

Agenda Item	14
Report No	EDU/30/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education

Date: 17 November 2021

Report Title: Statutory Consultation: Request to proceed to consultation on formal closure of Roy Bridge PS

Report By: Executive Chief Officer- Education

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report seeks members' agreement to proceed to a statutory consultation, under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, for formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to agree to proceed to statutory consultation, on the basis of the Proposal attached to this Report.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - The financial implications of the Proposal are set out at Appendix D.

3.2 Legal - The Proposal will be issued for statutory consultation as required by the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - Equalities and rural issues are considered at sections 14 and 15 of Appendix A. There are no specific poverty related issues to consider.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - Appendix A 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 need to comply with all of the requirements of the School (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. Officials have sought to mitigate the risk through review and evaluation to ensure that the procedural requirements of the Act and statutory consultation process will be met.

3.6 **Gaelic:** None.

4. Overview

- 4.1 Roy Bridge Primary School has been mothballed since Easter 2017, when the roll fell to 2.
- 4.2 This proposal is being brought forward following informal consultation with local stakeholders and elected Members and having examined viable alternatives that could be considered. The results of informal consultation suggest that very few parents within the Roy Bridge catchment wish to see Roy Bridge PS re-opened, and that doing so would therefore have a negative educational impact. Further details are provided in the Paper at Appendix A, which sets out the basis of the proposal, and related information, including the educational, community and transport implications associated with the proposal.
- 4.3 If the closure were to proceed, the catchment area of Roy Bridge Primary would transfer to that of Spean Bridge Primary. Pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment have been attending Spean Bridge Primary since 2017.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to a Committee decision to proceed to statutory consultation, a public meeting will be held in Roy Bridge to discuss the Council's proposal. There will be considerable opportunity for stakeholders to submit views to the Council in advance of any final decision being made. At this stage, it is expected the statutory consultation timeline would see a final recommendation being considered by this Committee in December 2022, though this may be subject to change to ensure the Council has sufficient time to consider and respond to matters arising from the consultation.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Education

Date: 15 October 2021

Authors: Brian Porter, Head of Resources and Ian Jackson, Education Officer (Resources)

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge 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 Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School. A map of the proposed merged catchment is at **Appendix B**.
- The proposed change, 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:

- Fort William Public Library, 2 High Street, Fort William PH33 6EU
- Spean Bridge Primary School, Spean Bridge, PH34 4EU

and published on the Highland Council website:

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

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

Area Care and Learning Office,
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7NE
Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

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

Email: 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/carers of pupils attending Spean Bridge Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) The Parent Council of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (iv) Staff of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- (v) Trade Union representative.

Advertisement in Local Media

A notice announcing the public meeting will be placed in the local press and on the Highland Council's Facebook page.

Consultation Period

The consultation for this Proposal will run from 24 November 2021 and will end on 21 January 2022. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held at 6.30pm on 12 January 2022 at Roy Bridge Village Hall. 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 Education 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. Questions, responses and views will be taken down and the results 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 Proposals to:

Area Care and Learning Office,
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7NE

Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

Or via an online form, to be found at:

<https://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, 21 January 2022 at 5.00pm.

Involvement of Education Scotland

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 31 January 2022, a copy of any written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period. Education Scotland will also receive 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 not later than 18 February 2022. 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 and at the affected school 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 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 Education Committee of Highland Council, 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 May 2022, prior to submission to the Education Committee in June 2022. 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 at the Education Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

As the proposal involves the closure of a school, Highland Council would be required to notify Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers would have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision 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.

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

Legislative Background

- 1.1 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).
- 1.2 Roy Bridge Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (the school is classed as "accessible 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 Roy Bridge PS, taking into account the current pattern of enrolments (see Section 7 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 5-8 below); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 12 below) and to the impact of travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Roy Bridge catchment (Section 10 below).

Reason for the Proposal

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
 - Roy Bridge PS has been mothballed since Easter 2017, after the school roll fell to two. Consequently, no children have attended the school since that date.
 - The roll at Roy Bridge fell to very low numbers because the majority of parents decided to enrol their children at Spean Bridge Primary School. The drive time between the two schools is about 5-6 minutes.
 - Evidence gathered by the Council during informal consultation suggests that very few parents from Roy Bridge are interested in re-opening the school. Re-opening the school in such circumstances would have a negative educational impact on those pupils attending Roy Bridge PS, as well as possibly the pupils who remain at Spean Bridge PS. Further details on this are provided in Section 9 below.
 - The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below.
- 2.2 During 2019 and early 2020 three informal meetings were held with parents and members of the local community, to discuss the future of Roy Bridge PS. The first was a meeting of the Spean Bridge Primary School Parent Council on 7 May 2019. Only around 8 or 9 parents attended, but they were mostly from the Roy Bridge and expressed opposition to the closure of Roy Bridge PS. Council officials subsequently attended a Community Council meeting in Roy Bridge village hall on 3 September 2019. This was well attended although many of those in attendance were not parents of primary school age children. There was no support expressed at the meeting for closing Roy Bridge PS,

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and the Council was asked what it would take to re-open the school. The Council advised we would consider re-opening Roy Bridge PS if a sufficient number of parents committed in writing to moving their children from Spean Bridge to a re-opened Roy Bridge PS. In the event, only two parents wrote to so confirm, which would indicate that a re-opened Roy Bridge Primary School would have a roll of two children, were it to re-open.

- 2.3 A further meeting with the Parent Council took place on 12 March 2020. Six parents attended, three of whom were from Roy Bridge. The view of that meeting was that the closure of Roy Bridge PS was inevitable.
- 2.4 Further action was then put on hold because of the pandemic, but an additional meeting with the Parent Council was held on 1 September 2021. Only three parents attended, and all were in support of the proposal.
- 2.5 Notes of the above meetings can be found at **Appendices C-Cvi**. The Appendices include notes of the meetings taken by Council officers, as well as minutes from the Community Council or the Parent Council (as appropriate). We do not however, have the Parent Council minutes of the meeting of 1 September 2021.

Current Details – Roy Bridge Primary School

- 3.1 Roy Bridge Primary School is located just off the A86 Trunk Road, at the eastern end of the village. The school is located close to the western edge of its large catchment, which extends eastwards along the A86 almost as far as Loch Laggan, northwards to encompass the whole of Glen Roy, and southwards to Corrou Station.
- 3.2 The school has been mothballed since Easter 2017 when the school roll fell to 2, and the pupils transferred to Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 3.3 Prior to the school being mothballed all the children were accommodated in a modular building which contained the P1-7 classroom, school office, staffroom, and toilets. A Horsa hut in the playground was used as the school canteen/general purpose area. There was in addition, the original school building which at one time was used as a classroom. The school has an outside seating area for the pupils, which was used in the summer months as an outdoor classroom. A Multi Use Games Area is sited in the playground, and was used by the pupils at break times and also for PE when the weather permitted. The school also has an outdoor grassy area and play equipment.
- 3.4 There was no nursery class at Roy Bridge PS prior to mothballing. A Gaelic Medium nursery was located for a period within the former schoolhouse, managed by a private provider under contract to the Highland Council. This had however ceased operating prior to the school being mothballed. When the school was last in operation, nursery education for English Medium pupils from Roy Bridge was provided at Spean Bridge PS, as it still is.
- 3.5 In 2015 the Highland Council opened a new Gaelic Medium primary school and nursery in Fort William, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, located about 20

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minutes' drive from Roy Bridge. The existence of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar makes it unlikely that there will be demand for another Gaelic Medium nursery in Roy Bridge.

- 3.6 The school has a registered permanent capacity of 50, based on the availability of two classrooms.
- 3.7 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). Prior to mothballing, Roy Bridge Primary School was rated as "B" for the educational suitability of the building and "B" for building condition.
- 3.8 As the school has not operated since session 2016-17, placing requests have not arisen.
- 3.10 No current HMle Report is available.
- 3.11 Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 the CO₂ equivalent emissions from the Roy Bridge School building are estimated at 1.378 tonnes. This low figure reflects the fact the buildings are not in use, and would be much higher otherwise. During the year 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, the last year in which the school was in operation, the CO₂ equivalent emissions from the Roy Bridge School building are estimated at 17.399 tonnes.

Current Details – Spean Bridge Primary School

- 4.1 Spean Bridge Primary School is located just off the A86 Trunk Road, at the eastern end of the village. The school is located close to the eastern edge of its large catchment, which extends westwards to incorporate Achnacarry and Glen Arkaig, southwards to Achindaul, and northwards to Letterfinlay.
- 4.2 The school has excellent facilities. The main teaching area consists of four classrooms, a learning support room, storeroom and a large general purpose area which houses the school library and ICT suite. Two further classrooms are located in a new building beside the school. A large entrance hall leads to the administrative area, medical room, disabled toilet, boys' and girls' cloakrooms, toilets and showers, gym hall and main teaching area. The nursery classroom has a self-contained outside play area and a separate entrance. The gym hall has been built to satisfy the standards set by Sport Scotland and has staging facilities for assemblies and drama. The kitchen and dining area are connected to the gym hall by a sliding wall. There is a large playground with marked playground games and boxes of play equipment for each class. Lastly, the school has a large sports field with its own mountain bike track, a climbing wall and other outdoor play equipment, and a garden area.
- 4.3 The 2021-21 roll is 102 pupils within P1-7. There are a further 17 children in the nursery class.

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- 4.4 The school (excluding the nursery) has a registered capacity of 125. The 2021-22 roll of 102 therefore represents 82% use of capacity.
- 4.5 The registered capacity is based on 5 classrooms with a maximum of 25 pupils per class. As mentioned in paragraph 4.2 above, the school actually has 6 classrooms, with one not counted in the registration figure as it is used as GP room. This could however be used as a classroom if necessary, thereby permitting a capacity of 150. The Highland Council's formula for staffing primary schools requires six teachers once the roll reaches 121.
- 4.6 The Council publishes roll projections for each of its currently operational schools. The latest forecast for Spean Bridge PS is attached at **Appendix D**, whilst a copy of the Council's methodology for calculating the forecasts can be found at **Appendix Di**.
- 4.7 It can be seen from Appendix C that the roll at Spean Bridge Primary School is forecast to rise to 121 in session 2027/28 and to 126 in session 2030/31. The Council will carefully monitor the roll at Spean Bridge PS with a view to managing the accommodation issue if and when capacity issues arise.
- 4.8 The Spean Bridge Primary School building is rated as "A" for educational suitability and "A" for Condition.
- 4.9 There is no current HMle Report for the school.
- 4.10 Annual CO₂e emissions from Spean Bridge Primary School building from April 2020 to March 2021 were just under 68 tonnes. This figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School.

Examination of Alternatives

- 5.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must give due consideration of alternative courses of action that could be considered. The following reasonable alternatives to closure have been considered:
- i. To continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement.
 - ii. To re-open Roy Bridge PS with its current catchment area.
 - iii. To re-open Roy Bridge PS with an expanded catchment area.
- 5.2 As part of the consideration of alternatives, the Council has investigated the long-term roll projections.
- 5.3 The detail of the Council's consideration of the reasonable alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and its appendices.

Option 1 – Continued Mothballing

- 6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community. "Mothballing" would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the

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school and would prevent the community from developing options for the future use of the accommodation. The Council would also be burdened with the costs of maintaining a “mothballed” building.

- 6.2 Roy Bridge Primary School has now been mothballed since 2017, and it is appropriate to decide on the future of the school.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.

Option 2 - Re-Opening of Roy Bridge Primary School with its Current Catchment Area

- 7.1 For the 2021-22 school session, there are 33 pupils of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school.
- 7.2 Roy Bridge Primary School would have remained a viable school had children from the catchment continued to attend. As detailed above in section 2, a large majority of parents within the Roy Bridge catchment have chosen to enrol their children at Spean Bridge PS instead. Information gathered during informal consultation would suggest that a very small number of local parents would be willing to enrol their children in Roy Bridge School, were it to be re-opened. In these circumstances, Roy Bridge PS would re-open as a single teacher school with a total roll of less than 10 pupils. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching. Further detail is provided at Section 9 below.
- 7.3 When the school was mothballed, it was managed as part of a “cluster” with Spean Bridge PS. The latter school is now managed as a cluster with Invergarry Primary School. For this reason, it is assumed that a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would be managed with a “standalone” Head Teacher
- 7.4 Were the school to re-open with as it was prior to mothballing, the staffing entitlements, as per the Council’s Devolved School Management policy are as follows:
 - Head Teacher – 1.00FTE
 - Management Time Teacher – 0.2 FTE
 - Class Contact Time Teacher 0.1 FTE
 - Clerical Assistant – 16 hours per week
 - Cook 2 – 9.5 hours per week
 - Cleaning Operative – 5 hours per week
- 7.5 Additional Support Needs teaching and non-teaching staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.

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- 7.6 As set out above, Roy Bridge Primary School did not have a school nursery prior to mothballing. As with the P1-7 stages, there is currently no information to suggest that a new pre-school nursery in Roy Bridge would be viable.
- 7.7 If the school were to re-open, pupils within Roy Bridge village would no longer require school transport. Pupils from the further reaches of the Roy Bridge catchment would continue to qualify for school transport and would have marginally shorter journey times to school than they do at present. However, Highland Council does not consider that the travel distance from Roy Bridge PS to Spean Bridge PS is excessive, as the two schools are located only a few miles apart along the A86 trunk road. Full details of the transport arrangements are set out at Section 10 below.
- 7.8 The re-opening of Roy Bridge PS would be unlikely to have a significant short-term effect on Spean Bridge PS, unless a larger number of pupils than expected moved to Roy Bridge PS.

Option 3 - Re-Opening of Roy Bridge Primary School with an Expanded Catchment Area

- 8.1 This is not a realistic option, partly the two schools are located so close to one another. The Roy Bridge catchment could not be extended towards Spean Bridge without actually entering the village of Spean Bridge itself.
- 8.2 In the other direction the next school to Roy Bridge is Gergask Primary, located in the village of Laggan which is 28 miles from Roy Bridge. The current catchment boundary runs along the former boundary between Lochaber District Council and Badenoch and Strathspey District Council, and represents the historic boundary between two areas with a different geographical identity. Moreover, Gergask Primary is itself a very small rural school with a total roll in single figures. For both reasons, it would not be appropriate to alter this catchment boundary in favour of Roy Bridge.

Educational Benefits

- 9.1 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. Some of the activities listed in the paragraphs below have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the educational benefits of the closure are considered in the longer term.
- 9.2 Highland Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing its' school estate:
- Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
 - Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
 - Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.

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- Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
- 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.
- School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
- School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
- Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
- Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
- The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
- Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built up community.

- 9.3 As mentioned above, evidence gathered by Highland Council to date suggests that a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would have a very small roll, and consequently there would be educational detriment to pupils from attending such a school. Pupils at Spean Bridge PS regularly work in co-operative learning groups of various sizes. The very small roll of a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static, since there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. A small roll would 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.
- 9.4 A larger school roll makes it easier for the school to attract visiting speakers, tutors and other external partners to work with the children. In many cases external partners look for a certain threshold in the number of children they will be working with.
- 9.5 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the 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. 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.
- 9.6 The existence of the pre-school class at Spean Bridge PS enables a strong transition process for children moving into P1.
- 9.7 The language programme at Spean Bridge PS aims to develop listening, talking, reading and writing skills. Listening is developed by games, stories, radio & television programmes, music, and use of ICT. The school aims to develop fluency and clarity of expression and to extend vocabulary. Talking is

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developed by role playing, mime, reporting, interviewing etc. They are also used for the teaching of French and Gaelic, which are introduced to pupils as part of the 1+2 language initiative. Once again, the emphasis is on oral work and role play. In all cases, working with others plays an important role.

- 9.8 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.
- 9.9 It is self-evident that an overall school roll in single figures restricts opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices. Whilst these problems can be overcome by taking the pupils to participate in activities in neighbouring schools, that in itself involves time out of school in travelling.
- 9.10 As with sports, the larger roll at Spean Bridge provides a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of group musical and artistic opportunities, events that are more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers.
- 9.11 Larger pupil numbers also provide more opportunities for lunchtime clubs and after school activities. Spean Bridge PS has lunchtime clubs for knitting and Lego, though the latter has been restricted by the pandemic. There are plans to introduce a lunchtime clubs for young mechanics. There are after school clubs for dance and for the Lochaber Scouts. Lochaber shinty club work with the youngsters and the school hopes to restart netball.
- 9.12 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.
- 9.13 As described above, Spean Bridge PS has excellent facilities. Although there are also a range of facilities at Roy Bridge PS, they do not fully replicate those at Spean Bridge, where overall the accommodation provides a better environment for learning.
- 9.14 In summary, positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge Primary Schools. Collaborative working within the classroom, language learning, and artistic and sports activities have all benefited from the greater numbers available through the operational merger.

Effect of Differing Transport Arrangements

- 10.1 Currently, pupils from the Roy Bridge PS catchment are transported to Spean Bridge PS at an annual cost of £36,195. This is however via a public bus which would continue to operate along the route even if Roy Bridge PS were

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to re-open, so the actual transport saving from re-opening would be less than the figure set out above.

- 10.2 As Roy Bridge PS is currently mothballed, the pupils from the catchment already travel to Spean Bridge PS and no differing transport arrangement would need to be applied in the event Roy Bridge PS is closed.
- 10.3 As set out above, the travel times involved are well within the normal range for the Highland Council area.
- 10.4 It is recognised that the larger merged school implies an increase in the number of pupils entitled to school transport compared to the number who can currently walk/cycle to school, should they choose to do so.
- 10.5 Since pupils are transported from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge in a single bus, and the return distance is only six miles, the additional CO₂e emissions arising from the transport are negligible, and would in any case be set against the annual emissions of over 17 tonnes that could be expected from the Roy Bridge Primary School building itself were it operational (see paragraph 3.11 above).
- 10.7 Since the mothballing of Roy Bridge PS, there have not been any occasions on which the school remained open but where the education of the Roy Bridge children was disrupted due to unavailability of school transport between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge in bad weather. Given the short distance between the two schools this would be unlikely to arise.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 11.1 As the school is already “mothballed” there will be no impact on school management arrangements at Spean Bridge PS from a formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School.
- 11.2 A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements.
- 11.3 The staffing implications of re-opening Roy Bridge Primary School are set out at Paragraphs 7.3 – 7.6 above, whilst the financial implications are set out at Section 13 below, and the associated **Appendix E**.

Effect on the Local Community

- 12.1 There is an existing village hall in Roy Bridge, which provides a public space for the local community.
- 12.2 Other suggestions have been made for the future use of the building in the event of the closure proceeding. Subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community over the future use of the building and site. Any such proposal would however have to be progressed within the terms of the Council’s current asset management policy.

Financial Consequences

- 13.1 The Table at **Appendix E** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger. As the school is currently mothballed, the savings identified are already being made and no additional saving would arise to the Council from closure.
- 13.2 The table does not include property costs that would arise if Roy Bridge were to become operational once more. At the present time this figure can only be a very rough estimate.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 14.1 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
- 14.2 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 school provision.

Rural Impact Assessment

- 15.1 Both Roy Bridge PS and Spean Bridge PS are classed by the Scottish Government as "accessible rural schools". Although the proposal involves a formal closure of service, the service itself has not operated since the summer of 2017. In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position.
- 15.2 The relocation of service (which in practical terms has already taken place) involves moving local school provision from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge, a distance of 3 miles.
- 15.3 As set out in Section 9 above, the Highland Council believes that the proposal offers educational benefits.

Appendix A

- 15.4 It is recognised that pupils from Roy Bridge itself have less opportunity to walk or cycle to school than when Roy Bridge School was in operation, and that there is occasional inconvenience for parents who wish to take their child to or from school during the school day.
- 15.5 The maximum additional travel time for school pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment to Spean Bridge is 5 minutes (source: Google Maps). As school transport is provided by the Council, the proposal would not be expected to have any impact on accessibility to education or on fuel poverty.

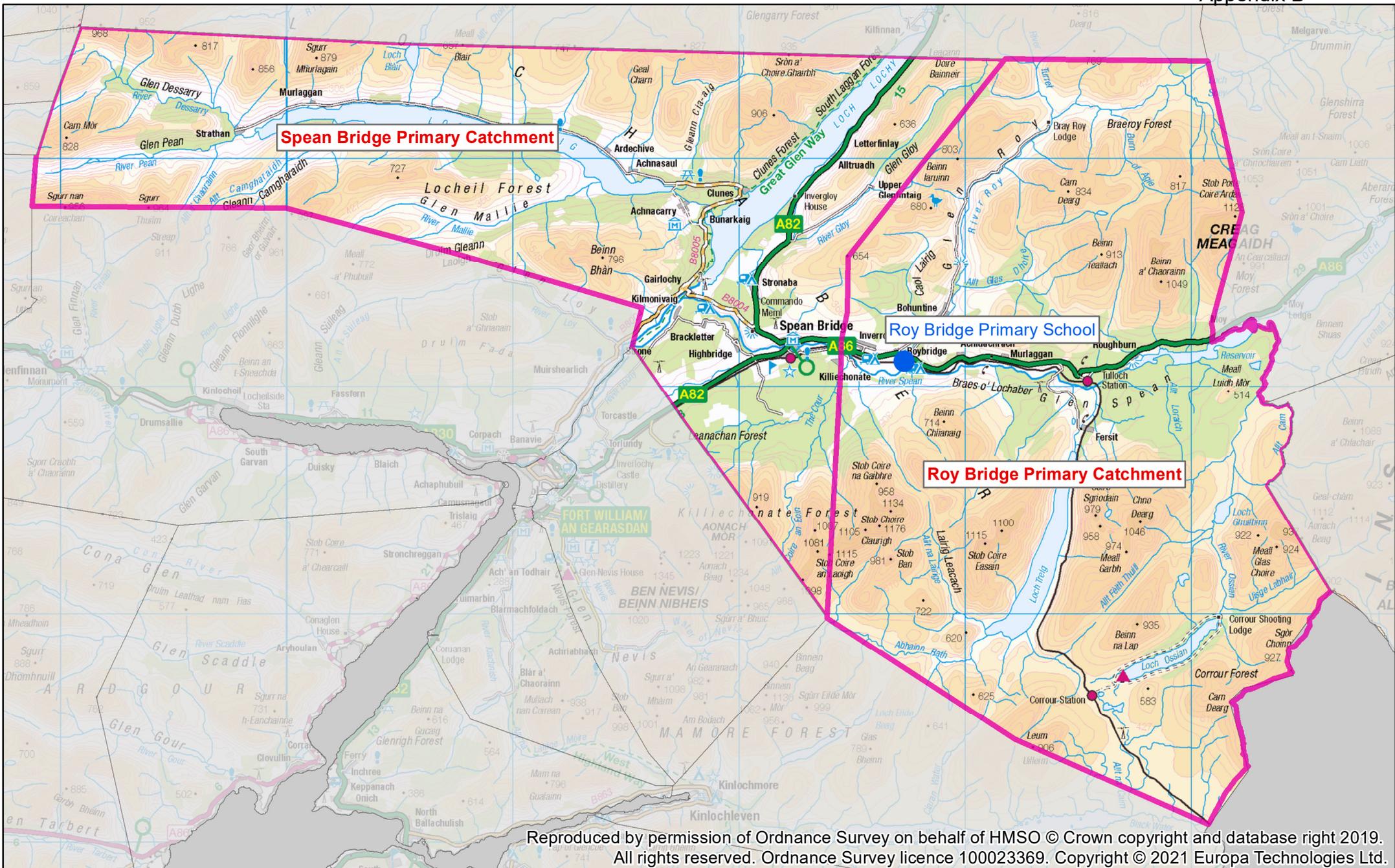
Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 16.1 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the additional travel from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge, details of which are provided above. In practice this is already taking place. Funded school transport is and will continue to be provided to P1-7 pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment who attend Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 16.2 If the school re-opened, it would be on the same basis as it existed prior to mothballing, i.e., without a nursery class. Nursery pupils would continue to travel to Spean Bridge PS, as happened prior to the mothballing.

Recommendation

- 17.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Roy Bridge Primary School, currently “mothballed,” is closed and the catchment area re-assigned to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 17.2 This proposal paper is issued in terms of the authority’s procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the Education Committee of the Highland Council.

END OF PROPOSAL PAPER



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Proposed catchment Roy Bridge Primary School

Ref: gis2422
Date: 09/08/2021



1:216,068



Note of an Informal Discussion at a Meeting of Spean Bridge PS Parent Council – 7 May 2019

Only about 8 or 9 parents attended, but they were mainly from Roy Bridge and there was a definite view from those attending that the school should re-open. One parent said he had moved into the village the very day the school was mothballed and that he was appalled this had happened.

The arguments advanced against closure were:

- Parents wanted their children to be able to walk to school.
- The village had lost its shop and Post Office and losing the school would be “another nail in the coffin”.
- There were enough children in Roy Bridge to make a school viable.
- Future housing developments in Spean would make SBPS overcrowded.
- Roy Bridge PS could be used as additional accommodation for Spean Bridge PS, to cope with the overcrowding the parents were predicting. Classes could be split by stage, with nursery/infants at Spean and upper stages pupils at Roy Bridge

In respect of the third point above, I commented that Roy Bridge had been mothballed because parents had chosen to move to Spean. Parents expressed the view that this had happened because there had not been a EM nursery at Roy Bridge (there had been a partner centre GM nursery, which has now also closed). Once children went to the nursery at Spean and had made friends there, parents were reluctant to take them out of Spean for P1. I responded by advising that it would be more difficult for Roy Bridge to re-open with an EM nursery. That would be an addition to what was there before, rather than just a re-opening of the existing provision. We would need to look at whether there was sufficient accommodation for the purpose, as well as at the educational issues. (We are however obliged by the legislation to look at all viable alternatives to closure).

Cllr. Henderson added that, as we now had Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, it was very unlikely we would open a GM nursery at Roy Bridge.

On the fifth point above, I suggested that sending children from Spean Bridge to attend school in Roy Bridge might meet with considerable opposition in Spean itself.

Two parents expressed the view that we should not have allowed placing requests to Spean. I advised of the legal position around placing requests.

One parent from Spean spoke up against re-opening Roy Bridge, on the grounds this would overstretch the HT, who would be given a third school to manage. I added that if Spean were to lose 30 pupils to RBPS, then SBPS would drop a class. Parents from Spean Bridge had a legitimate interest in the issue.

A complaint was made about the lack of maintenance of the accommodation at RBPS. It was suggested that THC were deliberately allowing the buildings to deteriorate so as present the community with the argument that re-opening the

school would require too much investment. I commented that THC had limited resources and that a mothballed school was not as high a priority as an operational school. However, I undertook to pass on the complaint about lack of maintenance.

It was suggested that THC had not given sufficient publicity to the meeting. I explained that this was merely an exploratory meeting and of what the process would be if a closure proposal were advanced. I also advised that I have offered to attend the CC meeting scheduled for 4 June.

Cllr. Thompson asked whether there was a view in the community that the RBPS buildings might be used as a community hub. Parents said the building could be used whilst it was mothballed, but they still wanted it to re-open.

Ian Jackson

9 May 2019

Spean Bridge Primary Parent Group Meeting

Tuesday 7th May 2019

Apologies; Rachel Stewart, Ruth Fitzsimmons, Eilidh Maitland, Martia Rowantree, Margaret Sargent, Fiona Davies, Allan Henderson (councillor) Ben Thompson (councillor) Kim Bentley, Ian Jackson (highland council), Mark Strachan, Kelly Strachan, Susan

Present; Annabel Loughray, Sandra Chisholm, Caroline Henderson.

1. **Roy Bridge Primary School:** Ian Jackson asked to attend the meeting to discuss the future of Roy Bridge Primary School. In summary - Roy Bridge Primary was 'mothballed' in March 2017 and the remaining pupils transferred to Spean Primary at this time. Scottish Government rules dictate a school can only be mothballed for three years, so a decision needs to be made in the next 10 months as to the future of the school. Either it reopens as a primary school or it is closed indefinitely. There is a procedure that must be followed for this, step one is to find out the initial view of parents whom this affects. There then has to be a statutory consultation, a public meeting, further consultation with Education Scotland, a review exercise and a report published before a committee decision would be made. Ultimately Holyrood make the final decision and there would be lots of opportunity for people within the Roy Bridge school catchment to make any comments on the matter before a decision was reached. Ian was keen to hear comments from within the room and opened it out to the group present.

Mark Strachan stated he was keen for the school to be reopened as it is part of the village community. He also mentioned the capacity of Spean school and the planned new houses for Spean village. What would the impact be on Roy Bridge children in the future if Spean school becomes full? Mark also added that a lot of money was spent on a new classroom for Roy Bridge school prior to it closing and this has not been maintained whilst mothballed - there will now be large costs for repair and maintenance if the school reopens.

Fiona D - discussed/clarified that English nursery provision has always been in Spean whereas Roy Bridge only offered Gaelic nursery in the village. Spean nursery fed into Spean school and Fiona asked would Roy Bridge parents have selected Roy primary if there had been an English speaking nursery there.

Margaret S stated that since Spean Nursery opened in 2001 it became harder for Roy Bridge parents to decide which school to send their kids to.

Ben T at this stage asked the Roy Bridge parents was a community hub more important than a school? Was it more about having somewhere at the centre of the village for the community to access or more about having a school for the children? An answer wasn't clear.

Allan H - Allan gave a summary of the history of the closure - Roy Bridge was scheduled for closure in 2007 but this decision was fought and the school stayed open, numbers began to

dwindle. Allan added it had been very difficult to source the £500,000 for the new classroom at Roy Bridge Primary and now it sits abandoned. Allan encouraged parents to speak out if they want Roy Bridge Primary to reopen. The group discussed and some of the parents present stated they have chosen Spean for their children and would NOT remove them from Spean school if Roy Bridge school reopened.

It was agreed that Ian will attend the community council meeting on Tuesday 4th June to discuss this and highlight it to the wider community. If a public consultation is to be held it will be held in Roy Bridge Hall and it would be well advertised to the wider community so all could attend.

The nursery situation was discussed and it was stated that Roy Bridge wont have its own nursery provision even if the school does reopen, the nursery for Roy Bridge children would continue to be in Spean Bridge.

Kelly asked if Roy Bridge primary could be used as a second campus for the current kids enrolled at Spean Bridge, this was discussed among the group but unclear if this could be a viable option. It was asked why Spean Bridge had become an option for Roy Bridge parents in the first place and the following summary was given by Eilidh and Allan. When Roy Bridge primary was for planned closure in 2006/7, the children eligible for school enrollment that year enrolled at Spean school. Roy Bridge school was then saved and didnt close but the children who had already started school in Spean were allowed to continue there as were their siblings. A bus was provided to transport the kids and other parents applied for placing requests alongside this and it snowballed from there. There have in the past been children in Roy Bridge who attended school in Spean and there are currently children in both Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge who attend school in Fort William.

The placing request system was then discussed among the group and Fiona gave an explanation of how they work/don't work in England. Ian clarified that within Highland Council children are automatically enrolled into their catchment school unless parents submit a placing request. Placing requests can only be refused if allowing that child to attend would put the class size over the maximum number.

The cost of running buses from Roy to Spean would compared to the costs of reopening the school in Roy Bridge as well as the fact it would be adding a third school to Kims cluster and that would have an impact on her workload. Although the 'cluster' in its beginning was always the three schools, roybridge has now been closed for two years and it would divide Kims time further. The proposed new houses in Spean were mentioned and it was asked what impact would be felt by Spean school if Roy school reopened? Would Speans budget see a cut?

Ben Thompson started a conversation about what the school building in Roy bridge could be used for if its not a school. Ian stated if there was an active movement within the Roy Bridge community then it could be considered. If a closure goes ahead the property could be offered round council departments. Ian stated the building would remain a council building unless not wanted at which time it might be offered to the community. There would be a discussion over how this might happen.

Ian left the meeting at this time as did Margaret, Mark, Kelly and Susan.
The planned agenda for the meeting continued.

2. Minutes - Accuracy. Occasional spelling mistakes noted by secretary.

3. Minutes - matters arising - Eco Garden. No volunteers but lots of gardening going on this term. 3 of the p1/2's cleaned out the polytunnel with Mrs Fitzsimmons in their lunchtimes and have planted herbs. The whole school now plan to get involved. Kim will put out a dojo post asking for summer holiday cover/help with garden.

The effectiveness of Dojo was discussed - Kim reports only 2 families not registered to use the app and over 40 views per post on average which is approx half the families.

4. Head Teachers Report - see attached for full report. The following were discussed:

Changes to nursery provision - as of August 2019 Spean nursery will offer the 30 hours a week free to all 3 and 4 year olds. (Between 8.30 - 3.30pm) No changes need to be made to the nursery to accommodate this change but the school kitchen is due to be reviewed as these nursery children are entitled to a free school meal. Not a big impact on staffing. Hours can be split between two nurseries.

Staffing - PSA allowance for 2019/20 yet to be confirmed, classes have not yet been allocated to teachers within the school. Kim did confirm that Mindy Ogilvie would remain the p2/3 teacher until July this year.

5. ASN provision:

Ben T hoped that the PSA allocations for next school year would have been declared by now but they have not. There are meetings in the coming weeks to discuss and decide allocation. Group discussed outcome of Parent group meeting and what the plan was going forward - how do we channel parent views? Ben stated there is an issue with the way the highland council assess for ASN and an issue with people tying money to attainment. Highland council is actually spending the average amount of money on ASN compared to other councils despite the high statistics.

It was agreed that the Spean Bridge Primary Group should write to Donna Masson asking her to attend a meeting inviting every spean parent. The group then discussed the highland councils code of conduct and how this restricted some parents from attending these meetings even though they are also parents. Fiona voiced her concerns over allocation, the highland council have a legal obligation to provide support for pupils with level one and two needs, the training of class teachers has been unclear and the support that will be provided for these teachers has not been made clear.

Ben encouraged us to contact our MSPs as they dictate how the council spend money and could influence the direction any extra income takes. Ben also reminded the group that rurality isn't taken into account when money is allocated to councils, we are compared to other schools/districts such as the borders but our staff cover many more miles.

6. Fundraising: Report and spreadsheet read out by Rachel (see attached), Fundraising bank account balance is sitting at approx £6000 (pre fun night). Kim once again thanked the fundraising group for all their hard work and how great their total so far was. A parent had emailed in asking for her email to be read out at the meeting, it was surrounding money allocated to the school at the Jan PG meeting and how this had been spent, what was leftover etc. Kim provided the group with a rough spreadsheet of what she has spent since given the £4250 following the meeting in Jan 2019, Eilidh to compose a table showing what the money was given for, what/how much was spent for each request, and attach to these minutes.

Requests for funding from Parent Group;

- Transport cost for Forest Schools (6 sessions at Nevis range) unsure of cost
- Transport for school trips £1000 approx
- Garden items such as plants £200 approx but will accept anything
- Maths resource (numicon) £2000
- Reading resource £500
- Panto costs in December £1000 requested - £500 approved

It was noted that not every teacher was made aware in Jan - April term that the group had donated £200 per class and so this has not been spent.

The maths resource had been discussed at the Jan meeting and kim/Michelle were to discuss with the staff about this which has not been done. Group discussed if staff let the group know exactly what they sets they want and the price of these through schools procurement and group can price online and see if its cheaper elsewhere.

The reading resource (p3/4 core readers) were again discussed at the Jan meeting and was included in the £4250 that Kim was given. Group agreed to look into costs of books and discuss with class teachers further.

The above requested transport costs are to be discussed with the community council as they hold the pot of money donated by local landowner to be used for school transport costs which could be accessed for the forest school trips and glen nevis trip planned for this term. Class attending forest school sessions yet to be decided, Kim proposing the p4 class, parent group felt p2/3 class should go.

It as agreed that more parents should be encouraged to attend the Parent Group meetings especially when financial decisions are being made so as to ensure the parent group dont feel responsible for justifying decisions made.

Netball group requested new Netballs, cost is £110 for 12 balls, group approved (Eilidh, Fiona and Ruth approved)

School trips were discussed. P5-7s have requested the trampoline park in Inverness which has been costed at approx £420 for the bus hire and £10 per child entry fee. The P1-4 trip has been suggested as Kincaig Wildlife Park which will cost around £840 for two buses and £6 per child entry fee. The group agreed to donate £1000 initially to put towards the costs f the school trips but this was later discussed in more detail and the parent group agreed to

give the school £2500 which would cover the entire cost of both planned trips including bus hire and entry fees. This would allow the trips to be free to all pupils.

The upcoming sponsored walk money will go into the school funds account NOT the fundraising groups account.

The outdoor class committee would like to 'pitch' to the fundraising group for some money for their outdoor day on June 7th.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm - Ben was thanked for his attendance. The group discussed the school trips as documented above at this time and then emailed round the remaining parent group committee members who were absent to ensure all agreed to decision.

Next Parent group meeting to be held on Tuesday 3rd September at 6.30pm

Note of an Informal Discussion at a Meeting of Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council – 3 September 2019

There was a good crowd of people present. Cllr. Ben Thompson and Cllr. Denis Rixson were there, as was Kim Bentley (Head Teacher of Spean Bridge and Invergarry Primary Schools)

I explained that the Council was required, under statutory guidance, to keep the status of mothballed schools under review. I started to talk about the possible future of the school and about the possibility of closure, but all the suggestions from the audience were about how the school might be re-opened, and how that could be achieved. I advised that within Highland Council I was not a level that could make a decision on such an outcome. However, I acknowledged that we had come to listen to the community's views, and commented that we would only consider re-opening the school if we had very good evidence that there was sufficient demand from parents, who would have to commit in writing to taking children out of Spean Bridge PS and re-enrolling them in Roy Bridge. I suggested that any such requests should be made to Kim, who would collate them and send them to ourselves (Kim advised me afterwards that only two of the people who spoke at the meeting were parents of children currently at Spean Bridge PS. Most of the speakers were people who had historical links to the school).

I was asked what number we would need to re-open Roy Bridge but responded by saying there were no set number. We would consider the evidence if and when it arrived.

I highlighted that prior to being mothballed, Roy Bridge PS had not had a nursery class, and that if the school were re-opened it would be as it was before mothballing, with no nursery.

There were a few questions about refurbishing the former schoolhouse, which was used for a time by a partner centre nursery, and using it as classroom accommodation for a re-opened school. I advised that the modern demountable had been perfectly good accommodation and I saw no need for any additional accommodation. There had also been a classroom in the old building which could be used as a second classroom if necessary. The Council would not wish to create any more accommodation than was required.

A question was asked about whether there was a time limit on mothballing. I advised there was no set time limit, just that it be kept under regular review. I commented that it obviously wasn't good for a building to be kept empty for an extended period. This led onto questions about maintenance. I said the Council had a duty to keep the building wind and watertight, but beyond that the Roy Bridge building was not a priority for investment, for obvious reasons.

There were quite a lot of questions about the potential roll at both schools. I commented that the issue with sustaining Roy Bridge was not due to a lack of children in the catchment, but because the parents had chosen to send their children to Spean. I was asked whether, if Roy Bridge re-opened, the parents of Roy Bridge children would be required to send their children to that school, as the catchment

school. I advised that in my opinion they would not, since they had enrolled their children in Spean on the basis it was the local school at the time, and it would be “changing the goalposts” to order them to Roy Bridge. I also highlighted the right of parents to make placing requests, which THC are required to grant unless there are particular legally defined reasons for refusing them.

Views were expressed that likely housebuilding in both communities would lead to capacity issues at Spean and that it was therefore a “no-brainer” to re-open Roy Bridge. I disagreed with the comments about capacity issues at Spean but acknowledged that roll projections were “crystal ball gazing”.

Cllr. Thompson asked whether the parents at Spean Bridge had a say. I responded that re-opening Roy Bridge could happen without any consultation, since it was merely opening the doors of a school that already exists. If a closure proposal was advanced, we had to consult parents at any “affected school”, which would include Spean Bridge PS. A re-opening of Roy Bridge would potentially affect Spean PS, since a substantial move of pupils to Roy Bridge could result in Spean losing a teacher. Also it might affect the HT arrangements.

The CC Chair summarised the meeting by saying there was no community support for closure, and that THC should either re-open the school, or at least continue to mothball it. That was a fair summary of the meeting. I asked for a copy of the minutes, when they are produced.

Ian Jackson
4 September 2019

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Council held at 7.00 pm on Tuesday 3rd September 2019 at Roy Bridge Village Hall.

Present: John Fotheringham, Ross MacLennan, Liz Fotheringham, Brian Donald and Highland Councillors Ben Thompson and Denis Rixson, and 36 members of the public.

Statement by the Chairman: At our last meeting on 2nd July the meeting was disrupted by two members of the public who seem to believe that a Community Council Meeting is an open forum in which everyone can express their views however offensive. May I respectfully remind the public that under the Community Council Constitution I as Chairperson shall determine the order, relevance, and competency of all questions or contributions from the public, and if there is any repetition of such disgraceful scenes I will adjourn the meeting to a time and place I see fit.

Apologies: Councillor Allan Henderson

Conflict of interest Declarations: Ross MacLennan, Ian Langley and John Fotheringham are Members of the Stronelaig Wind Farm Community Fund Panel, and Trustees of Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO. Brian Donald is a Trustee of the SCIO. John Fotheringham is also a Community Director with the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust.

Previous Minutes: The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2nd July were approved.

Proposer: Ian Langley

Seconder: Brian Donald

Highland Council's Update on the Future of Roy Bridge Primary School:

Ian Jackson from Highland Council Care and Learning explained that when schools were mothballed, it was proper to examine periodically whether mothballing was still relevant or whether they should move to closure. Even then it was still a complex procedure and every school closure had to be approved by the Scottish Government.

The Community Council supported by many at the Meeting asked about the criteria necessary to reopen the primary school now that the number of pupils attending Spean Bridge Primary School from Roybridge was on the increase, and Spean Bridge itself had over 90 units available for development which may lead to an increase in demand from there. Mr Jackson explained that parents who wanted their children to return to Roy Bridge Primary School should approach the head teacher in the first instance and if there were sufficient numbers they would consider it. Such a proposal if adopted could lead to a staff reduction at Spean Bridge but the Nursery would not be a part of any transfer, nor would any pupils currently attending the Gaelic Medium School be forced to return. Parents have a right of choice regarding placement even in school catchment areas.

Assurances were given that the school building will continue to receive care and maintenance to ensure it doesn't deteriorate whilst further consultation takes place.

The Community Council's position is to support parents if sufficient come forward requesting the re-opening of Roy Bridge School, and if it is sustainable in the long term. If insufficient numbers request change we would support continuing with mothballing, but we are not willing to consider formal closure at this time.

The Chairman thanked Ian Jackson for his patience, and for the detailed explanation of the various complexities involved in each proposal.

Reports;

From 27 August 2019 Mobile Working will be introduced across Highlands and Islands Division of Police Scotland.

Mobile Working means that police officers will be operating mobile devices as part of their operational duties.

They will now be in possession of mobile devices which may be secured to their body armour / jackets adjacent to their radio.

This means that officers will be able to use their mobile devices to remotely access police systems which will increase officers' time working with the public and on incidents - or conducting patrols and preventing crime.

PC Scott Williamson gave the meeting an update on local occurrences,

Matters Arising:

Highland Council – Highland Council have confirmed that they will be clearing the vegetation from around the street lights on the path between the A82 and Altour Gardens in Spean Bridge.

The broken drain cover in Bohenie Road near to its junction with the A86 has still not been replaced and we will ask the Councillors to intervene on our behalf as repeated requests by us have failed to secure results.

We would like to thank Mrs Jenny Hastings and Highland Council for acting promptly in clearing the mess created by corralled horses at the Commando Memorial on Friday 30th August.

As our correspondence with Stuart Black and Donna Manson relating to consistent errors by Highland Council's Planning Department continues to be ignored we have written to both Kate Forbes and Kevin Stewart Minister for Local Government, Housing, and Planning in the earnest hope that someone will accept responsibility, and ensure no further mistakes.

Members of the public asked that we thank Highland Council for recent pothole repairs and the Chairman will pass on the appreciation.

BEAR and Transport Scotland – The Chairman met with Kate Forbes MSP last week and raised the long delayed A86 Inverroy Safety Report with her. He had subsequently written to both Transport Scotland and BEAR giving them 14 days to produce the Report or he would ask Kate to intervene again.

Resurfacing of the A82 at Altrua, some 6 miles North of Spean Bridge is scheduled to take place between Sunday 15 September to Thursday 19 September (both nights inclusive) between 20.00 and 06.00. The road will be closed throughout these times with an Amnesty every two hours at 22.00, 24.00, 02.00 and 04.00 hrs. Emergency vehicles will be able to access at all times.

Recycling Tailings and Scalpings – Following the outburst by a local Landowner at our Meeting on 2nd July the Chairman contacted the Data Protection Commissioner and BEAR Scotland. An examination of the circumstances found that the Roads Sub Contractor had consistently breached SEPA's rules and that recipients would need an exemption certificate for every location which many did not have. The Data Protection Commissioner was happy to take a formal complaint, and Transport Scotland were not amused about the contractor's conduct on a government contract. We have received assurances about the procedures to be followed on forthcoming local contracts and we will be monitoring adherence.

This is not a problem confined to one recipient but seems to have been widespread, but reselling such waste product is specifically outlawed as end use must be agreed with the producer.

Community Council Elections – The notice of Election for Candidates wishing to serve Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council for the next four years will be published on Monday, 23 September 2019 on the Highland Council Website. The deadline for submitting nomination papers is 12noon on Tuesday, 8 October 2019.

The new Community Council will be formed if 9 or less candidates apply on 8th October.

If more than 9 apply the election day will be on the 19th November and the existing Community Councillors will remain till that date.

The Code of Conduct for Community Councillors is based largely on the Code of Conduct for Local Authority Councillors and relevant public bodies as provided for in The Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Act 2000. As elected representatives of their communities, they have a responsibility to make sure that they are familiar with, and that their actions comply with, the principles set out in the Code of Conduct. Its principles, shall apply to all Community Councillors and those representing the Community Council wherever and whenever they are acting in an official capacity as Community Councillors. These principles are Service to the Community (Public Service), Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability and Stewardship, Openness, Honesty, Leadership and Respect.

The key principles of the Code, especially those that specify integrity, honesty and openness, are given further practical effect by the requirement for you to declare interests at meetings which you attend. The rules on declaration of interest are intended to produce transparency in regard to interests which might influence, or be thought to influence, your actions as a community councillor. In such circumstances you will be required to withdraw and refrain from any discussion where you or family member could be deemed to have a conflict of interest.

Correspondence:

1. A letter was received from a local landowner who no longer resides in the area. It made certain inaccurate allegations about the Community Council's involvement in a street name change, the 23 conditions imposed on Planning Application 16/05283/FUL, and our unwillingness to support the plans for a fenced off area in Spean Bridge. After due consideration and with the unanimous approval of the Community Councillors the Chairman had replied. It was clear that she had been misinformed that any street change was premature to say the least, Highland Council Planning Department never consulted us indeed often ignored our contribution, and the comments about the fenced off land would have had more credibility if there had not immediately been an attempt to sell the land to a neighbour.
2. Highland Council had relayed British Telecom's latest consultation on removal of the Telephone Boxes at Gairloch, Tulloch and Stronaba. For some unknown reason the box at Bohuntin has disappeared from the consultation. Nothing has changed in the last three years, and we will resist their removal. The Chairman will write to Highland Council informing them of our decision, and the Chairman will circulate the consultation to any interested parties.
3. The Scottish Land Reform factsheet provides Scotland's Community Councils with advice about how local communities can have more of a say in how land is owned, used and managed. It also outlines the ways in which communities can use legislation to seek to become the owners of land, even where the owner of the land does not wish to sell the land

to the community. The factsheet also provides an update on other land reform activities that will be of interest to community councils. We have passed the information to the Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO that have the financial capability to pursue such land ownership, and have already identified potential sites.

The Community Councillors agreed to note:

- a) An invitation to attend the Fort William 2040 Annual Workshop on 25th September.
- b) Highland Council's Amended Core Paths Plan West Highlands and Islands.
- c) Latest News and Opportunities from Local Energy Scotland.
- d) An invitation to the West Highland Community Rail Partnership AGM 2019 on 21st September.
- e) An invitation to the Highland Small Communities Housing trust Conference and AGM in Inverness Town House on 13th September.
- f) The Transport Forum's August Minutes.
- g) An invitation to the Resilient Communities Conference 2019 which takes place on 11th September at SFRS Cambuslang.
- h) The Asset Transfer of the land Spean Bridge Community Centre is built on including the Car Park from Highland Council to the Community Centre SCIO.

Treasurer's Report:

The current balance is £3960.82 following the receipt of our annual administrative grant. £1518.82 is Community Council Funding and £2442 is the balance left over for further allocation of Micro awards. As we are required to balance the books by 30th September in election year all current expenditure should be forwarded to the Treasurer by that date.

We are required to protect our SSE Micro Award funding and are discussion with SSE about transferring any funding left over in case the Community Council doesn't form

It is noted that a 'top up' grant application to help meet the administration costs of the Community Council has to be submitted by 7th October, but will only be paid if the Community Council can demonstrate that they will run out of their grant funds by 30th June 2020. Only Highland Council could run such a process in the middle of the Community Council elections as no one knows what is likely to happen until they know how the new Community Council intends to spend their funds.

Any Other Business including Date and Venue of Next Meeting:

The final Meeting of this 4year cycle will be at 7.00pm on Tuesday 1st October in Kilmonivaig Church Hall.

Killiechonate Woodlands are currently harvesting timber in the plantation bordered to the north by the railway to the west by Corriechoille Road and to the south by the River Spean which will involve temporary closure of the popular riverside walk. It is anticipated that the harvesting will take two months, warning notices will be posted, and clambering over stacked timber is dangerous, and should not be undertaken.

Licensing;

Notification of a Major Variation Application in respect of the Stronlossit Inn, Roy Bridge. As there was no concerns expressed from the Meeting the changes were approved.

Planning:

The Community Council monitors Planning Applications weekly to ensure we are able to respond within the 14day deadline.

During the last two months we have raised one objection relating to a proposal to build four camping pods in the Fort William Hinterland which we believe is contrary to the Supplementary Guidance in the Wider Countryside Siting and Design.

We noted that there had been a change at Tigh Aran but in the absence of any complaint from residents we were happy to allow it to proceed.

It has been our policy for some years to automatically object to applicants that put in retrospective Planning Applications. We will not reward those that fail to use pre planning or carry out approved plans. Two applications fell into this category this month.

Three Applications were approved.

Meeting closed at 21:00.

**Dana MacLennan
Secretary**

Note of an Informal Discussion at a Meeting of Spean Bridge PS Parent Council – 12 March 2020

Norma and I met with the PC yesterday evening. The PC had invited us to provide an update on the position with Roy Bridge PS.

There were only about 6 parents present. The person leading calls for Roy Bridge to re-open was not present. Three of the parents were from Roy Bridge though.

We advised the PC that Roy Bridge PS would not re-open for August 2020, as there had been only very limited interest expressed by parents.

The future of the school therefore came down to a choice of (i) continued mothballing, but we would likely be revisiting the closure issue in 18 months' time, or (ii) moving to a formal closure proposal. The PC Chair had some reservations about closure, on the grounds of the impact on the community of Roy Bridge. However, the overall view was that we should move to a formal closure consultation.

Ian Jackson
13 March 2020

Spean Bridge Primary School Parent Group Meeting

12th March 2020

Present - Norma Young, Iain Jackson, Lindsay, Ruth, Rachel S, Eilidh, Ali B, Kim B.

Apologies - none

Previous Minutes - approved

Community Benefit - Mitie have said that the school would need to take responsibility for any equipment installed which SSE wouldn't approve. Group agreed not to submit an application at this time. The hall committee may apply for something themselves. It was agreed this item can be removed from the agenda for future meetings.

RoyBridge Update - Iain recapped the meeting from September 2019 held in RoyBridge Hall when people were encouraged to contact him. He has had very few people contact him and with that number so low it has been decided Roy Bridge Primary will not open in August this year. There are now 2 plans.

A - Roy Bridge school is mothballed further.

Plan B - there is a formal closure consultation which takes one year. Local council members who were supportive of RB staying open in the past are now supportive of a closure.

Currently Dorothy Gibb (estates dept) is looking after RB.

A community group have informally approached the highland council about transferring the use of the school buildings for community purpose but this couldn't happen until after the closure consultation.

Parent consensus seems to support closure. There have not been high numbers wishing to reopen it. The group discussed should Speans projected population increase be considered - current pattern is approx 15 kids per primary with nursery numbers gauging the same. Including house building underway and those projected numbers we would be looking at a school roll of 120 pupils (current roll is 110) Projected roll for 2029 is 120+. By 2027 the highland council will own Spean Primary outright and they have already reviewed the ground available at Spean for possible expansion in the future.

It was highlighted that properties in the Roy Bridge catchment were still selling despite the schools mothballing so lack of school not impacting growth of village.

The group discussed Spean school borrowing some of the resources currently sitting unaided in RoyBridge to benefit the children and could be returned if needed but this would need to be discussed again in further detail.

All present at the meeting tonight we're in favour of moving to a formal closure consultation. Support was vocalised for community transfer if possible. In place of the community council the local SCIO would be consulted.

Iain and Norma left the meeting at 7pm.

Fundraising - A healthy bank balance of approx £9000 at this time. Bingo planned for next week but will likely be cancelled - the group will make that call on Monday and notify everyone. Plans ongoing for a summer raffle and fun night. There will be another meeting in April when the schools go back to discuss this further. The group will send Kim a list/plan. The shed beside the container is to be cleaned out and used by the fundraising group to store items.

Unclear if £5000 donation to the school cheque had been cashed and the SCIO still have not been sent invoices for the Aug-Dec 2019 term. These should be sent to Brian Donald. Kim will check the money is in the school account. It was discussed that perhaps the SCIO should type up something formal for the arrangement/donation offered for transport costs. The donation is for £3000 per year for two years.

Financial Requests -

£5000 cheque given - Kim to check if cashed

No other requests submitted. This cheque will include the costs for school trips. Kim's planned transport spends total £3170 with £3000 expected from SCIO.

A parent suggested the Rural Complex 'seed to supper' project would be a great activity for the P1/2 class. There are 10 sessions in total held at the complex. The group discussed how this might work eh sending half the class at a time or p1 for 5 and p2 for 5. Kim to discuss further with staff.

Discussed canteen supervision - Kim currently covering lunches and nursery breaks daily which is now impacting the running of the school. Clear need for additional staff cover but this isn't available.

A suggestion was made for the school to ask parents to support transport for trips like swimming lessons to alleviate pressure on staff.

SB13 - Ali B has applied for funding through Arkaig Forest Trust for an art project for P4-7 in Sept. Ali asked for a donation of £500 from the fundraising group to help with this. Approved by 3 members.

Headteachers Report - Kim will attach to the minutes.

Meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Next meeting scheduled for June 2020, date to be confirmed

Note of an Informal Discussion at a Meeting of Spean Bridge PS Parent Council – 1 September 2021

I attended a meeting of the Spean Bridge PC last night, to talk about a statutory consultation proposing the closure of Roy Bridge. Only 3 parents turned up at the meeting, and all were in agreement with the proposal. I was told that the one parent from Roy Bridge who had previously expressed strong opposition to the closure has now moved away. I hadn't previously been aware of that.

I advised that I was hoping to put a paper to the November Education Committee, proposing a statutory consultation exercise on the closure. The only concern expressed was that, due to the low attendance at the meeting, parents might not know of the proposed consultation. I said I was keen that the statutory consultation did not come as a surprise to parents, so I would prepare a statement to notify parents of what was underway, which the HT and the Parent Council could circulate on social media. The statement would make it clear that the consultation was yet to be approved by the Education Committee.

Ian Jackson
2 September 2021

School Roll Forecast
 Lochaber High School
 Spean Bridge Primary

5134420	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36
P 1	12	20	14	13	17	17	17	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 2	12	13	21	14	13	17	17	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 3	13	13	13	21	15	13	17	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 4	19	14	13	14	22	15	14	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 5	10	20	14	14	14	22	16	14	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 6	19	11	20	15	14	15	22	16	14	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 7	18	20	11	21	15	15	15	23	16	15	18	19	19	19	20	20
Total Roll	103	111	106	112	110	114	118	121	120	123	126	133	133	133	140	140
Total Capacity	125	125	125	125	125	125										
Tot Roll - Tot Cap	-22	-14	-19	-13	-15	-11	-7	-4	-5	-2	1	8	8	8	15	15
(Tot Roll/Tot Cap)%	82%	89%	85%	90%	88%	91%	94%	97%	96%	98%	101%	106%	106%	106%	112%	112%

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This background paper describes the high level approach taken in preparing school roll forecasts for primary and secondary schools in Highland. It describes the basic methodology used and changes introduced to the processes to improve transparency and ease of use of the forecasts.
- 1.2 The existing school roll forecasting methodology has been iteratively developed over several decades with improvements and adjustments to account for circumstances in Highland. Given the school capacity pressures experienced in recent years, Highland Council's Development and Infrastructure - Information and Research department, together with Care and Learning, took the opportunity to look afresh at the forecasting process. This research has informed the 2017/18 School Roll Forecasts and the preparation of the draft Developer Contributions Supplementary guidance (consultation 2018).
- 1.3 It has been recognised that there is a need for a simplified approach to determining the effect of residential development on the school estate. In preparing the forecasts, a key consideration was the usability of these forecasts to easily identify all anticipated residential developments which feed into the forecasts and undertake development scenario modelling. This information is critical for effective planning of the school estate and assessing Local Development Plan site allocations as well as individual development proposals.
- 1.4 An integrated primary and secondary school Excel spreadsheet based approach has been developed to give confidence in school roll forecasting. A baseline forecast is updated and published annually, which also acts as a template that can now be used for modelling future school rolls based on testing various potential development and school estate management scenarios.

2 Input Datasets and Factors

- 2.1 A key factor in school roll forecasting is a detailed and accurate assessment of the likely residential build-out timescales for new developments. The annual Housing Land Audit (HLA) provides this base information. Since 2016, the HLA has been prepared in parallel with the creation of the annual School Roll Forecasts. In addition to programmed build out rates for Local Development Plan site allocations, 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 build out and delivery of multiple residential developments, which often take place within a similar timeframe, contribute to cumulative pressures on the school estate.

- 2.2 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 per new home. These figures are comparable with those used across many Scottish Local Authorities and have been found to be accurate and reliable as recently assessed and reported in the School Pupil Product Ratio Review, prepared by The Highland Council - Information and Research, September 2017.
- 2.3 Forecasts are informed by an annual school pupil census, combined with information on current school capacities to provide the baseline and start point for forecasting and roll pressure analysis. These are provided by Care and Learning and are updated regularly to comply with the latest legislation and regulatory requirements.
- 2.4 Pre-school year group values are populated using GP registration figures supplied by the NHS, to identify children which are not yet of school age. These will be included in the calculation of future P1 intakes for Primary Schools.
- 2.5 A significant exercise was undertaken in 2017 to increase the accuracy of pupil flow modelling. We analyse the current flow of pupils attending schools outwith their catchment area school to determine future roll adjustments from Placing Request applications, as well as calculate intake numbers for Gaelic and Denominational schools.

3 Methodology

- 3.1 Once the input datasets have been refreshed with the latest values, the spreadsheet can be used to forecast school rolls for the next 15 years. As a baseline, each projection sheet shows the number of pupils in each year group for the current school year.
- 3.2 For every additional year to be forecast, the number of pupils expected in each year group will be updated to take account of the influences from the various input datasets, including additional pupils from new housing development completions.
- 3.3 Using the residential development information, estimated build out rates are aggregated by primary catchment and an updated windfall contribution is added to give a year by year additional housing count for each. These values are combined with the Pupil Product Ratios to predict the number of additional pupils expected per school for each year forecast.

- 3.4 These anticipated new housing yields are combined with expected Placing Request numbers and are used to adjust the pupil numbers moving through the education system. Primary School P1 rolls are based on the Pre-school figures collected from the NHS and Secondary School S1 rolls use the product of last years Primary P7 pupils. All other Primary and Secondary year groups are based on the number of pupils expected to progress through from the previous school year. Adjusted year group figures for each projected year are displayed alongside baseline roll figures.
- 3.5 Total school rolls forecasted are reported against school capacities to highlight current and future school's capacity constraints or where schools have excess capacity.

4 Outputs

- 4.1 Forecasts are aggregated into a single summary sheet for each Associated School Group (ASG) and published annually via the Highland Council's Website. From 2018, we will also be publishing mid-year update sheets to reflect any significant changes to the school estate.
- 4.2 The published School Roll Forecast is used internally as a baseline to enable effective management of the school estate and forms an essential part of the Council's evidence base for informing planning decision making.

END

The Highland Council - Information and Research
Development and Infrastructure
September 2017

Financial Template - Roybridge PS Closure

Appendix E.

Table 1			
	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Forecast revenue costs for Roybridge PS			
Roybridge PRIMARY SCHOOL	Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)	Additional financial impact on receiving schools	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 1)
School costs			
<i>Employee costs:</i>			
teaching staff	91,216	0	-91,216
support staff	8,566	0	-8,566
teaching staff training (CPD etc)	259	26	-233
support staff training			0
Supply costs	2,367	0	-2,367
<i>Building costs:</i>			
property insurance	320	0	-320
non domestic rates	0	0	0
water & sewerage charges	1,149	0	-1,149
energy costs	5,121	0	-5,121
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	2,548	0	-2,548
building repair & maintenance	200	-7,825	-8,025
grounds maintenance			0
facilities management costs			0
revenue costs arising from capital			0
other			0
<i>School operational costs:</i>			
learning materials	1,366	178	-1,188
catering (contract or inhouse)	7,674	0	-7,674
SQA costs			0
other school operational costs (e.g. licences)			0
<i>Transport costs:</i>			
home to school	36,195	0	-36,195
other pupil transport costs			0
staff travel	198	0	-198
SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL	157,179	-7,621	-164,800
<i>Income:</i>			
Sale of meals			
Lets			
External care provider			
Other			
SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL	0	0	0
TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL	157,179	-7,621	-164,800
UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	157,179	-7,621	-164,800

Note: As Roybridge PS is currently mothballed, the costs in column1 of table 1 above reflect the estimate 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 (moth-balling) until disposal	
property insurance	320
non domestic rates	0
water & sewerage charges	339
energy costs	1,210
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	0
security costs	0
building repair & maintenance	0
grounds maintenance	0
facilities management costs	0
other	0
TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL	1,868

Table 4

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

Table 5

Impact on GAE	
none	-7,825
GAE IMPACT	