

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	14
Report No	EDU/15/24

Committee: Education

Date: 30 May 2024

Report Title: Statutory Consultation Exercise – Badcaul Primary School: Request to Proceed to Consultation on Permanent Closure

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

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 Badcaul Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Ullapool Primary School.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked **Agree** to proceed to statutory consultation, on the basis of the Proposal Paper attached to this Report (**Appendix A**)

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - These are set out at **Appendix C**.

3.2 Legal - The proposed closure has been taken forward under the provisions of The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – Community, Equalities and Rural impacts are assessed at Sections 13, 15 and 168 of the Proposal Paper (Appendix A).

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 – This will be assessed during the public consultation process.

3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) – None.

3.7 Gaelic – None.

4. Overview

- 4.1 Badcaul PS has been mothballed since January 2022, when the pupil roll fell to zero.
- 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 there are no parents within the Badcaul catchment who actively advocate for Badcaul PS re-opened. For the forthcoming 2024-25 school session, it is believed there are only two children of primary school age living within the Badcaul Primary catchment.
- 4.3 Discussions were held with community representatives in March 2023 about the future of the school. Community representatives argued that it was too soon for a closure proposal, and that the school should remain mothballed for a further 12 months, at which point a further review could be held. This was agreed. Community representatives advanced a similar view in the most recent informal discussions, held in March 2024, arguing that the permanent closure of the school would exacerbate the depopulation issues facing the area.
- 4.4 In advancing the current proposal, officials took account of the fact the school has been mothballed since January 2022. It is undesirable that schools should continue as “mothballed” for several years, and there appears to be little parental demand to re-open the school. In addition, a statutory consultation exercise would provide a fuller opportunity for everyone in the community to comment on the proposal, compared with informal discussions.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 If the closure were to be implemented, there would be a need to re-allocate the catchment to that of a neighbouring school. Pupils from the Badcaul catchment have been attending Ullapool Primary School since January 2022.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to a Committee decision to proceed to statutory consultation, a public meeting will be held in Badcaul 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 either February or May 2025, 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: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 13 May 2024

Author: Ian Jackson

Appendices: Appendix A – Proposal Paper
Appendix B – Map of Proposed Merged Catchment Badcaul/Ullapool
Appendix Bi – Map of Existing Badcaul PS catchment
Appendix Bii - Map of Existing Ullapool PS catchment
Appendix C - Financial Analysis