- 18.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Stoer Primary School, currently "mothballed," is closed and the catchment area assigned to Lochinver Primary.
- 18.2 The Council must formally consult on changes to provision. This consultation paper is issued in terms of the authority's agreed procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee of the Highland Council.

END OF PROPOSAL PAPER