

The Highland Council

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| Agenda Item | 4. |
| Report No | EDU/9/25 |

Committee: Education Committee

Date: 4 June 2025

Report Title: Statutory Consultation: Relocation of St Clement's School

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, on a proposal to relocate St. Clement's School to a new site at Dingwall Point of Delivery (POD), to allow the construction of a new school as part of The Highland Investment Plan (HIP). The consultation report at Appendix 1 sets out the basis of the proposal and related information including the educational, community and transport implications.
- 1.2 The Highland Council has a longstanding commitment to replace St. Clement's School, and the construction of a replacement school has widespread public support. The current school accommodation is unsatisfactory both in terms of condition and suitability. A statutory consultation was completed in 2022 for St Clement's School to be relocated to a new site at Dochcarty Brae in Dingwall to allow the construction of a new school building.
- 1.3 In September 2023, plans to build a new St Clement's were put on hold following a review and reduction of the then capital programme on grounds of affordability. It was stated at that time that capital priorities, including a new St Clement's, could be reconsidered if, at some point in the future, there was a material change of circumstances that could provide an opportunity to reconsider the Council's capital programme.
- 1.4 Following the introduction of The Highland Investment Plan in May 2024, Dingwall was identified as a phase 1 project location and a new school for St Clement's was reinstated in the Capital Programme. In March 2025, The Highland Council agreed to move to a Community POD development for St Clement's and Dingwall Primary schools, on the basis that this provides the greatest educational benefits for both schools, and the maximum economic benefit for the wider community.
- 1.5 It is proposed that the new school should be constructed at a site next to the existing primary school in Dingwall. A drawing showing the approximate extent of the new site is at Appendix 2. If agreed at the conclusion of the current consultation exercise, the building of the new school would be subject to planning permission.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to agree to proceed to statutory consultation, based on the proposal attached to this report at Appendix 1.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource -The overall cost of investment into the Dingwall phase 1 project is in the region of £50 million, which includes St Clement's School and Dingwall Primary School.
- 3.2 Legal - The statutory consultation will be taken forward as per the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - A new school would meet modern standards for health and safety for pupils and staff.
- 3.5 Gaelic – None arising specifically from this report. It is of note that Dingwall Primary has a large GME provision of over 70 pupils and rising. A new school for Dingwall Primary would provide opportunities to improve the condition and suitability of the GME school environment. It also potentially provides an opportunity for the Council to seek contributory capital funding from the Scottish Government to assist with build costs.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary**
 - 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening was undertaken on 28 October 2024. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant manager review and approval.
 - 4.3.2 The screening process has concluded that there are positive impacts for equalities and human rights by providing a new special school. There are no known negative impacts for poverty, island and mainland rural communities or data protection. In due course, should approval be given for the building of a new school, a further impact assessment will be required.
 - 4.3.3 A full impact assessment will be undertaken as part of the statutory consultation phase, using the information previously gathered and also informed by feedback received as part of the consultation process.

5 Overview

- 5.1 St. Clement's is one of three special schools run by The Highland Council and provides education to children in the 3-18 age group. It is located in the centre of Dingwall and admits pupils from a wide area of Easter Ross, with a few pupils attending from further afield. The school dates from the early years of the 20th century, although there have been many building modifications down the years. The current school accommodation comprises the original main building, a modular annexe building that was installed in 2015 and an older modular unit. Overall, the accommodation is currently rated "C – (Poor)" for both condition and suitability, primarily due to the state of the main building; having three separate buildings on the campus; and the limitations of some of the facilities, such as external areas.

There is general agreement that the accommodation does not adequately support the delivery of education for some of our most vulnerable pupils who are unable to attend a mainstream school.

- 5.2 In 2014, following inspection, HMIE noted: "The buildings do not provide a satisfactory range or quality of facilities. Corridors and doors are narrow and challenge pupils with limited mobility. One classroom can only be accessed through the staffroom and there is a lack of space and specialist facilities. Whilst there have been some improvement works since inspection; the current school is not suitable in its condition or layout as a special needs school."
- 5.3 A number of meetings have been held since January 2021 to discuss the future replacement of the school. These meetings were attended variously by representatives of the parent council, the community council, local Elected Members of The Highland Council and its chief officers. The focus was to look at suitable sites for a new build. A number of potential sites were identified as possibilities within the Dingwall area. Most were subsequently discounted due to inadequate size, flood risks or infrastructure challenges.
- 5.4 In 2022, it was agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken for a proposal to relocate the school to Dochcarty Brae. It was subsequently agreed by the Full Council in October 2022 that the proposal to relocate would be taken forward and funding for the project would be secured as part of the Council's bid for LEIP (Learning Estate Investment Programme) 3. However, in September 2023, in the absence of further LEIP funding, plans to build a new St Clement's were put on hold following a review and reduction of the then capital programme on grounds of affordability. It was stated at that time that capital priorities, including a new St Clement's, could be reconsidered if at some point in the future there was a material change of circumstances that could provide an opportunity to reconsider the Council's capital programme.
- 5.5 Following the introduction of The Highland Investment Plan in May 2024, Dingwall was identified as a phase 1 project location and a new school for St Clement's was reinstated in the Capital Programme. In March 2025, The Highland Council agreed to move to a joint development for St Clement's and Dingwall Primary schools as separate entities on the same site within a new community POD. The integrated approach is designed to enhance service delivery and educational and community benefits. It was noted that this would require a new statutory consultation for St Clement's as it would be moving to a new site; and an informal period of engagement with relevant stakeholders was agreed so as to inform the

proposals for the consultation to be presented to the Education Committee. This engagement has informed the proposal as set out in Appendix 1.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 A consultant architect with extensive experience of designing new special schools and additional support needs facilities has been engaged to assist with the development of the project brief and the initial floor plans and external layouts. A series of design workshops with stakeholder groups to establish a clear vision for the new school building has commenced and this will allow the design and planning work to progress while the statutory consultation is underway.

Subject to a Committee agreement to proceed to statutory consultation, a public meeting will be held to discuss the Council's proposal. The St Clement's Parent Council Chair is being involved in the selection of the date of that meeting, and this will be confirmed at Committee. There will also be considerable opportunity for stakeholders to submit views to the Council ahead of the public meeting and subsequently prior to any final recommendation and decision being made.

At present, it is expected the statutory consultation timeline would see a final recommendation being considered by this Committee around Easter 2026, though this may be subject to change to ensure the Council has sufficient time to consider and respond to matters arising from the consultation. Much of the preliminary planning and development phases can be done in parallel to the consultation process so that progress can be made at pace.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 22 May 2025

Author: Derek Martin, Principal Education Officer and Robert Campbell, Service Lead Capital Planning and Estates

Appendix 1: Consultation Proposal Paper

Appendix 2: Proposed Site Location

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The proposal is to relocate St. Clement's School, Dingwall, to allow the creation of new accommodation

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

INTRODUCTION

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process:

- To replace the current St. Clement's School building with a new school building located on a new site, which will also accommodate a new Dingwall Primary School.

The proposed change, if approved, will be implemented when the new accommodation has been completed.

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Proposal Paper Published

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

- ☐ St. Clement's School
- ☐ Dingwall Public Library
- ☐ Dingwall Primary School

and published on the Highland Council website:

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

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

Business Support Team
Education Service
County Buildings
High Street
Dingwall
IV15 9QN

E-mail: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please also contact Business Support Team, Education Service, County Buildings, High Street, Dingwall, IV15 9QN.

E-mail: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

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

- (i) Parents of pupils attending St. Clement's School; including parents of pre-school pupils
- (ii) The Parent Council of St. Clement's School
- (iii) All staff of the school
- (iv) Parents of pupils attending Dingwall Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils
- (v) The Parent Council of Dingwall Primary School
- (vi) All staff of the school
- (vii) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal
- (viii) Trade union representatives
- (ix) All Community Councils for the Highland Council wards of Dingwall and Seaforth, Black Isle and Cromarty Firth, and Strathpeffer Community Council

- (x) All Councillors representing wards in the school catchment area
- (xi) Education Scotland

Advertisement in Local Media

A notice announcing the public meeting will be placed in the *Ross-shire Journal* and on the Highland Council's Facebook page and "X" account.

Consultation Period

The consultation for this Proposal will begin on 9 June 2025 and will end on 3 October 2025. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held, the week commencing 23rd or 1 July 2025 at 6.30pm, St Clement's Special School **[N.B. the exact date will be confirmed at the Education Committee meeting on 4 June 2025 following engagement with the St Clements Parent Council]**

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. Electronic invitations will be sent to all statutory consultees and the link for the meeting will be made available to others.

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 considered. 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.

Responses to the Proposals

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

Business Support Team
Education Service
County Buildings
High Street
Dingwall
IV159QN
Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

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

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

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

Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically should know that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may have to be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish their response to be made publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: “I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to councillors and officers of The 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, 5 September 2025 at 5.00pm.

Involvement of Education Scotland

When the proposal document is published, a copy will also be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, 12 September 2025, a copy of any relevant 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 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 9 October 2025. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries as they consider appropriate.

Review of Consultation Exercise

The Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meeting. It will then prepare a consultation report. This report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website as well as at the affected 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 Council’s Education Committee, who will make a recommendation to the full Highland Council.

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

At the present time the Council intends to publish its report in October 2025 prior to submission to the Council’s Education Committee 19 November 2025. However, this timescale may change depending on the nature of issues raised during

consultation, and the need to give full consideration to those issues. In the latter event, the report may not be submitted until a later Committee meeting.

Any proposal approved by the Education Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council. This is currently planned for 11 December 2025.

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, the reissuing of the proposal, or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period. In that event, relevant consultees and Education Scotland will be advised.

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 publish or otherwise make available information as to their arrangements for the placing of children in schools under their management (S.28 of the 1980 Act).
- 1.2 In common with all public bodies in Scotland, The Highland Council also has a duty to provide best value. This includes making arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance, whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost; and, in making those arrangements and securing that balance, to have regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equal opportunities requirements and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Reason for the Proposal

- 2.1 St. Clement's School currently suffers from poor quality accommodation. Relocating the school would permit the construction of a new build school.
- 2.2 St. Clement's School provides for some of the most vulnerable young people in Highland, and the Council has had a long-standing commitment to replace the school. A consultation was undertaken during 2022, on a proposal to relocate the school to a new site at Dochcarty Brae, Dingwall.
- 2.3 Prior to the 2022 consultation, the Council considered building a new St. Clement's School on the existing school site plus the adjacent site of a former church. The site requires flood risk assessment which may affect the developable area, contamination assessment, recreational access management plan to avoid any adverse effects on the integrity of the Cromarty Firth Special Protection Area, and a transport assessment. It's an existing school site, with the associated issues of disruption from a new build on a live school site. Existing buildings would require demolition, and the current school would need relocation. The Council would need to purchase the church, and the area available is too small.
- 2.4 In light of the above, and following consideration of a variety of other sites in Dingwall, the Council undertook a statutory consultation in 2022 on relocating St. Clement's School to the new site at Dochcarty Brae, on the edge of the town, to allow for the construction of a new school building. The Council's Education Committee agreed this recommendation at its meeting of 29th September 2022, and the proposal to relocate St. Clement's School to Dochcarty Brae was adopted by the full Highland Council on 27th October 2022. The Council agreed to include St Clements in its bid to the Scottish Government for LEIP 3 funding. However, in September 2023, in the absence of the LEIP bid being successful, plans to build a new St Clements

were put on hold following a review and reduction of the then capital programme on grounds of affordability, It was stated that capital priorities, including a new St Clements, could be reconsidered if at some point in the future there was a material change of circumstances that could provide an opportunity to reconsider the Council's capital programme.

- 2.5 In May 2024 the Highland Council adopted a new Highland Investment Plan (HIP), which sets out how the Council will work over the next 10 years to optimise its investment of resources in its learning estate in a prioritised manner to meet the needs of 21st century learning and teaching. As part of this, a new generation of community facilities was envisioned for the Highlands, with Points of Delivery (PODs) providing a range of public services brought together in a single location.
- 2.6 Within the HIP, a commitment was made to rebuild St Clement's School and retain its unique identity.
- 2.7 Following the approval of the HIP approach last year, work was undertaken to identify a site that could accommodate a community POD development for Dingwall. A suitable site has been identified adjacent to Dingwall Primary School and, although it is not currently in Council ownership, positive discussions have taken place with the landowners, Albyn Housing, regarding the acquisition of the site.
- 2.8 This new suggested site was not considered to be a viable option during the original statutory consultation process for St Clement's as the introduction of a separate school campus adjacent to the primary school would have exacerbated the traffic issues and other restrictions that exist there. However, relocating the primary school to this larger site as well would allow other co-located facilities to be included as part of an overall design layout that would overcome the previously identified restrictions. Also, a new distributor road to the north of this site has recently been completed.
- 2.9 Appendix 2 identifies the location of the proposed community POD site (the lower part of Site Reference DW02) and includes the relevant land areas that would be required for each of the component parts, i.e. the Primary School, the potential co-location of St Clement's School, and other co-located community and partner facilities. Part of the existing primary school site would be retained and incorporated within the new campus development to ensure adequate road and footpath access, car parking and drop-off areas, and compensatory green space.

Informal Consultation

- 3.1 A series of engagement events have been held to consider priorities for the Dingwall and Seaforth area, as part of developing an area place plan. Included in this were views regarding the future use of buildings; the opportunities for better use of premises for delivering services; and for co-location of various services. Council officers have also engaged directly with parent councils and specific community groups to raise awareness and

understand views on the HIP approach and the potential opportunities for Dingwall. A public drop-in event was held in Dingwall in November 2024 along with an online event to engage with the local community and obtain feedback. The initial feedback has been generally supportive of the longer-term strategic approach and the concept of a community POD, but some comments were made regarding the lack of information on the significant heritage of Dingwall, facilities to support tourism and visitors and how to improve the use of premises on the High Street.

- 3.2 Within the overall place plan consultation, officers of the Council have also engaged with parents of children at St. Clement's School over the future location of the new school building. There has been ongoing engagement with the parent council, with Council staff attending meetings and contributing to the parent council's AGM. Additional officer meetings have taken place with parent council office bearers around specific issues raised. In February 2025, survey meetings were additionally offered to all parents of children at St Clements, and 15 parents met with Council staff. A survey was also sent out by email, to which an additional 13 parents responded. A number of FAQ responses were circulated in response to survey feedback. Initial concept drawings of the potential new school at the POD site have also been shared with the St Clements parent council and Dingwall Community Council Chair. Further meetings have been held with the St Clements parent representatives in April 2025.
- 3.3 It should be noted that whilst the proposal is to locate the two schools on the same site, St. Clement's School will retain its own identity. A consultant architect with extensive experience of designing new special schools and additional support needs facilities has been engaged to assist with the development of the project brief and the initial floor plans and external layouts. A series of design workshops with stakeholder groups to establish a clear vision for the new school building has commenced and this will allow the design and planning work to progress while the statutory consultation is underway. Updated information will be included on the Council's website.
- 3.4 The Council has considered the views of parents submitted during informal engagement, described above. Having reviewed the options in their entirety, it takes the view that the relocation of St. Clement's to the new Dingwall POD site offers educational benefits, due to the opportunities that arise from co-location with Dingwall Primary School and the school's proximity to the town.

St. Clement's School – Description

- 4.1 St. Clement's is one of 3 special schools run by The Highland Council and provides education to children in the 3-18 age group. It is located in the centre of Dingwall and admits pupils from a wide area of Easter Ross, with a few pupils attending from further afield. The number attending the school fluctuates and some attend on a part-time basis, but generally there are between 48-50 pupils.

The school itself dates from the early years of the 20th century, although there have been many building modifications down the years. The current school accommodation comprises the original main building, a modular annexe building that was installed in 2015 and an older modular unit. Overall, the accommodation is currently rated “C – (Poor)” for both Condition and Suitability, mainly due to the state of the main building, having three separate buildings on the campus, and the limitations of some of the facilities, such as external areas.

There is general agreement that the accommodation does not adequately support the delivery of education for some of our most vulnerable pupils who are unable to attend a mainstream school. The proposed new build will significantly improve the learning environment for pupils. Further details on this are provided in Section 5 below.

Educational Benefits

- 5.1 The Council's previous decision to relocate the school to Dochcarty Brae was based on the principle that a new school building offered the prospect of strong educational benefit arising from improved accommodation and Dochcarty Brae was the best available site at that time.
- 5.2 A new school located at the Dingwall POD site will offer all the same educational benefits as the Dochcarty Brae option, in terms of improved accommodation as compared to the current school building. In addition, the co-location of the two schools offers further educational benefits:
- Improved access for specialised support and mainstream setting to support learning to meet the needs of individual children.
 - Increased opportunities for pupils to participate in a wider curriculum, where possible.
 - An opportunity for co-location with institutional partners; leading to better multidisciplinary working and increased access to services to deliver positive outcomes and for cooperation between partners, with effective and targeted deployment of resources.
 - A shared location can help break down barriers in the wider community for promotion of inclusion and making the transition to the wider world more accessible.
 - There may be opportunities to develop and maintain friendship groups across the location, building on wider community links. Integration between pupils gives mainstream pupils the opportunity to experience a more diverse cohort.
 - Staff training and moderation across the shared location can assist staff in meeting complex additional needs. The staff of the two schools already work together on child plans and have regular discussions on learning and progress. Co-location will help to facilitate this joint working.

Effects on School Transport

- 6.1 As the new school will be located less than a mile from the current site, there is not expected to be any significant effect on school transport arrangements.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 7.1 The relocation will have no impact on school management or staffing arrangements.

Effect on the Local Community

- 8.1 The proposal is not expected to have any negative impact on the wider local community. It will retain the traditional link between St. Clement's School and the town of Dingwall.

Integrated Impact Assessment

- 9.1 The proposal has been assessed as having no significant impacts on data handling, or on island and rural mainland communities.
- 9.2 In respect of age equality, the proposal relates to a special school and as such primarily affects children in the 3-18 age group and their parents. The proposal is advanced on the basis of educational benefit to the children in these age ranges. No negative age-related effects arise. Age is not a protected characteristic for the purposes of school provision.
- 9.3 With respect to climate change, the construction phase of the new building may result in additional CO₂ emissions, the new buildings will provide a long-term benefit in being built to the most modern environmental standards. The proposal could affect an area of woodland, but the overall effect on climate change will not be significant.
- 9.4 The new buildings would have a positive impact on disability, since they will include up to date and more inclusive facilities. As such they will have a positive overall effect on equalities, human rights, and children's health and wellbeing.

Recommendation

- 10.1 Taking the above into account, The Highland Council recommends that St. Clement's School is relocated from its current site to a new school adjacent to the current Dingwall Primary School.
- 10.2 This consultation 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

Dingwall Proposed Site Location: St Clement's Special School (DW02)



Opportunity 6 Site North of Ross Avenue

Area: 5.6 hectares
Local Development Plan: Part of DW02 Dingwall North - South of Tulloch Castle
Local Development Plan Uses: Housing

Comments on Site

- Existing woodland
- Gradient slopes downwards from North to South
- Zoned for housing in Development Plan
- Well connected to Primary School, existing and future residential areas

Next Steps: Feasibility Study

- Assess potential for: mixed use, community partner delivery, active travel

Site North of Ross Avenue

SCALE 1:2000
0 20 40 60 80 100m



Dingwall Points Of Delivery – Final Draft (5.12.2024 Update)