

NOTE OF PUBLIC MEETING IN SCALPAY SCHOOL – TUESDAY 1 JUNE 2010

Present: **Mrs Morag Munro (Chair)**
 Ms Joan Mackinnon
 Ms Lesley McDonald
 10 parents and members of public

Morag Munro Mrs Morag Munro: Feasgar math agus failte gu coinneamh co-chomhairleachaidh a nochd. Good evening and welcome to this formal consultation meeting. Before I start, I would like to ask Roddy to open with prayer as is our custom.

Roddy Mackenzie Dear Lord our God as we bow before thee we pray that thou would be with us and as we gather here tonight and seek to do what is educationally and socially beneficial for our young people in all we seek to, we pray that they would grow up to be worthy citizens of the world in which we live and help us in all our deliberations to seek thy guidance and thy help. We thank thee for those who are entrusted with the care of our young and our prayer is that thou would be with them in the many tasks, difficult times which lay to their hands. We remember those too who are in Council over us and pray that thou would be with them and their own spheres of labour and help them to discharge all their duties at all times seeking thy guidance and thy help. We pray now that thou would go before us and be with us one and all, in all we seek to do. Lead us and guide us and prepare our way and pardon our sins for Jesus sake amen.

Morag Munro First of all I would like to introduce ourselves. I am Morag Munro the Chair of Education and Children's Services and a Councillor for na Hearadh agus Ceann a Deas nan Loch. Ms Joan Mackinnon, the Director of Education. Lesley McDonald is the Head of Executive Office. The two gentlemen who are helping out with the IT are making sure that the recording works are Martin and Alex. Of course we have Donald Macleod who is the Head of Quality Improvement.

In August 2007 the Comhairle decided to undertake a review of educational provision throughout the Western Isles. Since that time we have had quite a number of informal consultations with communities. As a result of this the Comhairle agreed to go out to statutory consultation on proposed closure and amalgamation of a number of schools. This meeting is part of that consultation process for Scalpay School. The purpose of the meeting tonight is to hear more about the proposal, to ask questions and to have your views recorded and the meeting is being recorded so when we are asking you to make a point or ask a question you will be given the roaming mic and if you would kindly say who you are, for the sake of the recording. A verbatim report of the meeting will go to the meeting of Education and Children's Services Committee, so if you would remember that.

If you have a mobile phone, could you switch them off as they interfere with the recording.

Joan Mackinnon Even if they are on silent they beeb if you are getting a message through.

Morag Munro

The aim of the authority is to provide our children with the best educational, experiences and outcomes in modern learning environments suitable for 21st century needs within the resources that are available to us. Now at the present time the Comhairle are facing enormous challenges. Our school rolls have fallen to 3681 from a figure of 6246 20 years ago and even in the last five years our school rolls in the Western Isles have fallen by 333. Now that is a real challenge to us because we are resourced accordingly to pupil numbers not accordingly to schools. So when the pupil numbers fall so do our resources. We have got 38 buildings and 18 of them are classed to be in a poor condition.

As we all know we are facing huge financial problems in the future, I think that is well known to everybody by now and the Comhairle next year are going to be looking at almost £6million worth of savings to be made and it is going to be a very painful process. There are pressures on other Council services and budgets, like community care, roads, transport, waste services and so on. Then of course of there's implementation of the Curriculum of Excellence which Joan will talk about later.

We are in the process of building six new schools at the moment and that will mean that 44% of our children will be housed in new buildings. Now your children, if the decision is to close Scalpay School, your children will be housed in one of these new buildings. Sir E Scott is one of the new schools that will shortly be starting to be constructed.

Our aim in line with the Government's Schools Estate Strategy is for all our pupils to be educated in either new or refurbished buildings but in order to achieve that we have to reduce spare capacity that we have got within our school estate. I am now going to call on Lesley McDonald, Head of Executive Office to go over the procedure of this consultation process with you. After that I will ask the Director of Education and Children's Services to speak and the meeting will then be open to yourselves for questions.

Lesley McDonald

As the Chairman mentioned this is the first formal stage of consultation, an informal conversation has taken place. The Council has decided to go out to formal statutory consultation to see what people think about the proposal that education provision in this school be discontinued in two years time with the children transferring to Sir E Scott and the catchment area of that school extending.

No doubt you will have heard of the new Rural Schools Legislation which imposes a different process and different rules in relation to any proposal to close a school. For the purposes of that legislation Scalpay is a rural school and the particular matters that relate to that are addressed in this document, here, which is formally called the Proposal Document.

We are currently in a consultation period which by law must have 30 school days in this case we have 34 school days, that consultation period ends on the 30 June 2010. Any responses you wish to make to the consultation should be emailed to the Chief Executive, but we have a special address which is at 3.5 which is schoolconsultation at the council or by writing to Malcolm Burr, the Chief Executive to arrive by that date. All of those consultation responses and a transcript of this meeting will be made available to HMIE and this is anyone who was involved in the discontinuation of the secondary stage of this school may remember that the process up to date might sound a bit familiar. This is where it gets different-HMIE have a particular role and they then have until 20 August 2010 to produce a report on the educational aspects of the proposals. As part of producing that report they can speak to whoever they want to

speak to. The Council then gets that report and must use that and any responses we receive and any points made at this meeting as the basis for producing what is called the Consultation Report. That Consultation Report is then made publicly available and is made available to anyone who has put in a consultation response or anyone who asks for the report at least three weeks before the meeting at which the Council will formally consider whether or not to close the school. It is hoped that, that report can be considered at Education Committee during the last week in October of this year and go to full Council the following week in November. No action must be taken in the respect of that Report for six weeks to allow Ministerial call in, that is just something to tell you it is not really an issue here because it is proposed that any closure would take place August 2012.

Finally if there is any inaccuracy in this document there is a particular process we must follow and that is detailed for you at paragraph 2.10. Another legal process that we are carrying out as part of this consultation is an Equality Impact Assessment so that we see what impact any closure would have.

Couple of little points, I will be taking some notes, those notes will be very much a backup. I hope very much that our recording is going to work and that the transcription will work. You will have seen from the advert that we are in the process of carrying out these meetings for a lot of schools, we think we have setup a robust administrative process that will ensure that any consultation response you put in is acknowledged within three working days. I would ask that if you put in a consultation response and you haven't heard something in about a week, if you get in touch with me I will personally track your consultation response, make sure its acknowledged but crucially make sure that it is made available to HMle and taken account of in the final consultation report.

The purpose of tonight's meeting is to give you some information, hear what you have to say and crucially to answer any questions that you may have. Hopefully we will be able to answer the majority of your questions but I am sure you will agree it is more important to have the right answers supposing these can't be given tonight. Any question that you have that we don't have an immediate answer to, I will take a note of those questions some them up at the end of the meeting and try to give you a response to those within about a week of today so that you can take those answers into account and any formal comments you might want to make. And I always take longer than I mean to, thank you.

Morag Munro

Now I am going to pass over to the Director, to Joan.

Joan Mackinnon

Well just to pick up on what Lesley said there, immediately with regard to an error. If I can just point out to you in paragraph 8.4 where it is talking about the catchment area for Sir E Scott School it is really a typing error, in the very last line there where, if you were amazed at the number of villages that Sir E Scott school has in its catchment, it doesn't have Marvig in Lewis, it is supposed to be Maarig. So it's a UIG, just to draw to your attention that there is an error, it is not a fundamental one just to draw attention to it.

As Morag has said in her opening remarks the rolls in the Western Isles have been falling and very sadly they have been falling at Scalpay too. Having said that really over the last number of years they haven't been that drastic there has been a drop of about 9% over the last eight years which, you know, given some other profiles, that is not bad at all. It has been steadily around in the 20's for the last eight years, however we are seeing this year it is going to go from 21 just now to when you open in

August it will be 16 and then in August 2011 it will be 10 and in August 2012 it will be 5. As you know there are no young children below school age in Scalpay so really that's a main driver for the reason that we are here tonight and why we put forward this proposal paper because we believe that the best educational provision for young people after 2012 will not be taught by 1 teacher in a class of 5. So maybe I will draw your attention to the proposal paper which you will have read. I don't intend to take up much of your time to go over this but the sections that start at page 3, if you have got a copy of it and take you through to page 8 are the same for all the proposal documents that we have written for all the schools closures that we have in view. These basically set out the context within which we have come to this conclusion. It sets out the challenges facing the Comhairle and our aspiration to educate all our young people to give them quality education in quality buildings. Currently we have 38 schools for the number of pupils we have clearly we don't need 38 schools; and we believe that we can give a better experience in less locations, if you like. But I could particularly draw your attention to the section that begins on page 8 which is the Educational Benefit Statement. Now under the law, now, when we are proposing an amalgamation of schools we have to state what we believe the educational benefits to be. I want to make it clear that there are educational benefits to be gained at Scalpay school, absolutely, we have no question about that and you may therefore be wondering why does this just talk about Sir E Scott school but it is simply because our proposal is for children at Scalpay to be educated in Sir E Scott school, if that's the decision of the Comhairle. So therefore we are setting out what we see as the educational benefits within Sir E Scott school for your pupils.

But just very quickly it goes through several things, the learning environment, ICT, Additional Support Needs and so on. However, the paragraph I would like to draw your attention to is paragraph 8.18 which is just the summary of the benefits. Now we know that you have excellent teachers at Scalpay school and an excellent Headteacher and very good support staff and that the school is very well supported by the community but it is just that when the numbers get smaller, if you like, crystallising here what we see to be the main benefits and it is really about having more pupils therefore more flexibility where you have got more staff then the staff are able to share best practice better and support each other. It is a very exciting time in Scottish Education with the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. It is new for everybody and we believe that staff as well, the more there are of them the better that they will be able to support each other in the best implementation strategies that they can come up with in the future. And just to point out a significant, what is different about Curriculum for Excellence well actually children will still learn about the same things and I think to put it very, very simply the difference will be the way in which they learn and if you were to look at the definition of the Curriculum as we had it within the 5-14 programme where all the attainment targets were set out from the teacher's point of view. In the Curriculum for Excellence the focus is on what children will learn and if you look at them it will say I can discuss, I can explain. So it is about what children can do, it is about them being much more active in the learning and they will best do this if there are more of them of the same age as themselves. That is the particular paragraph that I will just draw your attention to as well and just to say that we are in no way saying that the education that they are currently having here is not a very good standard because we believe it is.

I think maybe I will leave it at that and leave it for yourselves if you want anything clarified if you want to make any points that you feel strongly about or even just feel that you want to make so that they will be noted

that would be really important to us. I suppose you have concerns about staffing but it is set out there what the Comhairle position is with regard to the staff and so on.

Morag Munro

Thank you Joan.

I would like to open the meeting now out to yourselves for questions or comments and will sent you the roving mic and if you would remember to say who you are. So its over to yourselves.

Kenny Morrison

Thank you Chair for being here tonight, Kenny Morrison Parent Council Member. With Paul Finnigan not being here I have just a couple of points I want to make that we discussed at an earlier meeting today with an HMI Inspector. The first was the provision for bad weather and it was to do with the decision making. At present when the kids are going across to Tarbert and there is bad weather or that the bus driver is making a decision on whether they should cross or not and then it's a case of calling the parents to come with cars and it is a very loose arrangement at the moment and it works fine with secondary children but with primary children I think it needs to be firmed up and looked at in detail and how its going to work for them.

Joan Mackinnon

Thank you for bringing that point up because to a degree the bus contractors, Lesley you will correct me here if I am wrong, in terms of for example snow or ice on the road in the morning the contractor may very well say "I am not taking the bus out today" and that does effect whether there is school transport on a particular day or not. I take it you are actually more concerned about issues surrounding the bridge and this is not something we are unfamiliar with because in Uist we have a number of causeways and we have the same issues there with the causeways although the bridge is, I must say, much higher and that is something we will take back and look at. I don't know Lesley if you want to make any comment but thank you for that and we will look at that and come back to you with a protocol maybe that would be acceptable to you. Can I just ask for clarity ever since the bridge opened has there been a day when young people haven't been able to get home or have there been issues?

Roddy Mackenzie

Roddy Mackenzie, parent. Yes, because I was kind of involved a wee bit in the minibus and I have been, I think there has been one day when they have been held over for three or four hours. There was, the whole thing escalated from the fact that some years ago the bus couldn't cross and the kids got out the bus and they walked across and that lead to, it was pretty hairy that day and it was quite dangerous and the kids were literally hanging onto the sides of the bridge as they went across. It is from then onwards that we decided that this arrangement could not operate so the bus driver when he gets to the bridge doesn't let them out at all now they are just kept in.

Joan Mackinnon

And there's that situation, where parents are maybe phoned is that where that comes from? Does the bus driver then, if he is not prepared to cross the bridge but also not letting the children out, does he phone or?

Roddy Mackenzie

He will get in touch with the bus driver on this side yes and then parents will go across. But is a kind of very, very the morning especially as Connieach says it is a very loose arrangement.

Joan Mackinnon

I agree that is something we need to look at very carefully. If we have time but I don't know is currently, if there is an optimum speed at which the bridge closes to traffic, wind speed?

- Roddy Mackenzie Once it says closed to high vehicles the bus doesn't move and then once it, in theory once it closes full stop the Council put vans on each side and stop everybody crossing and then that's it-nobody is allowed to cross.
- Lesley McDonald Thank you, just to say I don't have the answer to that but I will go away and talk to colleagues in Technical Services and come back because clearly you need a protocol, you want the children to get to school, if at all possible but you don't want your children stuck on the wrong side of the bridge under any circumstances. I completely appreciate that so I will go back and speak to colleagues in the Transport Officer, liaise with Ms Mackinnon come back with a response to you on that.
- Joan Mackinnon What we would like to do actually, obviously as Mrs Munro explained the decision making process is a long one however, not pre-empting what the decision will be but between now and then that we would look at this anyway because we should have a protocol that is solid for the children who are going up there regardless of their age really. So we would like to maybe look at protocols we could put in place and come back and consult with you on the protocols we are thinking about.
- Kenny Morrison Just one more point, Kenny Morrison again. That it is not just when you are looking at the statistics of when the bridge is closed because it is very seldom closed when it is closed to high sided vehicles.
- Joan Mackinnon Absolutely we accept that, that is a very good point.
- Morag Munro I know about this problem I have been approached by parents, I think it was for the incident you are talking about that I actually I spoke to the then Director who was Murdo Macleod at the time I think and I know that there concerns about that and it definitely needs to be firmed up.
- Joan Mackinnon Absolutely.
- Morag Munro As you say regardless of what happens to the primary school here, we need to firm up for the secondary pupils.
- Kenny Morrison The problem can also arise and it has arisen, if it says the bridge is closed to high vehicles we can be told in Sir E Scott school, then sometimes in ten minutes the sign on the bridge can actually change that's when you have a big problem because the bus is on the way down and then suddenly the sign changes and then you have got to make arrangements.
- Morag Munro Absolutely, so all these things have to be covered really. You have got to know what to do in the circumstances.
- Kenny Morrison Kenny Morrison again, one more point with that we discussed today was if there is slippage with the building of Sir E Scott school is there going to be provision made or is it kids go in regardless?
- Joan Mackinnon It would be our intention not to move the children until the school is ready, that would be our intention and I think that is a firm commitment that the Council has given all the way along that pupils will not be moved until the building that they are expected to go to is ready and that is a new build or a refurbishment, in your case it is a new build. Of course nobody knows what is going to happen. At this stage we are not anticipating slippage we are expecting the building to be ready for pupils for August 2012 but if for any reason that were not the case without, quite clearly pupils will be allowed to stay here until such time.

Kenny Morrison With regards, transition from one school to another we don't want it to happen twice in a short period. It would be strain on them when they are so young.

Morag Munro You have a commitment on that. We are hoping that there would be no slippage because Sir E Scott should only take 18 months they reckon to build so there is a bit of leeway with Sir E Scott that maybe there isn't with the bigger school, the Nicolson for example. But as you say who knows what could happen that could cause slippage but if there is you have got a commitment the children will not be moved till school is ready.

Joan MacKinnon If I can say I was speaking to some pupils today and we were talking they might be worried about and how then that could be helped if they were going to move and they themselves how good it would be if they could go and visit the school beforehand so we would be expecting in the run up to them moving that there would be quite a considerable programme in terms of transition arrangements before finally going. They were making some very good suggestions. And can I just say they were very worried about what would happen to Scalpay school if the decision was taken to close it and they have some very good ideas for it like an HMV store and a Burger King or a Pizza parlour so there you go.

Morag Munro Budding entrepreneurs.

Joan Mackinnon So there are a few business ideas.

Were there any other issues Conneach?

Kenny Morrison The two points that they brought up, I think it just shows that we as a parent council, there is no argument for keeping the school open it is just getting the details right.

Joan Mackinnon Absolutely.

Mic not working

Joan Mackinnon Maybe you could just say it again.

Kenny Morrison I don't know what I said now.

Joan Mackinnon I think it was something along the lines that you as a Parent Council....

Kenny Morrison As Parent Council we don't have that big a worry about the school closure it is in regard to getting the details right of going up to Tarbert and we have, the two issues that we brought they are small in the great scheme of things.

Joan Mackinnon But still very, very important that we get that right.

Morag Munro Safety issues are a priority and should be a priority.

Any other questions or comments or views.

- Kirsty Mackinnon I don't think people go about large numbers and how their children would benefit more from being, I don't think that is necessarily true because when I went to school, Seilebost school had fluctuated from between 15 pupils to 20.
- I don't think necessarily that is a negative thing at all, to be honest. I think we are missing the point here because I know it is a issue with money and saving money trying to get all pupils to the one school but I don't think it is negative from some pupils at all to have smaller classes, because in fact when the Nicolson was at its best it was fed by all these other little schools, and my sister's year when they went to Sir E Scott school in fact there was only two pupils who went to university and they came from Seilebost which was the smallest school at the time.
- Joan Mackinnon Absolutely you are entitled to your view, absolutely you are. It is just that there are issues around socialisation as well. When you end up with classes with one child on primary 2 and nobody on primary 3 and one child on primary 4 there are issues around isolation and while you don't know any better you don't miss it, it is only sometimes when you go and you end up with a pal or pals, or a choice of pals that you know maybe as parents it is when that happens that you realise young people were missing something. Albeit that they may have had other things, of course and it is a point of view.
- Kirsty Mackinnon It just depends on the individual pupil. Another problem is there is legislation in place where we are supposed to have choices to where we can put our children to a primary now if you close Scalpay, if Leverburgh eventually gets closed, we only have Sir E Scott school primary and here it says 30 minutes is the maximum recommendation time in a bus so where is, what is our choice?
- Joan Mackinnon Can I just say that we no intention whatsoever of closing Leverburgh school.
- Kirsty Mackinnon Well even if you didn't it is still more than 30 minutes away.
- Joan Mackinnon For you? Yes but that would be your choice though. When parental choice comes into it the policy doesn't apply. You could choose to send you child to Leverburgh School and then that would be your choice and therefore, I think I am right Lesley, then the policy doesn't apply you are making a choice on behalf of your own children.
- Kirsty Mackinnon Right, so it doesn't matter
- Joan Mackinnon If we are making you go somewhere that the 30 minutes is a policy but if you are making the choice yourself then that's up to you.
- Kirsty Mackinnon And do you provide transport for that.
- Joan Mackinnon No if you were making a choice like that, that is your choice.
- Morag Munro That would be placing request because it wouldn't be within the catchment area so a placing request outwith the catchment area means there is no transport provided by the parent.

- Joan Mackinnon However, if there happened to be transport, if there happened to be transport going to where you were making a placing request and there was space on it we would look favourably at that. Unfortunately I don't think there would be much transport going that direction. But you could still make that placing request, absolutely. And parents in Harris currently do make placing requests where they are transporting their own children.
- Morag Munro I think the other change is though, from when my children were in school to when you were in school is the new Curriculum and I think that is a different way and teaching numbers affect that.
- Joan Mackinnon I think I did allude to it earlier; it is not what children will learn. Children will learn much the same things it is the way in which they learn and it is really about looking at the world that they are going out into and the kind of learners that they need to be. I think we maybe touched this the night we were down having the conversation where you know, you, although you are much younger than me were in school and certainly when I was in school basically if I learnt what I was taught and was able to regurgitate it I would get on. Nowadays children are needing to apply the learning that they do in different contexts just so that they are going to be flexible enough to be able to live in the world of work ahead of them because jobs for life are probably a thing of the past and researchers who look at that sort of thing are just now saying that children who are currently in school may very well have to change their career anything up to 5 or 6 times in their working life so it means that you have to be very much more flexible than you needed to be in the past and also you need to learn. How to learn is going to be the big thing so it is equipping young people for the world that they are going out into that's why the Curriculum is changing and it is much more about how we learn rather than what we learn.
- Morag Munro Any other issues anybody wants to raise?
- Do you want to sum up any issues that we are going to take back?
- Lesley McDonald Just to confirm that we are seeking to come back to you with a protocol in relation to the children getting to school in bad weather conditions with particular reference to the bridge.
- Now is there a parent council contact that, the best person to bring that back to, to have it disseminated. I will maybe speak to you later if he has an email address or something
- Joan Mackinnon Were there two issues?
- Kenny Morrison That was it, slippage you answered.
- Morag Munro Well if there are no more, just to remind you of what happens from now on in. The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to the HMle Report, written submissions that we will receive and the oral representations that have been made at this meeting. A consultation report will then be prepared, this report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be published in local newspapers. The Report will be available on the Comhairle website and from Comhairle offices as well as from the schools concerned, and all that is free of charge of course. The consultation report together with any other relevant documentation will be considered by the Education and Children's Committee will then make a recommendation and that recommendation will go to Full Council for approval. Should the Comhairle decide to close the school at this stage it is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of the decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and the consultation

report in accordance with the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 within 6 working days for the decision being made. Scottish Ministers then have a 6 week period from that date, the date of the final decision of the Comhairle, that is, to decide if they will call in the proposal. Until the outcome of that 6 week call-in process has been notified to the Council, the Comhairle will not proceed if the implementation of the proposal and that of course is not relevant here because the proposal post closure date is June 2012. The deadline date for the receipt of written submissions is 5.00pm on 30 June 2010 and you can send these to Malcolm Burr, Chief Executive at the Comhairle in Sandwick Road, Stornoway or electronically to the email address set up for the purpose that's schoolconsultations@cne-siar.gov.uk and that address is in your consultation documents.

So I would just like to thank you very much for coming to the meeting tonight and for all your contributions. Thank you very much.