

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

### EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Torridon Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Shieldaig 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 Torridon Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Shieldaig Primary School. (Maps of the current catchment areas are at **Appendices B - Bi**).
- For the avoidance of doubt, it should be assumed that the related Pre-School provision is included within any reference below to a Primary School. In particular, any reference to Torridon Primary School should be taken as a reference to both the primary and nursery classes that operated prior to the mothballing of the school
- The proposed changes, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

## SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

### PUBLICATION INFORMATION

#### Proposal Paper Published

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

- Torricon Community Centre
- Shieldaig Primary School
- Gairloch Community Library
- West Ross Mobile Library

and published on the Highland Council website:

[www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations](http://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations)

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

Business Support Team  
Highland Council  
Camaghael Hostel  
Fort William  
PH33 7NE  
E-mail: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)

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

E-mail: Education. [Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto: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 Shieldaig Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) The Parent Council of Shieldaig PS.
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
- (iv) Staff of Shieldaig Primary School;
- (v) Trade union representatives;
- (vi) Torricon and Kinlochewe Community Council
- (vii) Shieldaig Community Council;
- (viii) Garve and District Community Council
- (ix) Education Scotland;
- (xxii) Highland Youth Convenor.

## **Advertisement in Local Media**

A notice announcing the public meetings 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 Monday 27 February 2023 and will end on Friday 21 April 2023. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

## **Public Meeting**

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

Torrison Community Centre, 28 March 2023 at 6.30pm.

Anyone wishing to attend the public meeting is invited to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Council, will be chaired by a senior elected councillor, and will be addressed by officers of the 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. A record of questions, responses and views will be taken and this will be published in the Consultation Report.

## **Responses to the Proposals**

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

Ian Jackson  
Education Officer (Resources)  
Camaghael Hostel  
Fort William  
PH33 7NE  
Email: Education. [Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Consultations@highland.gov.uk)

When responding, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “parent of child in the area”, “carer”, “relative”, “former pupil”, “teacher in local 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 April 2023 at 5.00pm.

### **Involvement of Education Scotland**

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will also be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 9 May 2023, a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period, as well as the summary note of the public meeting that will be held and so far as is practicable a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal, to be completed not later than 3 weeks after they receive the consultation papers – 29 May 2023. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries of people there as they consider appropriate.

### **Review of Consultation Exercise**

Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meeting. It will then prepare a Consultation Report. This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website as well as at the affected schools and local library, free of charge. The Report will include a summary of the written and oral representations made during consultation and a copy of the Education Scotland Report, together with the Council's considered response to the issues raised. The Report will include details of 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 People 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 November 2018, prior to submission to the Council's People Committee on 6 December 2018. 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 People Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

## **Scottish Ministers Call-in**

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

## **Note on Corrections**

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

## **DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL**

### **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 Torridon Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 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 Torridon Primary (see Section 3 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 5-9 below); to the educational benefits arising from closure (Section 10 below), to the effect of closure on the community (Section 14 below) and to the impact of differing travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Torridon catchment (Section 12 below) but who currently attend Shieldaig Primary.

### **Reasons for the Proposal/Chronology**

- 2.1 The proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
  - Torridon Primary School has been mothballed since the end of session 2011-12, and no children have attended the school since that time.
  - Current population figures within the school catchment indicate a maximum school roll of either 5 or 6 pupils over the next 5 years.
  - A school roll of this size provides significant impediments to the successful implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence (details below).
  - A school roll of 5-6 pupils hampers social interaction opportunities for children, who conversely benefit from attending larger schools amongst more children of their own age.
- 2.2 At the time the school was mothballed, there was a tenanted schoolhouse which formed part of the overall property (i.e., the school and schoolhouse had a shared external entrance, and were joined by an internal door). The resolution of the tenancy was a protracted process.
- 2.3 During 2019 the Council began informal discussions with the community about the status of the school – see details at paragraph 2.4 below. Queries were raised about the legal title to the land on which the school sits, and to the adjacent land used as a children's play park. These queries also took time to resolve. In addition, some members of the community did not favour a closure proposal, arguing instead for continued mothballing whilst attempts were made to find a longer-term solution for the school. Lastly, the sudden arrival of the COVID19 pandemic in the UK in March 2020 led to a postponement of action, due to the diversion of Council resources to address the outbreak.

- 2.4 During 2019 and 2020 several informal discussions were held with parents and with the local community council, concerning the future of Torridon School. Notes of these discussions have been appended as follows

**Appendix C** – Highland Council note of an informal meeting with parents held on 12 June 2019

**Appendix Ci** – Minutes of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council meeting of 12 June 2019. The Highland Council does not agree that these minutes are an accurate record of the discussion regarding Torridon Primary School.

**Appendix Cii** – Highland Council record of the discussion at the Community Council on 12 June 2019.

**Appendix Ciii** - Highland Council note of an informal meeting with parents held on 11 November 2020.

**Appendix Civ** – Highland Council note of a discussion with Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council on 8 December 2020.

- 2.5 Highland Council again contacted each of the parents in Torridon via email on 24 November 2022, to explain that the Council was considering moved to a formal closure consultation and to invite further comments. A similar email was sent to the local Community Council, who responded by indicating support for a statutory consultation exercise, particularly since the school buildings have been left empty for a long time and are deteriorating.

### **Current Details – Torridon Primary School**

- 3.1 Torridon Primary School is situated within the village of the same name. It is classed by the Scottish Government as a “very remote” rural school. The area historically served by the school includes the village of Torridon and the communities on the north side of Loch Torridon, as far as and including Lower Diabaig. The school has been mothballed since the end of session 2011-12.
- 3.2 When the school was first mothballed, pupils from Torridon attended either Shieldaig Primary or Kinlochewe Primary, although the majority attended Shieldaig. Kinlochewe Primary was mothballed in the summer of 2022, after the school roll dropped to one following a number of placing requests.
- 3.2 For the 2022-23 school session, there will be five pupils of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school. There is one pre-school child in the catchment, who would enter P1 in August 2024.
- 3.3 The above figures suggest that, were Torridon School to re-open with 100% of catchment pupils attending the school, the P1-7 roll figures for the forthcoming few years would be:
- 2023-24 – 5
- 2024-25 – 6
- 2025-26 – 5
- 2026-27 - 5
- 3.4 The school has one classroom plus a further room, which when the school last operated was set up as a nursery.

- 3.5 The school has a permanent capacity of 25. Based on the permanent capacity available, the notional 2023-24 roll of 5 pupils would represent 20% use of capacity.
- 3.6 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). Torridon Primary School is currently rated as "B" for educational suitability and "C" for building condition.
- 3.7 Given the length of time the school has been mothballed, there is no current HMIE Report.
- 3.8 The P1-7 pupils from Torridon who attend Shieldaig PS travel on school transport, at a cost of £155 per day, or £29,450 per school year. Were Torridon Primary to re-open, only one of the current pupils would be entitled to school transport over a distance of 2.5 miles. The potential annual cost can be estimated at £5 per day, or £950 per school year.

#### **Current Details – Shieldaig Primary**

- 4.1 Shieldaig Primary School is situated within the village of the same name. It is classed by the Scottish Government as a "very remote" rural school. The area served by the school includes the village of Shieldaig and the area from Balgy to Cuaig along Loch Torridon. Since the mothballing of Torridon School it has, for practical purposes, also taken pupils from that school's catchment. Since the mothballing of Kinlochewe PS in June 2022, it has also taken some pupils from that school's catchment.
- 4.2 The school building dates from well over one hundred years ago, but has recently undergone extensive modernisation with the conversion of the school house into a purpose-built Nursery accommodation. There are two classrooms, a Nursery room, a school kitchen, an office and several toilets. Adjacent to the school, there is an enclosed grassy playground, plus the Community football pitch and multi-use games area, which are located directly behind the school. These areas are all used by the children during outdoor breaks and P.E. The local church hall is also used for P.E. and as a performance venue.
- 4.3 For session 2022-23, the school has a roll of 25 pupils, with represents a significant increase on the typical school roll for Shieldaig earlier in the century. The current roll includes five pupils from within the Torridon catchment and three from within the Kinlochewe catchment. There are a further 7 children in the nursery class, including one from Torridon and two from Kinlochewe.
- 4.4 The Council publishes roll projections for each of its currently operational schools. The latest forecast for Shieldaig PS is attached at **Appendix D**, whilst a copy of the Council's methodology for calculating the forecasts can be found at **Appendix Di**. The projected roll forecast suggests the roll will continue to rise to 34 pupils by 2026-27, and thereafter stabilise.
- 4.5 The school has a permanent capacity of 50. The 2022-23 roll of 25 pupils represents 50% use of capacity.

- 4.5 Shieldaig Primary is currently assessed as “C” for Suitability and “B” for Condition.
- 4.6 No current HMle report is available.

## **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 Torridon PS with its current catchment area.
  - iii. To re-open Torridon PS with an expanded catchment area.
  - iv. To re-open Torridon PS as a form of specialist facility
- 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. The school has now been mothballed for 10 years and it is necessary to decide on its future.
- 6.2 A further period of “mothballing” would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the 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.
- 6.3 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. The status of mothballed schools should be regularly reviewed. Having undertaken such a review, Highland Council does not see continued mothballing as a realistic alternative for Torridon Primary.
- 6.4 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.
- 6.5 A continuation of mothballing would have no impact on the community.

## **Option 2 - Re-Opening of Torridon Primary School with its Current Catchment Area**

- 7.1 As set out in Section 3 above, if Torridon Primary were re-opened, it would therefore be as a single teacher school with a total roll in single figures. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching, particularly in terms of the requirements of the current curriculum. Further detail is provided at Section 10 below.
- 7.2 When Torridon Primary was last in operation, it was managed by a Head Teacher with class teaching responsibilities. Since then Highland Council has moved to an arrangement where small schools are managed as part of a “cluster” with other schools within the ASG. However, alternative management arrangements would not address the wider population issues within the Torridon area.
- 7.3 There has been no significant rise to the school age population of the Torridon area since the school was mothballed in 2012. Section 9 below discusses in detail the educational issues arising from the low local school roll figures.

## **Option 3 - Re-Opening of Torridon Primary School with an Expanded Catchment Area**

- 8.1 The Torridon PS catchment is linked by road to two other primary school catchments. To the east the school catchment borders that of Kinlochewe PS, which is itself mothballed after the roll fell to one at the end of session 2021-22. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to alter this catchment boundary in favour of Torridon PS, nor would such a change achieve anything in terms of boosting the potential roll at Torridon Primary.
- 8.2 To the south the Torridon catchment borders that of Shialdaig, the receiving school for the Torridon children. The schools are located around 7 miles apart.
- 8.3 An analysis of the home addresses of the Shialdaig pupils reveals that there are no current pupils located in addresses to the west of Shialdaig village itself. Moving the Torridon boundary to the east would not therefore add any pupils to the Torridon catchment, without extending it into Shialdaig itself.
- 8.4 Altering the catchment of Shialdaig PS in favour of Torridon would of course require a statutory consultation in its own right. Taking all the circumstances into account, it would not be appropriate to alter this catchment boundary in favour of Torridon Primary School.

## **Option 4 – Re-Opening Torridon Primary as Specialist Facility**

- 9.1 This was something suggested by local parents at an informal discussion held with Council officials in June 2019 – see Appendix C. Some parents expressed an interest in an educational facility in the village that would concentrate on Gaelic, music, and cultural education. Officials advised that in terms of school provision, Highland Council officials advised at the meeting

that, in operating its schools, the Council does not deviate from the Curriculum for Excellence, but that parents could develop a private facility if that were financially sustainable. There were no firm proposals about what sort of facility might be offered, but Council officials indicated that all options could be considered. It was agreed that parents would work on their proposals over the course of the next year, and that officials would return for a meeting in the summer term of 2020.

- 9.2 At the meeting between officials and parents in November 2020 – see appendix Ciii – it was noted that there had been no further developments on this suggestion.
- 9.3 Given the very small numbers of children in the Torridon area, the very limited facilities available at the school building, the lack of detail, and the need for Highland Council to follow CfE, the Council does not see this suggestion as a reasonable alternative to closure. The formal closure of Torridon Primary as a local authority school could however allow local parents to further develop such a proposal.

### **Educational Benefits**

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 With the above aim in mind, Highland Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing its school estate:
1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
  2. Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
  3. Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.
  4. Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
  5. Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary) although it is recognised that this may not always be possible in a rural Council area such as Highland.
  6. School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
  7. School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
  8. Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
  9. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
  10. The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
  11. Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built-up community.

- 10.3 It is Highland Council's view that the pupils from the Torridon Primary catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at Shieldaig Primary School.
- 10.4 Highland Council is of the view that the school environment should be of a quality that sustains and improves education provision, pupil performance and outcomes for the young people of Highland.
- 10.5. Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the modern school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. The children at Shieldaig Primary School are able to work collaboratively on various topics and activities.
- 10.6 Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.
- 10.7 Very small learning groups have a number of disadvantages. They are not only limited in size but also static, since there is no possibility of changing the membership. Very small rolls also limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
- 10.8 A healthy school roll of pupils at varying ages allows opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. This applies even to individual sports, where successful learning of skills is helped by talking and sharing of experiences. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices.
- 10.9 As with sports, larger rolls provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities. School shows, plays and public performances are events that that are much more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers. Larger pupil numbers also provide more opportunities for after school activities.
- 10.10 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.
- 10.11 In summary, a number of positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Torridon Primary with Shieldaig Primary.

### **Re-Allocation of Catchment**

- 11.1 Following the mothballing of Kinlochewe PS in the summer of 2022, Shieldaig Primary School provides the only reasonable option for re-allocating the Torridon PS catchment.

## **Effects on Differing Transport Arrangements**

- 12.1 As there are currently no children attending Torridon Primary School, no differing transport arrangement would need to be applied in the event of the formal closure of the school.
- 12.2 For the 2022-23 school session, there are four primary age pupils and one nursery age child travelling to Shieldaig Primary, who have longer journeys than would be necessary if Torridon Primary School were still operational. Some of these pupils are within walking distance of Torridon Primary, and others would have a shorter car journey were the school to re-open.
- 12.3 The driving time between Torridon Primary School and Shieldaig Primary School is given as 16 minutes (source: Google Maps). It is appreciated that potential driving times from the extreme ends of the catchment would be longer.
- 12.4 Calculations of the additional emissions of greenhouse gases arising from the current transport arrangements from Torridon to Shieldaig Primary suggest that the mothballing, and by extension the formal closure of, Torridon Primary, is currently resulting in just over 17 tonnes per annum of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions. The figures can however only be estimates as emissions are affected by the type of vehicle used for the transport contract, the speed at which vehicles are driven and the type of road travelled.

## **Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements**

- 13.1 As Torridon Primary has not operated since the end of school session 2011-12, there will be no impact on staff and school management arrangements from a formal closure.

## **Effect on the Local Community**

- 14.1 The village of Torridon has a first-class community centre located a short walk from the school building.
- 14.2 During informal discussions with local stakeholders, the Community Council in particular wished to have further information about the Title to the land currently occupied by Torridon Primary School and schoolhouse. In response the Council's legal team has undertaken extensive research to clarify the title and ownership aspects, which has taken time but which has ensured that whatever is ultimately decided, the path for any future use of the building is clearer. The Council's Title to Torridon School (including the school grounds and schoolhouse) is a Feu Charter by Duncan Darroch of Gourock and Torridon in favour of The School Board of the Parish of Applecross recorded in the Division of the General Register of Sasines applicable to the County of Ross and Cromarty on 23rd August 1875. It is believed that The National Trust for Scotland is the current owner of the surrounding Torridon Estate.
- 14.3 From an examination of the title it would appear that there is nothing in terms of the Council's title which would prevent the Council transferring the property to another party. Any application for a Community Asset Transfer, following any future closure of the school, would need to demonstrate a level of community benefit commensurate with the value of the site.

- 14.4 The school playground is an amenity for local children. The land occupied by the playpark is owned by the Council and is classed as Housing Revenue Account Land. This means any transfer of the site would require the consent of the Council as well as the Scottish Government. There is, additionally, a clause of pre-emption which prevents any sale without first having offered the same to the National Trust for Scotland.

### **Financial Consequences**

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 The table does not include property costs that would arise if Torridon PS were to become operational once more. At the present time this figure can only be a very rough estimate.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 16.1 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

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

### **Rural Impact Assessment**

- 17.1 Both Torridon Primary School and Shildaig Primary School are classed by the Scottish Government as "very remote rural schools". Although the proposal involves a formal closure of service, the service itself has not operated since June 2012. In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position.
- 17.2 The relocation of service (which in practical terms has already taken place) involves moving local school provision from Torridon to Shildaig, a distance of 7.5 miles.
- 17.3 As set out in Section 11 above, the Highland Council believes that the proposal offers educational benefits.

- 17.4 The maximum additional travel time for school pupils from the Torridon PS site to Shieldaig is 16 minutes (source: Google Maps). As school transport is provided by the Council for pupils aged P1 and above, the proposal would not be expected to have any significant impact on fuel poverty.

### **Mitigation of Adverse Effects**

- 18.1 The main adverse effect for children is the additional travel from Torridon to Shieldaig, details of which are provided above. In practice this is already taking place and has done since 2012. Funded school transport is and will continue to be provided to P1-7 pupils from the Torridon catchment who attend Shieldaig Primary School.

### **Recommendation**

- 19.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Torridon Primary School, currently “mothballed,” is closed and the catchment area assigned either to Shieldaig Primary School.
- 19.2 The Council must formally consult on changes to provision. This consultation paper is issued in terms of the authority’s agreed procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the Education Committee of the Highland Council.

**END OF PROPOSAL PAPER**