

MINUTE OF PUBLIC MEETING HELD AT UIG COMMUNITY HALL 19 JUNE 2019

CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT UIG PRIMARY SCHOOL

Panel

John Gordon, Councillor (Chair)
Norma Young, Area Care and Learning Manager (West)
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Highland Council

17 members of the public attended the meeting.

The Chairperson began by welcoming everyone to the meeting, by introducing himself and the officials present. He advised that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to formally close Uig Primary School, (as set out in the recommendation to the Proposal Paper). The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures. Copies of the Proposal Paper and appendices were distributed. The Proposal Paper identified various options, and the Chairperson explained that we could also discuss any other options or alternatives to closure which those present would like to raise. The Chairperson then asked Ian Jackson to describe the consultation process.

Ian Jackson advised that the meeting was part of a set statutory procedure relating to a school closure. We are in the initial phase of that consultation, which is due to end on 30 August 2019. The Proposal Paper sets out a proposal to close the school, but clearly there are other options and these are identified in the paper. People are entitled to express their views on those other options, or indeed any others that the Council should be considering. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather views, and we would try to answer any questions that are raised. Any questions that cannot be answered tonight, and which require further research, will be responded to in due course. There is a very clear obligation on the Council to consider each and every one of the comments received, including those made at the meeting tonight.

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 30 August, 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 visit Kilmuir Primary in the autumn, and they will be keen to meet with 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 take a Final Report to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee. As part of the inclusive process, the Final 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. If, hypothetically, the decision of the CLH Committee is to implement the closure, that decision has to be confirmed by the full Council. That is not however the end of the process, as the Scottish Ministers has a right of call-in for any school closures proposal, so even after the Council has made its decision there is a further 3-week period in which people can raise concerns with the Scottish Government. Any such representations might lead to Scottish Ministers calling-in the proposal. If the decision is called in, there would be a further review process. If the decision is not called-in, the Council would then implement its proposal. It is a very slow and measured process, with multiple opportunities for review.

The Chairperson then asked Norma Young to explain the educational aspects of the proposal.

Norma Young commented that anyone who wished to put in comments should be aware that they will be published. If anyone wished that their comments should remain anonymous, they would need to let us know in advance of publication.

Norma asked those present to turn to page 7 of the Proposal Paper, and the section on educational benefits. She did not propose to rehearse the wording that was in the report, but she highlighted some of the key sections – S.11.2 set out the criteria that Highland Council uses in proposing to mothball schools and S.11.7, which sets out the projected school rolls for Kilmuir and Uig, were Uig to re-open. All roll projections contain an element of crystal ball gazing, but these are based on the pupils we know. The Council also takes cognizance of potential housebuilding etc. For the purpose of this consultation, any developments like that are a long way away, and the small numbers envisaged for Uig would restrict some the opportunities for learning, that Highland Council considers best practice. Paragraphs 11.9 and 11.10 discuss issues around the numbers of children, working together in peer groups. Paragraphs 11.11 and 11.12 were included because we had an informal meeting at Kilmuir Primary School quite some time ago, and there was discussion there about whether Uig Primary could re-open either as a school offering English Medium education, which is what it was before mothballing, or re-open offering Gaelic Medium as well. The Proposal Paper assesses how such a proposal would affect both Uig and Kilmuir Schools. The numbers suggest that in such a case both schools would be offering single P1-7 classes in English Medium and Gaelic Medium. Paragraph

11.16 illustrates the positive benefits of collaborative working in larger groups and how well Kilmuir Primary has done over the last few years. The two communities have been very successful, at events in Skye and at a wider level.

The Chairperson then opened the meeting to the Q and A session.

Q1 – One of the things the paper says is about the school staff discussing the proposal with children. The parents were never consulted about that and, given the ramifications of what the children were being asked, this is not very fair. None of the children in the primary school have ever been to Uig School, because it has been mothballed for so long. It was ridiculous to ask children who have never been to Uig School whether they want to go there. Furthermore, none of the children from Uig who go to Portree Primary have been asked their opinion.

A1 (Ian Jackson) – On the first point, we are required by law to consult the pupils. The Scottish Government think it very important that the views of pupils are sought over something as important as a school closure.

Q2 (follow-up to Q1) - Do you think it's a fair question given the pupils concerned have never had the chance to attend Uig School?

A2 (Ian Jackson) – I don't know whether you've seen what we asked the pupils, but we have phrased it in as neutral as way as possible. We provided the school staff with a framework to use in asking the pupils, and we asked that the class teachers should undertake the exercise. The class teachers know the children and it is much better for the teachers to undertake the exercise rather than have someone like me turn up, whom they don't know. As it happens, and I can tell you this because it will eventually be published anyway, all of the pupils have said that Uig Primary should not be closed. Some have said it should continue to be mothballed and some have said it should re-open. I think that's a good indication that we have consulted the pupils in a very fair way. As mentioned, we have to consult them by law and I think we have done that in a neutral and fair fashion. On the second point, I understand the point being made and have replied to some email correspondence on this. We are required to consult the parents and pupils of any school that is affected by the proposal, and Kilmuir Primary School obviously falls within that category. Neither Portree Primary nor Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort-Rìgh would be affected by the Proposal. The number of Uig pupils attending those schools is very small compared to the overall rolls of the two schools, and also, given that Kilmuir Primary has in effect been the catchment school for Uig since Uig Primary was mothballed; those parents who have opted to send their children to Portree have done so as a matter of choice.

Q3 – I know of two children whose parents put them to Macdiarmid Primary because English Medium Nursery was not available at Kilmuir. Once the children had settled at Macdiarmid, the parents were unwilling to take them out of that school and put

them to Kilmuir. They were from Uig, and they only went elsewhere because they couldn't get English medium nursery at Kilmuir.

A3 (Ian Jackson) – I was just going to mention that, although we haven't sent a letter to parents of children at Portree PS, they are very welcome to send in a letter or email giving us their views. All the information relating to the consultation is available on the Highland Council website, on the Schools Consultation page. That will come up if you search "School Consultations" on the HC website. Everyone is welcome to comment and we are certainly not trying to exclude people whose children attend school in Portree or Macdiarmid.

Q4 – So can we take it then, that the projected roll of 6 pupils, set out in the paper, doesn't include children attending school in Portree?

A4 (Ian Jackson) – It's very difficult to predict rolls in this scenario, because we have a mothballed school. Children in this community have been sent to either Kilmuir or Portree – parents haven't had the choice to send them to Uig. What that means is that if Uig were to re-open, parents would have to decide whether to take their children out of their existing schools, and that makes the future rolls very difficult to predict. You are right though, that the projections are based on the pupils in Kilmuir, and don't include those who are attending other schools.

(Norma Young) – Those children who have gone to schools other than Kilmuir have done so on placing requests, which are a matter of parental choice. From memory, and I can check this, I don't think there is anyone who has said they have chosen Portree because Uig is mothballed.

Q5 – When Uig was mothballed, parents weren't given any choice in the catchment. We were told it would be Kilmuir, and anywhere else would require a placing request. My feeling is that the Paper is quite misleading. You make a prediction about future rolls but you don't include Uig pupils attending schools other than Kilmuir.

A5 (Ian Jackson) - That's right, although the projected rolls in the Paper anticipate that 100% of Uig pupils in Kilmuir will come back to Uig, which is probably not accurate either. We may have reduced the future numbers by not including pupils attending schools other than Kilmuir, but equally we may have inflated them by assuming 100% of pupils in Kilmuir will transfer to Uig. I would say though, that the idea of tonight is that, for any of these points that are raised, we have to go away and think about them, and decide whether we've got it right.

Q6 – At one time the roll in Uig was higher than Kilmuir, and I know of at least one parent who tried to enrol 3 children in Uig, long before there was talk of closure, but wasn't allowed to.

A6 (Norma Young) – That would not have been the case. If the school was open, and at the time of mothballing there were only 2 pupils attending Uig, so there was

adequate space and adequate staffing for additional pupils, no-one within the catchment would have been refused the chance to enrol their children.

Q7 (follow-up) – Well when this parent went to enrol his children he was told he couldn't.

A7 (Norma Young) – I can't answer that, because if the school was open at the time, the parent would have been at perfect liberty to enrol his children.

Q8 – Can we just go back to the methodology for the roll projections? I had a look at the page on the website that was sent to me in response to my written enquiry, and I can see that placing requests are normally factored into the roll projections. By not doing that for Uig, you are underestimating the future numbers.

A8 (Ian Jackson) – So your point is that, because the school has been mothballed and we haven't been accepting placing requests, we are underestimating the future numbers?

Q9 (follow-up) – Yes, and it could make a significant difference.

A9 (Ian Jackson) – The history of placing requests at Uig School before it was mothballed was that there were many more placing requests out than in, and that's why we ended up with only 2 children the year it was mothballed.

Q10 (follow-up) – Placing requests where, to Kilmuir?

A10 (Ian Jackson) – There were pupils from Uig attending Gaelic Medium at Kilmuir, because they wanted Gaelic Medium education (GME), and there were other pupils attending Portree Primary on placing requests. The issue with Uig when it was mothballed was not that there were too few children in the catchment, but that almost all of them had gone elsewhere.

Q11 – That's because they were encouraged to go elsewhere.

A11 (Norma Young) – They weren't encouraged to go elsewhere, they chose to do so.

Q12 – Because of what was on offer. Children from Uig would have happily gone to Uig School if Gaelic Medium had been on offer.

A12 (Ian Jackson) – There are 170 primary schools in Highland and only 20 offer GME. We don't have the means to offer GME in every primary school. I agree that some pupils from Uig went to Kilmuir because they wanted GME. Others went to schools like Portree Primary, for reasons I don't really know about, although we can speculate it may have been due to parents working patterns etc. However, it remains true to say that there were very many more placing requests "out" of Uig than "in".

Q13 – That happened because, months and months before the school was mothballed, rumours had been circulating that the school was going to close.

A13 (Ian Jackson) – I wasn't directly involved in the Uig mothballing at the time. I did work for the Council and I knew of it but I wasn't involved in the detail. I think there was actually a closure proposal similar to this one.

Q14 (follow-up) – That was why there were only 2 pupils at the school by the end, because of the rumours of the closure proposal months before it was put forward.

A14 (Ian Jackson) – I think I might turn that around and say that the reason the closure proposal was advanced was that there were so few pupils in the school. The numbers had fallen to very low levels and that's why closure was proposed. There would have been a meeting like this one, and following that meeting the decision was taken to mothball the school rather than to close it.

Q15 - Can I just ask about the state of the building? At the time of mothballing, the accommodation at Uig was rated higher than that at Kilmuir. Kilmuir has been upgraded since then, but the only thing that's happened is that two portacabins have been plonked outside. Anyone going to English Medium education has to use the Portacabins from when they start Nursery as a 3-year-old to when they leave P7. That isn't good enough, especially when there isn't a proper playground. The playground at Uig is a lot better than the one at Kilmuir.

A15 (Norma Young) – You're right that the playground at Kilmuir is not all that people would want it to be, but we have been working with the local community to take forward a project around that, which will involve ground acquisition and so on. Neither though are there good playground facilities at Uig School.

Q16 (follow-up) – There's nothing wrong with the playground at Uig.

A16 (Norma Young) – I'm not saying there's anything *wrong* with it, but neither is it of the standard you are implying. The location of it, the slope on it, and the fact that it's tarmac, for example.

Q17 (follow-up) – There's plenty of grass round about.

A17 (Norma Young) – Times have changed and we can no longer let children run around outside the school boundary, as used to happen in our own childhoods.

(Ian Jackson) – Just to add that the Paper comments at paragraphs 4.7 and 5.4 on what we term the Education Suitability of the buildings. It recognises that neither Kilmuir nor Uig are rated very highly.

Q18 (follow-up) – The biggest problem with Kilmuir is the Portacabins. In what world is having Portacabins at Kilmuir better than having a school in Uig?

A18 (Norma Young) – There are many schools in Scotland where additional accommodation is provided using demountable accommodation, and I'm sure you will agree that modern demountables are of a very high standard. I do accept however, that at Kilmuir the demountables are adjacent to the main building.

Q19 – Can we go back 20 years when there was a proposal to build a new school here in the village? That never happened. Now we're in a position, as was just said, where we're closing the school here, and we're taking children out of a proper school building, and we're putting them into a demountable.

A19 (Norma Young) – The new build that was proposed did not proceed because of a lack of agreement about where it should be built. Where communities can't agree, others will come forward. We don't have the sort of money now that we did 20 years ago. I can tell you for certain that there is no capital funding available within Highland Council to build a new school in Uig.

Q20 – Can I raise a point about the first bullet point in paragraph 2.1, where it says that one reason for the closure is that no pupils have attended Uig School since 2010. Pupils haven't gone to the school because it was mothballed, and so parents had no choice.

A20 (Ian Jackson) – I take that point. The wording wasn't meant to imply otherwise but we acknowledge what you say. We can't change the wording of the Proposal Paper, but as previously mentioned we are required to produce a report reviewing the consultation exercise, and we will need to consider whether, in the review report, we acknowledge that particular wording as being incomplete.

Q21 – Whilst I hear what you say Norma, about what happened in the past, I don't think it's reasonable to blame the community for the fact a new school wasn't built.

A21 (Norma Young) – That was the problem though. A piece of land had been offered for donation.

Q22 – There isn't an alternative in Section 6 about looking at the catchments for this whole area of Skye, that would consider the possibility of a new school for this whole part of Skye, and which looks at the longer term.

A22 (Ian Jackson) – Obviously, the Paper sets out the Council's proposal, and there will be an element of "back and forth" at this meeting about why we said X and Y, but one of the things we are here for is to listen to any suggestions that the community make. Any alternative option that comes out of this meeting tonight, or in writing, is something we have to go away and think about, and decide whether we think it's a realistic option. So your suggestion is that that we should consider building a single new school for Uig and Kilmuir, is that right?

Q23 (follow-up) – Yes and it should take in Glenhinnisdale pupils as well.

A23 (Ian Jackson) – Norma has alluded earlier to the Council’s Capital programme. Now that is something that elected members will decide on collectively, but the Highland Council has limited funds for capital projects, and at the moment they are all completely committed.

Q24 - I’m kind of aware of that process, but Highland Council does have a sizeable budget, and whilst we recognise the challenges, that doesn’t stop communities suggesting ideas.

A24 (Ian Jackson) – Of course not, but I don’t want to come here tonight and mislead you about the chances of a new school build in this area, and suggest that outcome is likely. We’re currently in the midst of a statutory consultation about the possibility of a new campus in Tain. Tain Royal Academy has poor accommodation, as do both the primary schools in the town, but there are currently issues with affordability of the campus project. Highland is a big place and there are many competing priorities.

The only other thing I would say in terms of catchments, if you are thinking of a catchment change that might affect Macdiarmid Primary, is that these are subject to a similar process as the one we are going through here. We must consult all parents and pupils of any affected school, so if a proposal affected Macdiarmid we would need to consult all the pupils and parents of that school, and they might have a different opinion from the people up here. The only difference with a consultation about a catchment change is that we don’t need to refer it to Scottish Ministers. They only get involved over school closures.

Q25 – So the catchment area could be changed?

A25 (Ian Jackson) – It could be. There would be a complex process similar to this one and there would be no guarantee of the outcome.

Q26 – I can recall a meeting to discuss GME at Kilmuir, when it was suggested that catchments could be changed.

A26 (Norma Young) – That was a suggestion that would have affected the catchment boundary between Kilmuir and Staffin. The people who were at that meeting – some of them may be different from those here tonight – were unanimous that they wanted to keep the Kilmuir catchment as it currently is.

Q27 – So for clarity, the catchment area for Uig was from Idrigill all the way to Glenhinnisdale?

A27 (Ian Jackson) – There’s a map attached to the back of the Proposal Paper you have.

(Norma Young) - If you go back far enough, and maybe I’m showing my age, but at one time Glenhinnisdale children went to Kensaleyre School. At the time of the

consultation on closing Kensaleyre Primary, parents from there were given the choice of going either to Macdiarmid or Uig.

Q28 – One of the things that gets my back up, is that, if you're going to leave things as they are, the community of Uig is not included in Kilmuir School. They go to Staffin for school sports. Since the day Uig was mothballed, I've asked them to have the school sports day on an alternative basis between Uig and Kilmuir. It's never happened, and if you're talking about grannies and seanairs and the rest of it, they're missing out.

A28 (Norma Young) - That's an operational matter, and in the interim, whilst this consultation is going on, I can pick that up with the Head Teacher. As you say, it would be good for grandparents and other relatives to be able to watch the sports day or other games events.

Q29 – It's been said before though.

A29 (Norma Young) – Well I'm sorry but I wasn't aware of it. However I'm aware of it now so can pick it up.

Q30 (follow-up) – Yes, because if you're going to leave things as they are, you need to recognise the community of Uig.

A30 (Norma Young) – I think that's a very valid point.

Q31 – This mothballing has had a devastating effect on the village here. Children have been sent right, left and centre to other communities. They don't know each other because the children around them all go to different schools. I'm lucky because both my girls went to Kilmuir Primary, but if that hadn't been the case they would have been virtual strangers within their own community.

A31 (Norma Young) – I hear what you're saying, but children who are not going to Kilmuir, are going somewhere else through parental choice. It's not the authority which is arranging that. If all the children in this community went to Kilmuir, then you wouldn't have that deficit you're talking about.

Q32 – OK, so how do the number of placing requests "out" from Uig compare to other communities. I have the impression there are many more away placing requests from this community than is average.

A32 (Norma Young) – Ian is working on that at the moment. You've put a request in for that data and you've had an email advising you that it can only be extracted manually. There was also a change to our database in 2013, when we moved to a product called SEEMIS.

(Ian Jackson) - The Council used to have a database called e1, made by a company called Pearson Education, on which we kept our pupil data. I actually thought it was quite good but it wasn't a very successful product commercially. For

those of you who are old enough, you might say that Highland Council bought the Betamax. Basically Pearson Education pulled the plug on e1 in 2013, and we lost all the data we had up to that time. We can go back on SEEMIS as far as 2013, although the SEEMIS archive only keeps limited data. There is a “live” SEEMIS with extensive data, and an “archive” SEEMIS with only limited information.

Q33 - That information will be very revealing in terms of what has been happening in the last 10 years

A33 (Norma Young) – That information will be provided as soon as its available, and you can share it as you see fit.

I was going to add that, in communities such as Uig, Staffin and Kilmuir, people will travel to work in a larger urban area such as Portree. Also there is wraparound care available in Portree, or some people might have relatives who provide after-school care.

Q34 – Surely things like after-school care could be provided locally?

A34 (Norma Young) – Yes, and we have been advertising for the last 18 months, encouraging people to become self-employed childminders in this area. We are offering support and training for people to take on that role. We have had no interest whatsoever.

Q35 - Is there a guaranteed income with that?

A35 (Norma Young) – No, that is the downside, but the opportunity is there if people felt they could make it work.

Q36 - Could the school be used to provide that service?

A36 (Norma Young) - The school could not be used on a commercial basis like that unless there was a licence to occupy.

Q37 – Would that be possible?

A37 (Norma Young) – Yes, in principle we could look into that. Anyone operating a childminding service would though have to register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

Q38 – If the worst happened and Uig School closed, would the Council just sell the building on the open market?

A38 (Norma Young) – The first process would be that the Council would check with all its own services and departments as to whether they would have use for the building. If not, we would prefer that there should be local use rather than an open sale, and there could be what we call an asset transfer. We could help a local community group with the process for that.

Q39 – I take it we couldn't discuss an asset transfer prior to the decision on closure?

A39 (Norma Young) - Correct, because that would be an assumption of closure. You could however put in a formal expression of interest after any closure.

(Ian Jackson) – Ultimately it *could* be sold on the open market, because if there was no community interest then the Council would not want to keep a building for which we had no use. We have a duty to the taxpayer to make best use of our assets, but as Norma says any sale would only be after the other avenues have been exhausted.

Q40 – What you say is interesting because in the Housing Plan, which is issued by the Council, the site was marked for transfer to Housing.

A40 (Norma Young) – So they have already looked at that and seen it as a potential site.

Q41 – Conversely I was told by, at that time, Transserve Scotland, that there wouldn't be access onto the Trunk Road for a housing development.

A41 (Norma Young) – That's maybe the case as well.

Q42 – What are the arrangements for maintaining the building and the access road?

A42 (Norma Young) – In respect of maintaining the building, we've had a meeting recently with the body that has the licence to occupy, and we discussed the continuing upkeep of the building. The road wasn't mentioned, but perhaps it something we need to look into.

Q43 (follow-up) – I have a letter from the Council from 2013 that referred to a quote for repairing the access road. The road is starting to break-up badly. [A copy of the letter was passed to HC staff for further action].

Q44 – I would like to return to paragraph 6.1 in the Proposal Paper, where there is no mention of a new school in the alternatives to closure. Does that mean you have already discounted it?

A44 (Ian Jackson) – As previously mentioned we have to consider any alternative to closure that's suggested here tonight, so we will do that. The capital funding will be a major issue though.

(Norma Young) – When the Final Report is issued, that point will sit in its own box, with a response that addresses it.

(Ian Jackson) – The Scottish Government has issued Statutory Guidance on this legislation, which is available for people to read on the Scottish Government website. That Guidance tells local authorities that before we go out to consultation we have to consider alternatives, we have to take any alternatives that are suggested during

consultation, and before we do our final report we have to think about all of those. We then issue the report for 3 weeks during which people can make further representations, and even after that there's an opportunity for people to make representations to Scottish Ministers.

Q45 – Is the building listed? Because if it is that would make a difference to what happens to it if the school closes.

A45 (Norma Young) – We're not aware that it is but can double check.

Q46 – Should the possibility of community ownership of the building not be an option in the alternatives?

A46 (Ian Jackson) – At this stage we can't anticipate that the school will close. Until we decide that we can't decide on any future use.

Q47 – Can you let us know whether it is listed or not?

A47 (Norma Young) – Yes we can do that. I would mention that there have been previous examples of communities taking over a school building after a school has closed. A good example was Inverasdale in Wester Ross, where the community used the former school building to create a museum about the WWII Arctic convoys. In Glendale, in another part of our island, the community also took over the former school building. The most important thing is, whatever the idea is, it has to be financially viable. Sometimes that can be the most difficult part of developing any proposal.

Q48 – The crucial thing the community needs is to retain the catchment area. If the school is closed, we need to retain the catchment area until we can get a new school built for this part of Skye.

A48 (Norma Young) – If the school closes the new catchment area will simply be an amalgam of the current Uig and Kilmuir catchments.

(Ian Jackson) – If Uig were to re-open then the catchment would stay as it was in 2010. If it closes, then every address in Highland has to be within a school catchment, so we would have to assign the Uig catchment somewhere. We propose in this paper that it is reassigned to Kilmuir, but if people have ideas or suggestions around that, we would be happy to consider those.

Q49 – I think it's very important that the community of Uig is entitled to, and should continue to have, its own school, but I would also like to say, and I know this may be jumping the gun a bit, that if the school is closed and the Council makes a single penny from selling the building, that money should come back into this community.

A49 (Norma Young) – I understand the point you are making, but many years ago, there was an agreement across Highland, that all receipts from the sale of assets go into the Centre. The reason for that was that you may be in a community that never

has additional funds as the result of a sale, and so you would never get the benefit. I suppose when it's in your own community you would like to keep it.

Q50 (follow-up) – Maybe it's time to change that system.

A50 (Norma Young) – That would be a matter for elected members.

Q51 – We could really do with a Multi-Use Games Area. Staffin has got one, Portree has two. This community is lacking.

The Chairperson commented that this was something that could be considered further, arising out of this consultation.

Q52 – It says in the Proposal Paper that if the school were to re-open there would be no nursery facilities?

A52 (Norma Young) – Yes. There was no nursery in the school prior to it being mothballed, and our Chief Executive has indicated there would be no new nursery facilities opening across Highland.

Q53 – So what would happen if Uig was closed and someone wanted English Medium nursery, which I'm sure they would be entitled to? What about the increase in hours for pre-school?

A53 (Norma Young) – There has to be an increase in capacity for that purpose. Our Estates Strategy Manager is currently pulling that together across Highland.

Q54 – Is there a 10 or 20 year plan for education provision within Skye?

A54 (Norma Young) – We did have a company that came in, Caledonian Economic, and held a lot of meetings around Skye about the future provision of schools on the island, but we've since moved towards what we call the Sustainable Schools model. I think myself that if we were left with just Kilmuir School in this area, then there would be no way Kilmuir would close unless parents voted with their feet to go elsewhere.

Q55 – I think that you are proposing to make a fundamental decision here, and I don't see how the proposal is linked to future population growth, future job growth, and infrastructure improvements. It doesn't take long to look at the area and judge what might happen in the next 20/30 years.

The Chairperson advised that was considered by CalEc about 7 years ago. They concluded there should be amalgamations of schools, so that there would only be one school for the area served by Uig/Kilmuir/Staffin.

(Norma Young) – That would be an enormous area for people to travel in. People say you can get over the Bealach, but try doing that in summer!

Q56 – So what is the latest position of the Council?

A56 (Norma Young) – The latest position is that we have been pursuing clustering, which you already have here. The latest paper that went to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee was in February 2019. All Committee papers are on the Highland Council website.

Q57 - At paragraph 17.5 of the Paper, it says that the closure of Uig will mean less opportunity for pupils to walk and cycle to school. That should be “no opportunity”. Also it says that parents suffer “occasional inconvenience”. Let me tell you the inconveniences are not “occasional”. Last Thursday it took me 45 minutes to get up and down to Kilmuir School. I am back and forth on that road like a yo-yo.

Q57a - I endorse that last comment. I was back and fore to that school every day for nursery and as far I am concerned it was wasted miles. Also because there were so many children coming back from Kilmuir there were two bus runs, and you never knew when your child would be arriving back.

A57 (Ian Jackson) – We’ll need to take account of those comments when we review this.

Q58 – It’s costing parents more money, that’s the point we’re making as well.

A58 (Ian Jackson) – It would cost money for nursery transport, yes.

Q59 – You said previously there were two pupils in Uig when it was mothballed?

A59 (Norma Young) – That’s correct, there was one in Primary 1, and one in Primary 7.

Q60 – We’ve been told there would have to be 10 pupils before we re-opened the school?

A60 (Norma Young) – There isn’t a magic number, but it’s difficult to deliver collaborative learning with very small numbers.

Q61 – I don’t agree with that statement, because one of the schools I went to was the Isle of Eigg, where there were 5 pupils, and there was plenty of learning, plenty of play; and then I went to Ullapool Primary, and that’s when the bullying started. Then I went to Dingwall Academy, and I might as well have not been in school at all. I got bullied all the way through. I think smaller classes are way better than bigger classes. When I was Isle of Eigg School, it was like one big family.

A61 (Norma Young) – I understand what you’re saying, because of your different experiences. However the way the modern curriculum is delivered, it is through collaborative groups, and children of a similar age working together. In Eigg you had no option. It’s still the same on the Small Isles.

Q62 – You talk about numbers but there is cost as well. Have you worked out how much it would cost to re-open Uig?

A62 (Ian Jackson) – There’s a spreadsheet at the back of the Proposal Paper. It’s a little hard to read when printed out. There would be a cost to re-opening Uig. In the grand scheme of things the additional costs would not be huge. The legislation around this process specifies that we have to look at educational rather than cost issues.

Q63 – At paragraph 17.6 of the paper, it says that the maximum additional travel time for school pupils from the Uig catchment to Kilmuir is 14 minutes and that the source is Google Maps.

A63 (Ian Jackson) – Well, all I can say is we took that from Google Maps.

Q64 – Surely to goodness you would have someone out there driving it?

At this point several comments were made about morning bus pick-up times being 0820 or 0805, with the bus arriving at Kilmuir early, sometimes before any staff are present. A comment was also made that on Tuesdays pupils have to travel over to Staffin for PE, as there are no suitable facilities at Kilmuir.

A64 (Norma Young) – The children should not be arriving at Kilmuir without any staff being there. I will take this up with the Local Transport Officer. The earliest drop-off time, agreed within the Council, is 20 minutes before the bell.

Q65 – To go back to 14 minutes, it’s more like 41!

A65 (Ian Jackson) – In the past, when we’ve driven routes ourselves and recorded the time, people have said we’ve not got it right. Google Maps is an unbiased source of information.

Q66 – It’s not a good road though, with the hairpin bends on it.

A66 (Ian Jackson) – How long would you say it takes then to drive from Uig to Kilmuir? You are locals and I’m not.

[Comments from Audience] – (1) You could probably drive from the centre of Uig to Kilmuir in not much more than 14 minutes. (2) It depends how many tourists you meet. (3) As I’ve mentioned before, it can take up to 45 minutes to go both ways.

Q67 – How much has it cost to put the demountables into Kilmuir, including leasing costs, groundworks etc?

A67 (Norma Young) – I don’t know. We can find out.

Q68 (follow-up) – If you are talking about further costs as a result of the expansion of nursery hours, how much would that have been over the last 20 years compared to the cost of providing one new school with top-class facilities?

A68 (Norma Young) – The cost of providing a new school for an area like this would be £12 million - £14 million. I know that many people express incredulity at that sort

of figure, but that's what typically we would be quoted for a school of the kind this community would require.

There being no other comments, the **Chairperson** reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 30 August 2019 – 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 Care, Learning and Housing 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. Following the decision of the Committee, the minutes would be submitted to the full Council for ratification.

MEETING CLOSED.