



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

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

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

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

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting held at Kinlochewe Village Hall on 28 January 2025.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 21 November 2024, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Kinlochewe Primary School, re-assigning its catchment to that of Gairloch Primary School.
- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B - G** are the appendices to the original proposal.

- 1.3 Kinlochewe Primary School has been mothballed since the summer of 2022, when the remaining pupils transferred to either Gairloch Primary School or Shildaig Primary School.
- 1.4 Having once again reviewed the status of Kinlochewe Primary, it is the Council's view that there is an insufficient number of children of suitable age in the Kinlochewe catchment who wish to attend Kinlochewe Primary School, and that consequently the school is no longer viable. Further details on this are provided in Sections 6 and 10 below.
- 1.5 Kinlochewe Primary School is designated as a rural school under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In that context, the Council has had special regard to:
 - any viable alternative to the closure proposal; alternatives were considered at Sections 6-10 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and have been reconsidered in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5-10 below.
 - the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference to (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community. The effect on the local community was considered at Section 15 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and is further considered at Sections 6, 8 and 10 below, in the light of representations received during consultation.
 - the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to;
 - the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact. The effects on school transport were considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper, (**Appendix A**) and reconsidered in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 6 and 10 below.

2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 13 January 2025 to Friday 28 February 2025. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:
 - (i) Parents/carers of pupils attending Gairloch Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
 - (ii) Parents/carers of pupils attending Shildaig Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
 - (iii) The Parent Council of Gairloch Primary School.
 - (iv) The Parent Council of Shildaig Primary School.
 - (v) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
 - (vi) Staff of Gairloch Primary School.

- (vii) Staff of Shieldaig Primary School.
- (viii) Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council.
- (ix) Gairloch Community Council.
- (x) Shieldaig Community Council.
- (xi) Garve and District Community Council.
- (xii) Trade Union representatives.

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

2.4 A public meeting was held at Kinlochewe Community Hall on 28 January 2025. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website, “X” Account and Facebook page, and in the *Ross-shire Journal*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

3.0 Review of proposals following the consultation period

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

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

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

4.0 Responses

4.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**. There were 4 written responses (not including the pupil questionnaires). Copies of the responses can be found at Appendices 3i-3xiv.

4.2 The views of pupils of a suitable age at Gairloch and Shieldaig Primary Schools (which included the pupils living within the Kinlochewe catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire. Appendix 3iii summarises the views of the children at Gairloch Primary, whilst Appendix 3v contains the view of the sole pupil from Kinlochewe attending Shieldaig Primary.

5.0 Overview of Issues raised during the consultation period

5.1 There were 22 written responses from pupils of Gairloch Primary. The detailed comments from pupils can be viewed at Appendix 3iii and Appendix 3v.

5.2 HM Inspectors visited Gairloch Primary School and Shieldaig Primary School and had discussions with parents, staff and children. They noted that children currently in the catchment area are happy and settled at alternative primary schools, with most opting for Gairloch Primary School, which has transport provided. Both Shieldaig and Gairloch Primary Schools are able to offer appropriate learning environments, with the opportunity for group learning and team activities.

- 5.3 The arguments advanced by the pupils in favour of re-opening the school, are set out at Issues 1-3 below, together with arguments put forward in support of closure.
- 5.4 There were 4 written responses received from other stakeholders. Two were from parents of current primary age children, another from a former pupil and former parent, and the other from Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council. In general, three themes have emerged – i. Early Years provision, ii. Concerns around school transport, and iii. Questions around future school catchments.
- 5.5 The public meeting was reasonably well-attended, given the small size of the local community. Broadly speaking, the discussion focused on the three themes set out in paragraph 5.4.
- 5.6 The main arguments put forward are summarised below, together with the responses from the Council. Where different responses raise similar issues, these have been “grouped” for the purposes of the response.

6.0 Responses to the Issues raised in Public Consultation

- 6.1 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of re-opening are set out at Issues 1-3 below and addressed at Responses 1-3.

Issue 1

- I think they should reopen Kinlochewe Primary because it will save petrol.
- I think it's a good idea because people who go to Gairloch have to get the bus and their parents have to pay the bus so they go to school so I think it's easier not to pay.
- Because it would be extra work if you change what the building is used for and everyone really enjoyed going there for school and nursery. I really hope you can do that.

Response 1

Parents don't have to pay fares for the bus taking children to Gairloch High School, and the bus has to go to the High School anyway.

If the school closes the Council might transfer the building to the local community or sell it to someone else. Whoever takes over the building would need to do work on changing it, but at the moment it's just an empty school building, not doing anyone any good. It could become something much more useful for the village.

Issue 2

I wish all the kids in Kinlochewe would just go to Kinlochewe School, that would be much better.

Response 2

The Council understands what is being said here. We agree with it. However, Kinlochewe School was mothballed because most of the parents in the area (and there were not that many) had sent their children to other schools.

Issue 3

I really like the playground and the school and want people to look after the building too. It would save money to have the school in Kinlochewe, from the transport.

Response 3

The primary school age children from Kinlochewe are travelling to Gairloch on the bus that takes pupils to Gairloch High School which the Council pays for anyway, so any additional transport costs are small. In any case the Council saves money by not employing staff at Kinlochewe Primary.

If the school closes, the Council will listen to any proposals for use of the building and grounds by the community.

- 6.2 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of continuing to mothball Kinlochewe Primary School are set out at Issue 4 below and addressed at Response 4.

Issue 4

I think we should think about it more because Kinlochewe School could turn into another thing like a creative thing or a Sunday School and Kinlochewe kids could come to Gairloch Primary.

Response 4

The Council has been thinking about the future of the school for almost 3 years now, so we think it is time to decide.

- 6.3 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of closing Kinlochewe Primary School are set out at Issue 5 below, and addressed at Response 5.

Issue 5

- So the children from Kinlochewe can still be with their friends.
- *I enjoy Gairloch Primary and I don't want to leave. Kinlochewe Primary had way less people.
- I prefer to go to Gairloch because some people want to stay at Gairloch and like playing with their friends.

- I think that if people from Kinlochewe come to Gairloch Primary it would give people an opportunity to meet new people, especially for people going to the High School because they can meet more people who they are going to High School with.
- Because all the teachers are really good in Gairloch.
- Because there is no point in opening another school of like 5 people.
- *Because I'm good friends with them.
- I think that if Kinlochewe Primary opens it might not have many people.
- So there is more people to play.
- So there is more people.

Response 5

The Council agrees with these comments. It's great for us to see that so many of the children enjoy being at Gairloch Primary.

- 6.4 The arguments advanced in written responses are set out at Issues 6-12 below and addressed at Responses 6-12. Where different responses raise similar concerns, these have, to an extent, been combined as a single issue.

Issue 6

I have read the proposal for Kinlochewe Primary School and am writing to you as a former student of Kinlochewe Primary and former resident of Kinlochewe village, with a child who also attended Kinlochewe Pre-School before it closed. This news is extremely disheartening. I understand the reasoning, essentially to save money really. Particularly as the school needs some maintenance. But there are currently at least 8 families with young children in Kinlochewe itself, of which around 7 are primary school age and 6 are pre-school age or younger. This is more children than Poolewe Primary currently has. We also saw Shieldaig Primary go from around 7 kids to almost 27 in the last few years, which shows how quickly things can change. Currently, there is also currently enough teachers in the ASG to cover Kinlochewe Primary re-opening. I think you should re-consider closing Kinlochewe Primary School, it would be a huge loss to the future of the community.

Response 6

Although there are a number of families with pre-school or primary age children in the area, Kinlochewe Primary was originally mothballed because the majority of parents had placed their children in other schools, via placing requests.

The consultation exercise has not identified any significant demand amongst parents for a re-opening of Kinlochewe Primary. On the contrary, there seems to be a general acceptance that the school is no longer viable.

There is no clear evidence to support the suggestion that the closure of a village school leads to a decline in local population. The Scottish Government's Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education, which reported in 2014, noted that the existence of a school is not always a pre-requisite for a community to exist or thrive, and that there is a lack of robust evidence on how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of closure) links to the sustainability of communities. As noted above, Kinlochewe Primary was first mothballed precisely because of a decline in the number of children attending, despite the presence of a local school.

School enrolments in Highland are in decline generally. Since 2018 the annual total number of primary school children in Highland has been:

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
17349	17301	16835	16714	16572	16187	15895

As can be seen, the number has dropped each year, and this pattern is expected to continue for the next few years at least. Sadly, this has inevitable repercussions for our primary schools.

Issue 7

I would suggest that as Achnasheen is nearer to Strathgarve Primary than Gairloch Primary, then the catchment area should be split in two with Achnasheen going to Strathgarve and Kinlochewe going to Gairloch. This would mean no school transport has to try and get up and down Glen Docharty safely in the winter months and children in Achnasheen will have less travel to/from school.

Response 7

The above argument is not unreasonable, but it will not be possible for the Council to make such a change as a result of the current consultation, as we have not consulted on the specific proposal to change the catchment in this way. The legislation that prescribes the consultation process for school closure proposals also sets out the process to be followed for changes to school catchment areas. The process includes consulting with pupils, parents and staff within "any school affected by the proposal."

Currently, Achnasheen lies within the primary school catchment for Kinlochewe Primary School, and therefore the secondary school catchment for Gairloch High School. Moving Achnasheen into the Strathgarve Primary School catchment would move it into the secondary catchment for Dingwall Academy. We have not consulted the parents of either Gairloch High or Dingwall Academy about such a proposal.

In light of this representation, the Council will consider whether to undertake a consultation on the change, but this could only take place following the completion of the current exercise on the future of Kinlochewe Primary.

Issue 8

Highland Council should investigate the possibility of permitting parents to choose whether to send their parents to Shieldaig Primary School or Gairloch Primary School, with the introduction of a shared catchment. This is also relevant to pre-school education.

There are still several primary aged and younger children in the village, and families that may go on to have children. We feel that consideration needs to be given to the alternative provision that is given to those children. Many children whose parents chose to put them to Gairloch did so because that was the only option with transport. If they had been given the option of Shieldaig with transport they may have chosen differently. We chose Shieldaig for many reasons including the fact that it was our cluster school, and has more of the small community school feel that we moved here for. We would suggest catchment zoning to Shieldaig to future-proof its numbers, or parents to have the choice as travel time is more or less the same to either.

Response 8

The Highland Council's system of school catchments is for the management of school enrolment, that is, P1 ages and above. Catchment areas do not apply to pre-school education and childcare, where flexibility is a key principle.

For the purposes of school enrolment, the Council generally follows a policy of allocating every address in Highland to a school designated for that address. At entry to P1, and to S1, children are automatically enrolled in their designated school, although parents may submit a placing request for their children to attend an alternative school. There are a small number of exceptions to this principle, all of them resulting from Committee decisions on school closures in the 1980s and 1990s, taken by the former Highland Regional Council.

Education authorities are required by law to secure "adequate and efficient provision of school education" and our catchment-based school enrolment system is one of the means by which we give effect to that. Highland Council spends a significant sum annually on school transport, a reflection of our relatively sparse and scattered population. A system in which parents had a choice of transport to more than one school would require a considerable increase to our expenditure on school transport, with an inevitable knock-on effect to expenditure in other areas of the Council's budget.

The Council does recognise that there is little difference in the distance and travel time between Kinlochewe and Gairloch on the one hand and Kinlochewe and Shieldaig on the other. On balance however, the Council does not feel it can justify allowing a choice of transport to either school. The decisions taken along these lines during the last century have had a long-term effect on the Council, and are, understandably, perceived as unfair by parents to whom such a choice is not extended.

Issue 9

TKCC reiterates the concerns of local parents regarding school transport and the current unsatisfactory situation of four-year-olds having to share transport with secondary school pupils. A separate arrangement for primary age pupils should be investigated whether they are travelling to and from Shieldaig or Gairloch

Response 9

It is common practice in Highland for primary school age pupils to share school transport with secondary age children. There is no reason to treat pupils travelling to Gairloch any differently from pupils elsewhere in Highland.

The Council can look at a variety of measures to mitigate any concerns about the sharing of transport. This might include introducing a buddying system, or possibly reserving seats at the front of the bus for primary age children. On some occasions we would look at whether it is appropriate for a very young child to travel with secondary age pupils.

Issue 10

No pre-school provision is available for Kinlochewe children without travelling to either Gairloch or Shieldaig. Therefore, if there was a proven need to re-open Kinlochewe Primary, it would be key to also provide pre-school education within Kinlochewe.

We are concerned about the challenges of accessing nursery and the impact this will have on families living in our village. Whether it was Shieldaig or Gairloch nursery parents would need to do two hours of driving a day to drop their child off. This is prohibitive to those who don't have a car or cannot afford the time or expense. This disproportionately discriminates against lower income families, which in turn has obvious implications for our community. The significant transport burden becomes a factor in parents' decisions on whether to take the advantage year at nursery or not. Parents should not be put in a position where they have to put their transport costs ahead of their child's developmental readiness for school.

We would suggest dedicated primary/nursery transport with adequate supervision. If that is not possible then a peripatetic play worker to run toddler/nursery sessions in the village.

Response 10

The current Proposal is to close the school and the pre-school nursery. The Council does not think it realistic to maintain a pre-school nursery if the school itself closes, not least because of the issues that would arise with the management of such a facility. There has also been no early years' service in Kinlochewe for a number of years, as the provision ceased operating even prior to the mothballing of the school itself in 2022.

We do recognise, however, that the closure of the school and nursery would mean that parents of pre-school children have long journey times to access the nearest school nurseries, and that the Highland Council does not provide transport for pre-school children.

Council officials met with local pre-school parents (online) on 2 April to discuss options that might be possible locally. Suggestions made at the meeting included:

- The funding of a local childminder, to provide an early years' service in the community. It was acknowledged that the small number of children in the community was a potential barrier, and that accommodation would also likely be an issue. Whilst the local community hall has space, the room would require an extensive upgrade to gain registration with the Care Inspectorate.
- Failing the provision of a full-time childminder, the community would welcome some form of peripatetic service, even if for one day a week.
- The possibility of an outdoor "forest nursery" was mooted.
- In respect of transport, the Council should consider using the local community bus, with a transport escort to ensure suitable supervision.

The Council has agreed to work with the local community to investigate whether any of the above suggestions could be viable.

The lack of Early Years is acknowledged as the main adverse effect of a permanent closure. This must be balanced against the evidence that a school in Kinlochewe is no longer viable.

Issue 11

Where are the School Fund monies from Kinlochewe held? These monies had been fund raised by Kinlochewe Primary and it is only right that HC returns them so that they can be shared between Shieldaig and Gairloch Primary Schools.

Response 11

The School Fund is retained at present as Kinlochewe Primary might still re-open, unless and until the current closure proposal is implemented. If the school is closed the School Fund will be split between Gairloch Primary and Shieldaig Primary, probably in proportion to the number of Kinlochewe pupils attending.

Issue 12

There is a general concern that there is no accommodation for key education workers in this area, e.g. for pre-school, primary and secondary school teaching staff. This is a matter which needs addressed to maintain an adequate complement of education staff within our local schools.

Response 12

The availability of accommodation for schools-based staff is not one of the factors that has led to the lack of demand for places at the school.

Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 7.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 5**.
- 7.2 In their report, Education Scotland HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits outlined by The Highland Council in their proposal to permanently close Kinlochewe Primary School. Children currently in the catchment area are happy and settled at alternative primary schools, with most opting for Gairloch Primary School, which has transport provided. Both Shieldaig and Gairloch Primary Schools are able to offer appropriate learning environments, with the opportunity for group learning and team activities. Since it was mothballed, the existing Kinlochewe Primary School building has begun to deteriorate and may require investment to bring it into use.
- 7.3 Inspectors noted that stakeholders were concerned at the loss of pre-school provision in Kinlochewe; that families may not be able to access the provision at Shieldaig and Gairloch due to the distance and time involved and a lack of transport; local people in the village do not want to lose the only playground; and stakeholders would like the Council to consider giving parents the choice of both Shieldaig and Gairloch Primary Schools instead of making the catchment area Gairloch Primary School only. Education Scotland recommended that, if the proposal is agreed, the Council should engage further with the local community to address the issues they have raised.

8.0 Effects on the Community

- 8.1 Paragraphs 13.1 - 13.3 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council's assessment of the effects of closure on the local community and advises that Highland

Council would be keen to work with the local community to see whether the current school building and site could be turned over to community use.

- 8.2 The consultation exercise identified concerns about the effect of the school closure on the future health of the community. The issues raised are addressed at Response 6 above.
- 8.3 Response 6 highlights that there is no clear evidence to support the suggestion that the closure of a village school leads to a decline in local population. The Scottish Government's Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education, which reported in 2014, noted that the existence of a school is not always a pre-requisite for a community to exist or thrive, and that there is a lack of robust evidence on how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of closure) links to the sustainability of communities.

9.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

- 9.1 There were no alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

10.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure

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

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Sections 6-10 of the Proposal Paper identified and discussed the following alternatives to closure:

- i. To continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement.
- ii. To re-open Kinlochewe Primary School with its current catchment area.
- iii. To re-open Kinlochewe Primary School with an expanded catchment area.
- iv. To re-open Kinlochewe Primary School as a school offering Gaelic Medium education.

- 10.2 Sections 7 and 8 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council's consideration as to why Options i and ii above would not be viable options for Kinlochewe Primary School. No additional suggestions were made during consultation.
- 10.3 Similarly, in respect of option (iii) in paragraph 10.1 above, Section 9 of the original Proposal Paper set out the reasons why an expanded catchment area would not be a viable option for Kinlochewe Primary School. Again, no suggestion to this effect was made during consultation.
- 10.4 It was suggested in consultation that, in the event Kinlochewe Primary were closed, that a joint catchment should be created for the Kinlochewe area, allowing a choice between Shildaig Primary School and Gairloch Primary School. Another respondent suggested the community of Achnasheen should

be re-zoned to the Strathgarve Primary School catchment rather than the Gairloch Primary catchment.

- 10.5 The above suggestions are not “alternatives to closure”. Rather they are suggestions for alternative courses of action if the school does close. The issues are discussed at Responses 7 and 8 above.
- 10.6 Response 7 above explains why the Council cannot implement the suggested change for Achnasheen, as a result of the current consultation. It does however leave open the possibility of a new consultation to effect the change requested.
- 10.7 Response 8 sets out the Council's view on the suggestion of a joint catchment.
- 10.8 Section 10 of the original Proposal Paper set out the reasons why re-opening Kinlochewe Primary School as a school offering Gaelic Medium education would not be a realistic option. No suggestion to this effect was made during consultation.
- 10.9 Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Sections 6-10 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal.
- 10.10 No further alternative approaches were suggested during the consultation exercise.
- 10.11 The Council has also reconsidered the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to; (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

The potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper and is further considered at Section 8 above.

- 10.12 The Council has further reconsidered the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact, (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities.
- 10.13 The impact of the proposal on travel time was considered at Section 13 of the original proposal paper. As Kinlochewe Primary School has been mothballed since the summer of 2022, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. It is accepted that the travel times from Kinlochewe to Gairloch are long for primary school children. However, this must be balanced against the reality of the simple lack of demand for a school at Kinlochewe that has now been evident for almost 3 years.

11.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers

- 11.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 26 June 2025 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so up until midnight on **16 July 2025**. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 20 August 2025 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.
- 11.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to close Kinlochewe Primary School is asked to email schoolclosure@gov.scot or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by midnight on 16 July 2025**.
- 11.3 Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

12.0 Legal issues

- 12.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 12.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000). As with all Council duties, the Council also has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value, and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). Each of the above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

13.0 Financial Implications

- 13.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as Appendix D to the Proposal Paper.

14.0 Integrated Impact Assessment

14.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment has been prepared, covering Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Socioeconomic Effects, Climate Change, Data Protection, and a Mainland Rural Area Assessment.

14.2 As the school is already mothballed, the Impact Assessment did not identify any significant issues relating to the above. The main identified issue was around Early Years provision, as discussed at Response 10 above.

15.0 Effects on School Transport

15.1 The effects on school transport were considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper. As there are no pupils currently attending Kinlochewe Primary School, there are no differing school transport arrangements to take into account.

16.0 Mitigation of Adverse Effects

16.1 Adverse effects were considered at S.18 of the proposal Paper, and as part of Integrated Impact Assessment and none were identified. These assessments were based on the fact that there are currently no pupils attending Kinlochewe Primary School.

16.2 Although no adverse effects can be identified for current pupils, a number of the consultation responses highlighted that the closure of the school would mean it would be difficult for pre-school children in Kinlochewe to access early years education and childcare, as compared with a hypothetical scenario in which Kinlochewe Primary was re-opened, with the Early Years facility that once operated there.

16.3 The Council held further informal discussions with local parents over this issue, following the completion of the consultation exercise. Various suggestions were made around mitigation and the Council will be actively pursuing these in consultation with parents.

16.4 Appropriate school transport is and will continue to be provided for any children travelling from Kinlochewe to Gairloch for school. Some concerns were raised about the suitability of the school transport. These are addressed at Response 9 above.

17.0 Conclusion

17.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 above. For the reasons set out in detail in sections 5-8 above, Highland Council considers that implementation of the closure proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.

17.2 The most significant reason for closure is that firstly, there is general agreement that there is no possibility of re-opening Kinlochewe Primary School, due to the lack of children willing to attend. There is, additionally no evidence to suggest

that the number of children in the catchment in the future would be enough to make the school viable, and that there would consequently be educational disadvantages arising from such a decision. Furthermore, the school has now been mothballed for 3 years, and it is time to come to decision on the permanent future of the school. Lastly, the alternative provision, Gairloch Primary School is itself a rural school.

- 17.3 Education Scotland staff visited Gairloch Primary and Shieldaig Primary School, to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses. They agree that the Highland Council's proposal will result in educational benefits for the children of the Kinlochewe Primary School catchment area.
- 17.4 The Assistant Chief Executive (People), on reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; concludes that the proposal offers educational benefits and that implementation of the Proposal in full is the most appropriate response to the reason for formulating the Proposal. The reasons for this conclusion are set out at Sections 5-10 above.

18.0 Recommendation

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

Kate Lackie
Assistant Chief Executive (People)
8 May 2025