



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Education and Children's Services Department

Future strategy for provision of education in the Western Isles **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK**

HARRIS – 22 June 2009

TWO WORKSHOPS

1. What are the advantages in keeping the current number of schools?
There was agreement about the community benefits of retention of schools, with the school seen as the focus in the local community and the negative impact closure would have in terms of community regeneration and attracting people into the area. The need to think positive in terms of population figures was emphasised, in order to engender confidence in the area. Other factors identified were shorter travel distance, parental choice, more parental involvement, discipline and the quality of learning.
2 What are the disadvantages in keeping the current number of schools?
There was agreement about the financial implications of maintaining current provision in terms of upkeep and running costs, and the detrimental effect on other essential services such as maintenance and improvement of roads. Additional costs in terms of management were identified. The educational disadvantages identified were: Lack of interaction with peers was identified, especially where there can be gaps in age ranges as a result of years with no intake.
3 What would be the advantages in reducing the number of schools?
The financial advantages of available funding from Government being shared across fewer schools. There would also be better social interaction.
4 What would be the disadvantages in reducing the number of schools?
The negative effects on the community were highlighted, including the loss of a building which provided facilities in the community. There was a plea not to "put all your eggs into one basket" thereby reducing capacity in the event of an adverse occurrence as there would be fewer alternative buildings. The fact that West Harris and North Harris Trust want to <u>expand</u> and <u>improve</u> the island was noted, and the Comhairle was asked to think bigger and positive across all departments (Economic Development etc). It was felt that the psychology of reduction could speed up depopulation. Travel distance for children, and previous rationalisation in Harris were also cited.
5 What kind of Gaelic medium provision should the Comhairle have?
A dedicated Gaelic school for Harris was suggested, with such an option seen as a possible way of securing an additional school for Harris. A Gaelic school would ensure that Gaelic would be spoken in the playground. It was suggested that a Gaelic secondary in Lochs could serve Lewis and Harris.
6 What are the other needs of this area for Comhairle services?
Learning Support provision – Mainstream and Gaelic Road maintenance – drainage. Care for elderly. Local jobs - devolved services Social Housing – Urgent Less reliance on 'great white hopes' – develop and nourish from within across all areas. Adult learning facility.
Main Points
Keep the school as the focus of the local community Ensuring the best future for the children of Harris Education should be fostering a Harris strong sense of place – providing the capacity for a better future. Think positive – grow the community and keep the schools. Jobs, housing, local development. Proactive not reactive. Work more closely with communities, business and groups such as Buy-outs to try and reverse trends such as depopulation. Don't forget that people <u>want</u> to help. Shelibost want to paint their school (trying for a year !!!). Partnerships can work. Double rates/holiday homes. Use revenue for affordable housing. Use schools in summer holidays for other reasons – venues, weddings, caravan park, cafés. Also consider alternative use of schools that have underused space – could classrooms be used as offices?