

CONSULTATION MEETING – PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH GAELIC MEDIUM CATCHMENT AREAS FOR CRAIGHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL, AND TAIN ROYAL ACADEMY

HELD AT CRAIGHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL – 11 FEBRUARY 2025 – 6.30pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Panel

Cllr. Maureen Ross - Chairperson
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources
Lena Walker, Gaelic Education Support Officer
Pauline Pearson, Education Support Officer

In Attendance

Eileen Henderson, Head Teacher, Craighill Primary School
Barbara Daly, Education Scotland
Dolina Grant, Gaelic Community Officer, Highland Council
3 class teachers from Craighill Primary School (Lesley Hayes, Sheena MacAskill and Morven Sanderson)
13 members of the public

The Chairperson – Cllr. Maureen Ross introduced herself as Vice-Chair of the Local Area Committee and welcomed everyone to the consultation meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to formally establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Craighill Primary School, and Tain Royal Academy, as set out in the recommendation to the proposal Paper.

The Proposal has been issued as a result of statutory guidance on Gaelic Education, produced by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Council officials present tonight were Ian Jackson, Education Officer, (Resources); Lena Walker, Gaelic Education Manager; and Pauline Pearson, Education Support Officer (North)

The Chairperson then invited Ian Jackson to describe the consultation process and the detailed reasons for issuing the Proposal.

Ian commented the Council is required to introduce GM catchment areas under the terms of Statutory Guidance issued by BnaG. The setting up of a catchment area involves a statutory consultation, of which this meeting was part. We are currently in the initial phase of that consultation, which is due to end on Friday 7 March, and

anyone who wants to submit views in writing should do so by that date. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather views, and we will try to answer any questions that are raised.

The formal process has a number of stages and gives ample opportunity for views to be expressed to the Council before any final decision is made. Once the public consultation ends on 7 March, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper, the note of the meeting tonight, and any written representations, and will form a view on the educational benefits of the proposal. Education Scotland will contact Craighill Primary and Tain Royal Academy, and they will be keen to hear from any parents who wish to make their views known. The Council has to take account of Education Scotland's view on the educational benefits and respond to any points raised by their report, as well as any representations received as a result of the consultation process. Following the completion of that stage, the Council will prepare a Report reviewing the consultation exercise and present it to the Council's Education Committee. The Review Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, and anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be invited to make "further representations" during those 3 weeks. Any further representations that are made are submitted to the members of the Committee, either in advance or tabled on the day, so that members are fully informed of any issues that may have arisen. Members will also see copies of the original responses and the note of this meeting.

Because of the Statutory Guidance we mentioned earlier, the Council has to set up Gaelic Medium catchments. What is up for debate is its extent of that catchment. The GM catchment we are proposing for Craighill and TRA encompasses all the schools within the Tain, Dornoch and Invergordon ASGs, meaning that children from these areas will be eligible to enrol in GME at Craighill/TRA if they live within the relevant EM catchments. Up to now there has been a "custom and practice" arrangement in respect of any children who wanted to attend Gaelic Medium education, and there are children from outwith Tain who attend Craighill and TRA, in order to access GME. To an extent therefore, this Proposal is simply formalising arrangements which have already been operating in practice.

Although we are making this Proposal primarily in response to the statutory guidance on Gaelic Education, we also feel that the Proposal has educational benefits in promoting the Gaelic language and bilingualism. My colleague Lena Walker will talk more about that in a few moments.

In summary, the benefit of the Proposal is that we're giving clarity to parents in respect of GME, making clear where entitlement exists and where it doesn't exist, and that's an improvement on the existing arrangements based on custom and practice.

The Chairperson then invited Lena Walker to outline the educational benefits of GME

Lena advised that the Highland Council had been offering GME now for about 40 years, and that within Highland, the presumption is that children are entitled to have their education through the medium of Gaelic. Historically we have not had catchment area for GME, although we have always had regular enquiries for parents about their nearest GM provision. The GM catchment areas help to define which school children have the right to attend when accessing GME. It also provides equity, because there have always been catchment areas for English medium education, but not for GME. The Statutory Guidance on Gaelic education requests that local authorities set up GM catchments, and Highland Council has led the way in Scotland on the creation of these. We have 20 primary schools offering GME, and this is the last to have its GM catchment decided.

The Chairperson then opened the meeting to the floor.

Q1 – I understand why GM catchment areas are being proposed, but I would have to challenge the equity issue, as we are effectively blocking the entire county of Sutherland out of GME. It would be useful to understand whether there is a plan to reinstate GME somewhere in Sutherland, and why there was a decision not to include the Golspie ASG as part of the GM catchment area. The ASG includes the villages of Lairg, Rosehall, Rogart, Golspie, and Brora, from where historically we have had a number of children coming to GME.

A1 (Ian) – The first thing is to say that if there are any existing children coming from the outwith the proposed catchment, we won't disrupt their existing education. On the wider point, there's a judgment call here in terms of balancing reasonable access to GME and distance. This is a consultation and we need to listen to people's opinions, and if there is an opinion tonight that the Golspie ASG should be included in this GM catchment, then we need to go away and think about that. I can't give promises about what the final decision will be, but we need to consider it. We sought to define what we thought was a reasonable travelling distance. There's always an issue of where you draw the line, and if you include the Golspie ASG you are potentially going all the way up to Helmsdale.

Q2 – Theoretically yes, but the likelihood of someone putting a 5 year-old to travel in a taxi from Kinbrace to Tain is unrealistic. We have had pupils though from Golspie, from Rogart and from Lairg. If you are talking "custom and practice" there is absolutely a history of children from those villages attending GM at Craighill successfully. Some of those have gone on to GME at TRA, other have gone on to attend their local secondary school in Golspie. It would strike me that the sensible thing to do would be to include the Golspie ASG.

A2 (Ian) - In answer to the other part of your question about reinstating GME in Sutherland, as you know there was formerly GME at Bonar Bridge PS and at Tongue PS, but for various reasons those provisions fell away. The same Statutory Guidance that introduced GM catchments specified a process under which families with pre-

school children can approach the Council with a request to introduce GME in a school, and if there are enough children there is an onus on the Council to respond positively to such requests. So, if there was sufficient demand, we would look again at those provisions, which have never been formally closed, they are only mothballed.

(Lena) – As Ian says, these provisions are not permanently closed, so if parents have an interest in starting them up again, there is an open door for that. There is ongoing action at present with opening new GM provision at Applecross and at Lochaline.

Q3 – Most people in those communities who have young children will have no idea that opportunity is available. I was involved in getting the GME at Bonar Bridge up and running. You have to get a big enough group of parents together, it takes time and the clock is always running, with children getting older, so a wider GM catchment might be a more effective way of giving children access.

(Comment from the floor) – Most parents don't start thinking about English or Gaelic medium education before their children are about two or three years old, and then they have 18 months to 2 years to have provision set up. You need to demonstrate demand and get staff in place before their child hits school age. This is very difficult where no provision currently exists and where there is no communication from Highland Council about the opportunities that exist.

A3 (Ian) – Lena can maybe talk in a minute about what we have on our website about GME. As a counterpoint to some of the issues raised about Golspie, when we started this process and we were having discussions with our colleagues at Bòrd na Gàidhlig, we were proposing some very wide catchment areas, and they were taking the opposite approach. They argued that the catchment areas were too wide and that we making them so to avoid opening GME in other locations. Rather than having people travel long distances, they argued we should be creating provision more locally.

Q4 – So why not just create GME more locally?

A4 (Ian) - If there was a demand, we would.

Q5 – But if the Council are going to close off access to GME for certain communities, surely there is an onus on you to actually lead the development of more local provision? It's too much to ask from parents, in too short a window of time, when people are already busy, to ask parents to lead. It feels like the barriers are insurmountable.

A5 (Ian) – Lena has already mentioned the examples of Applecross and Lochaline, where parents came to the Council to request GME.

Q6 – And how did the recruitment go in Applecross, because I heard it took a long time, so presumably children had to start their education in English, even though the parents had done all the work necessary?

A6 (Lena) – The timeline is very strict once we receive a request. The Highland Council has only 6 weeks, or 12 weeks depending on what assessment we follow. We have to establish whether there is a need for GME, and in that case we moved very quickly to an advertisement. The recruitment process itself is outwith our control, in that we are dependent on teachers applying.

Q7 – We all know there is a finite number of Gaelic speaking teachers in the country, and that the recruitment process is almost always glacial. It's not news that it takes a while to find a teacher for new GM provision in a rural community. Knowing that, doesn't the Council have an obligation to lead, rather than putting the onus on parents?

A7 (Ian) – There's an issue there with respect to a place like Applecross, where, if the Council took the lead in trying to establish GME, and then we couldn't recruit, then we've led people up the garden path. There's probably more of an opportunity in somewhere like Golspie, as opposed to Applecross, where, if anyone knows that community, residential accommodation is very hard to find, and it's not really possible to commute from elsewhere. We don't always find it possible to recruit GM teachers, but what we have done is responded very positively when parents have come to us.

Q8 – Does it make sense to have a catchment area where there are no other GM units in the area, or just include the Golspie ASG until such time as a community in Lairg or Golspie or wherever comes to the Council and says they want their own provision?

A8 (Ian) – OK, well we can think about that.

Q9 - I don't see the distance issue as that relevant as there is a limit to how far someone will send their child for GME. I don't think you will get people from 40 or 50 miles away. That hasn't happened yet, so if it hasn't happened before, it's unlikely to do so now. I think you are just putting up barriers, and if you do that you are deterring the teachers of tomorrow. In 10-15 years you are not going to have teachers, because you are putting people off from coming here by excluding them from the catchment, and not providing transport.

A9 (Ian) – We are including Dornoch and Invergordon in the GM catchment.

Q10 – The furthest points of those catchments are a similar distance as Rosehall, so the proposed limit is quite arbitrary.

Q11 – Can I ask a hypothetical question? If someone were to apply to Craighill Primary School, living in Golspie, would they be refused entry into Craighill because they are outwith the catchment area – transport is not part of this question.

A11 (Ian) – They would be classed as what we call a placing request. The Highland Council’s enrolment system is based on a default principle, where every address in Highland is allocated to a school catchment, and you are by default enrolled in the dedicated school for your home address. Parents can if they want, submit a placing request for another school. Usually these are granted although there are some circumstances where we are obliged to refuse them. In this case we would be talking about a designated GM school, and if you were outwith the catchment you could still put in a placing request but you wouldn’t get transport.

Q12 – What would happen in a situation where the Unit became full or at capacity for the number of teachers there?

A12 (Ian) – That’s the most common situation in which placing requests are refused. Essentially placing requests are granted as long as they don’t result in what is termed an “unreasonable burden on the taxpayer”. So for example, you can only have 25 children in a P1 class, so if there were 25 children in a class and someone put in a placing request, we would refuse the placing request as it would mean employing an additional teacher, and that would be deemed an unreasonable burden on the taxpayer.

Q13 – If someone in Tain wanted that place, would they get it?

A13 (Ian) – Yes, because they would be in catchment.

Q14 – My family lives in Fearn, in the village itself. We have previously had transport to GME in Tain. We don’t use it just now because I’m taking our son to nursery so I’m doing the run anyway. How would that work with the new transport arrangements? Would my children have to use the public bus, which is not specifically for school use, or would there be a taxi?

A14 (Ian) – The first thing to say is, we have no current plans to change the current transport arrangements for children attending GME. The second thing is, I probably worded that section rather badly – Eileen Henderson actually picked this up with me, in internal correspondence. In the final report, I will re-word that section. We have a team within the Council, the Passenger Transport Unit, who organise the school transport. The Education Department basically says, “we have X number of pupils at this location, and they need to be taken to Y school for a specified start time, and then returned at the end of the day.” The details are then organised by the PTU, who will take a variety of things into account when organising transport. We do have some children who travel on public buses, not from Fearn, but I think from Scotsburn. I didn’t want to make a promise that the current arrangements would always continue, because I felt I couldn’t promise what might be the case in 10

years' time, but I worded it too strongly in the paper and will change that when we review the consultation.

Q15 – So are you saying a 5-year-old might have to travel on a public bus by themselves?

A15 (Ian) – That's one of the factors that the PTU would take into account. It's maybe not unreasonable though to expect a P5-7 pupil to catch a bus like that.

Q16 – I think that *is* unreasonable.

A16 (Ian) – OK. Well, I think the Council has a different view, and there are children from Scotsburn who travel on the High School bus at present.

Q17 – But it's a very small bus. It's not a big bus at all.

Comment from the floor – We stay in Inver, and I wouldn't be happy with primary school kids going on the bus with the Academy kids.

Comment from the floor – No. The language, the behaviour, there are drugs on that bus, there are mobile phones.

Comment from the floor – The idea of putting primary school pupils on that bus is a big "no" for me.

Comment from the floor – A lot of the children are accessing public buses, so there are safeguarding issues, with potentially, children aged four-and-a-half travelling by themselves on a bus with members of the public.

A17 (Ian) – I mentioned earlier that the PTU would take that sort of factor into account.

Q18 – I still think it's a massive safeguarding issue for a P5 pupil, or for P6 or P7 for that matter.

Comment from the floor – There's a big difference in maturity levels. I have a P4, a P7 and an S1, and the difference between P7 and S1 is huge. My oldest boy would not have been as confident going on the bus this time last year. He has to walk 10 minutes across the village to get to the bus stop, which is a whole other issue. He is thriving now at the Academy, but there is a big difference between secondary kids and even older primary kids, and you are talking about putting them on a public bus, not even just a school bus.

Comment from the floor – Look at the times that the bus leaves at. The bus leaves so much earlier for the secondary school pupils, and leaves much later at the other end. Who takes responsibility for a child at the primary who finishes at 3.00pm, when the secondary doesn't finish until 3.40pm? In the mornings pupils arrive at 8.20am, and they are not supervised until school starts at 9.00am.

Comment from the floor – The school claims they are not insured to look after the children until 9 o'clock, so who is responsible for our children?

(Ian) – Can I just clarify? Did you say that children are arriving at Craighill on school transport at twenty past eight, and school starts at nine?

Comment from the floor – Some do, because there are different times of services and the bus many have another run to do.

(Ian) – I will need to check on that, as the normal policy, as I understood it, was that children should not be dropped off more than 20 minutes before school starts.

It would obviously be easy for me to say here tonight that children will never be put on the public bus, but the truth is that happens across Highland. We're not planning to change things at the moment.

Comment from the floor – I don't like the "at the moment" bit at the end of that. If people live outwith Tain, and they have a choice of GM or EM, if they knew that their children had to catch a bus alongside the Academy pupils, that's going to decide them against GME.

(Ian) – I don't like to make promises that I might not be able to keep. I can't say what might happen with school transport in 10 years' time.

Comment from the floor – None of us expect you to give promises about 10 years' time, but it would provide significant reassurance to know that in the short term, the transport is not going to be changing.

(Ian) - I have spoken to the PTU about this, and they did give me the assurance that they had no plans at present to change the existing arrangement, so when the review report is written I will change that wording. The review report will be issued to anyone who makes a written representation at this stage of the consultation.

Q19 – My house lies near Invershin, which is in a little corner of the Golspie High catchment, wedged between those of TRA and Dornoch, so you have excluded it from the GM catchment. I have 2 boys, one of whom will be going to S1 in August, the other will be going into P6. Will my younger boy, who will still be coming here, get transport put on just for him?

A19 (Ian) – Yes, he will, because he is already in receipt of school transport. We wouldn't disrupt his schooling by suddenly pulling the plug.

Q20 – I think the move to the new campus increases the risk of changes to transport.

Comment from the floor – It's a real concern, and I actually don't believe that the Council will keep the transport the same. There will be too many opportunities to save money.

Comment from the floor – I know that on the west coast, primary and secondary school children do share transport, but whilst that might work for those very rural locations, I don't think it will necessarily work here.

A20 (Ian) – The PTU obviously has a balance to strike here. Everyone who works for the Council has a duty towards the Council taxpayer. Now, some might claim we don't carry out that duty very well, but it exists, so there is a balance between providing the service that parents want and protecting the taxpayer. So, for example, the view that primary age children should not have to travel with secondary age children has to be balanced against the cost reductions that might arise.

Q21 – You can't compromise on children's safety – you can't put a price on that. Some teenagers act like thugs.

Comment from the floor – The PTU needs to assess the behaviour on these buses before they even consider putting primary children on them.

Comment from the floor – I'm sure they will already be aware of the problems that exist. It doesn't strike me as appropriate to put a P5 child on a bus where we know there have been historic issues with behaviour.

The Chairperson commented that these various points were well made, and she had taken a note of them all.

Q22 – Does Highland Council have any plans to support the growth of the Gaelic Department in Tain, and how would that become manifest?

Q23 – There will be a change locally when Craighill and Knockbreck combine. Historically parents in the Craighill catchment have tried to get their children into Knockbreck, but that won't be an option anymore, so I think many people will head for the Gaelic Unit. There could be so many from within Tain that people from the outlying areas will not be able to get in. What is the future of the Unit? Have you got money for an extension?

A23 (Lena) – The Council has a Gaelic Language Plan, and part of the commitment within that is to grow Gaelic Medium education. I know that the staff of the school work hard to promote GME, and Dolly Grant, who is here tonight, supports that activity, ensuring that the ELC has sustainable numbers, and you can keep going as you are. We report to the Scottish Government on the numbers in each area, and consequently keep an eye on those.

Comment from the floor – There is a small amount of work going on in Tain, certainly, but I'm not aware of any in the Dornoch or Invergordon areas. Even the work that is going on is limited just to the town of Tain. It's not happening in the wider TRA catchment, in places like Balintore, Portnahommack or Milton. Whilst I appreciate the comments made about the work the teaching staff do to promote GME, it's not really their job to that, and we are asking people do this on top of their

own jobs, in which they are already working more hours than they should. We are not asking the same from teachers in English medium.

(Lena) – There’s certainly no expectation on staff to do that, and we have the Community Learning Team carrying out that development work. You mentioned that you expect the numbers enrolling in GME to increase?

Comment from the floor – Yes, I do, once Knockbreck is no longer an option. GME will come to the attention of more people, which is great, but it will limit the number of places available to people from beyond the town of Tain.

(Lena) - Gaelic Medium is not capped, in the way that some English Medium schools are. We don’t have an alternative GM provision in this area. For the new school, we will provide the number of teachers that is appropriate for the number of pupils enrolled in GME.

(Ian) – To provide an example, in 2016 we created a new GM school in Fort William – Bun-sgoil Gàidhlig Loch Abar. There had previously been GM provision in Fort William, in a school that also offered English medium education. When there was EM and GM provision in the same school, there were 60-odd children in the GM department. When we built the new school we initially built a 4-classroom school, which allows a capacity of up to 100, which I thought was a reasonable increase on 60 odd. The roll is now at about 150, and we have built on two extensions to the original school. It’s as Lena said, we will respond to increases in demand for GME.

(Lena) – A comment was also made earlier about access to 0-3 provision in areas that traditionally have not had GME in the local schools – Lochaline would be an example of that. You have talked about raising the profile of GME. That comes in different ways – for example promotion of enrolment week through our Corporate Comms Team, GM Awareness Days. There are different pathways, but not necessarily targeted to particular geographic areas. There is a 0-3 project with BnaG that is run annually, and Lochaline is an example of a community where there is enough demand. Those children were not ready to move into P1 at the time parents made the request. They made it 2 years in advance, which is why we are only implementing it now. Those communities that do not have GME at present are not closed off from opening a provision in future.

Q24 – I’m still concerned that, if people don’t know somebody with an interest in Gaelic, they will be unaware that GME is even an option. When my children were little, I didn’t even know there was GM available here, and I certainly didn’t know it was something that could be set up. Could the Council put something in the Bounty Bags that are given to mothers of new babies? Just now I know of someone in Rogart who wants GME, but with this catchment proposal they won’t be able to come.

Comment from the floor – There’s a family in Lairg as well, with a toddler who wants to come here.

Comment from the floor – Parents like that need to meet up and take the initiative to get local provision, but it’s a lot of effort, and they probably don’t know of each other.

Comment from the floor – The Highland Council are great at GME up to a point, but they are just not pro-active enough.

(Ian) – Could I just say that, if people know others in Lairg or Rogart who are interested in GME, and who would like this catchment to be wider, the best thing they can do is to write in and say “I live in X and am interested in GME. This catchment needs to be wider.”

Comment from the floor – On the flip side of that, say this catchment did take in a wider area, and a group of people wanted GME in Lairg, would that mean it couldn’t happen?

(Ian) – No, it doesn’t. There is a requirement in the Statutory Guidance that says people can still request local provision even if they are within an existing catchment, although what you have just described was exactly what Bòrd na Gàidhlig were worried about when we started creating these catchments.

The Chairperson asked whether Highland Council had run a Gaelic Awareness Week at any time.

(Lena) – We have concentrated our activities around enrolment week. We run a campaign through Highland Council social media and promote it on our website. In areas where there is existing GME, our Community Team will promote it, and often Comann nam Pàrant do so as well.

Just to go back to the Bounty Pack, I think that’s a good idea.

Comment from the floor – The Health Visitors have refused to deal with that. The Group that run 0-3 provision in Tain have approached numerous people in the Health Centre about promoting GME, but the health staff don’t see it as their role.

I have visited numerous toddler groups in Tain and outwith Tain, and people have no idea that there’s a Gaelic Unit in Tain. Even people who live in our catchment don’t know we are here.

Comment from the floor – I’m not sure the Bounty Packs are produced any more.

Comment from the floor – I registered my son for sgoil-araich today, and I’ve seen nothing about GME. I have 3 older children so I have been through this, and I’m on the HC Facebook page, I’m on various Gaelic pages, and the only thing I saw was in

the drop down enrolment menu where it says “Craighill Nursery – GM”. It doesn’t even say the word Gaelic. There is nothing to encourage parents into GME.

(Lena) – There is a section about Gaelic on the Council website.

Comment from the floor – I have been on the MyGaelic website and it doesn’t even say the word Gaelic when enrolling. There is no promotion within the community. Nothing from any health visitor, or any toddler group. I am committed to Gaelic education and am more likely to see any material. I worked in the Gaelic nursery for a few years and we visited toddler groups, and it frightening the amount of people in our community who don’t know it is available.

Comment from the floor – Another example was a PC meeting with the Parent Councils from Knockbreck and the TRA, and one of the parents from the Knockbreck PC had no clue that GME was available in Tain.

Comment from the floor – Currently the Gaelic group is a clique. It’s not meant to be, but people just don’t know it’s there.

Comment from the floor – The only reason I heard about GME is that I’m an islander and Gaelic is my first language, so people mentioned it to me. There are people younger than me who haven’t been brought up with Gaelic in the same way, and people won’t know to say, “Come to the Gaelic group, or the Gaelic toddler group, or whatever.”

Q25 – Can I raise secondary school provision? Is there any plan to expand it further in Tain, and introduce it in any other school? In recent years the provision at TRA has diminished rather than expanded, which is disappointing.

A25 (Lena) – There are no current plans that I’m aware of to expand secondary provision. I can’t speak on behalf of TRA, but the models do vary. The guidance allows for that variation. Obviously the core subject of Gàidhlig needs to be available, but there should also be a proportion of Gaelic Medium activity, and subjects through the medium of Gaelic as well. An individual school decides exactly how that is delivered within their curriculum.

Q26 – My understanding is that there is a fluent Gaelic-speaking teacher who was delivering through the medium of Gaelic to some pupils but who is no longer doing so, as she’s been told not to.

Comment from the floor – The Academy has had so many changes to leadership that the Gaelic Medium had just fallen away. It’s very disappointing, because as the GM in the primary school grows, and more children are moving up, they are getting less support in secondary. If these changes go ahead, does that mean you have to provide transport for secondary school children going to GME? At the moment they have to go to the secondary school in their catchment area.

A26 (Ian)– If these proposals go ahead, any pupils from within the TRA’s new GM catchment, which includes the EM catchments for Invergordon and Dornoch, will be entitled to transport to TRA as long as they are accessing GME at Tain. To be honest I’m surprised to hear that this isn’t happening already.

Comment from the floor – In the past we have had children attend GME at Craighill, but they have then had to attend their local secondary school because there is no provision to bring them to Tain.

(Ian) – Sometimes in other areas, not in Tain, we have had problems with pupils getting transport on the basis of attending GME, but then not actually studying it. So for example, a pupil gets transport to Inverness Royal Academy because they are a GM pupil, but then they don’t study Gaelic, so some parents have sought to “work the system” that way. However, if this proposal is implemented, Tain Royal Academy will be the designated GM school for pupils from within the Dornoch and Invergordon ASGs. There would be no sense in pupils attending GME at Craighill Primary, only for us to deny them to transport to TRA, so they can continue studying Gaelic. I will pick this issue up internally.

In terms of extending GME in secondary schools, you have to start with the primary schools. If we were going to say, for the sake of argument, that we wanted GME in the Golspie ASG, we would have to start with Golspie Primary, or one of the other feeder primary schools, and 7 years later we would have to have a plan for secondary GME. You can’t start by just throwing non-Gaelic speakers into a secondary school curriculum in Gaelic.

[Discussion followed about the extent of GME offered at TRA, and how it had declined in recent years].

Q27 – I would just like to emphasise that the most important point discussed tonight has been the school transport. You are saying there are no current plans to change it, but we don’t want people to think “I’m alright Jack”, and that any changes will only affect future pupils. Putting primary school children on the public bus will deter parents from GME. What will the Council do to ensure that barrier is not there? There is a new Scottish Languages Act coming out later this year, and the Council will need to make sure it is really providing for Gaelic. The other important thing is about Sutherland, and making sure there is some sort of provision there. It seems that the Council’s policies are turning Gaelic into an elite, urban phenomenon dominated by middle class families.

Q28 - Thank you for answering our questions though. I think you answered them very well.

Q29 – What do you need from us now. Is the consultation online?

The Chairperson commented that there was information at the back of the Proposal Paper [copies of which had been distributed] on how to reply. Ian also explained how to find the consultation proposal on the website.

Q30 – When will these new catchments take effect?

A30 (Ian) – Later this year.

Q31 – Enrolment is going on at the moment for primary school next year, so if someone wants to enrol now, they wouldn't yet be subject to the new catchment. We need to get as many people as possible to enrol from outside the catchment!

There being no other comments on the Proposal Paper, the **Chairperson** reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 7 March 2025 – and of where responses should be sent, either via letter or via email, or by using the online form. A record of this meeting would be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Education Committee that considered the results of consultation. The members of the Committee would have a chance to see the note and all other representations before the meeting.