

CATCHMENT AREA CONSULTATION MEETING – SIR E SCOTT

Catriona Stewart: Good evening everybody and welcome to this evening's meeting. I am sorry I am slightly late, I was in Committee until 4.30pm and I was warned to take my time coming down because of road conditions, so I was being careful. Before we go into the formal proceedings I will introduce everybody around the table. So we have Mr Allan MacDonald who is from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Legal Department, we have David Smart who is our Transport Manager, I am Catriona Stewart, I am Chair of the Education and Children's Services Committee, Mr Bernard Chisholm who is Head of Resources with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Education and Children's Services Department, we have Martin and Alex who are making sure that the meeting is being recorded. So could I ask you to please switch off your mobile phones, not just to put them on silent or meeting mode but put them off because they do interfere with the recording and we want to make sure that we capture everything. Thank you very much.

Well I am sure most people here have got the Proposal Document in front of them and have had an opportunity to read it. One of the main reasons for us coming out to consult on the changes to the boundaries came about (as I am sure most of you are aware) due to the review of the School Estate which ensured that we refurbished some schools and we build new schools and we wanted to get rid of the anomalies that were then present from before the 2007 decision to review the estate. At September's meeting the Comhairle decided that they would go out and they would review a number of catchment areas for schools throughout the Western Isles. So that basically is the reason we are here tonight is to try and do away with the anomalies that are presently in the system. I will ask Mr MacDonald to go over procedure for this evening's meeting. Again it is contained within the Proposal Document that you have. Mr MacDonald.

Mr Allan MacDonald: Thank you Chair. Feasgar Math. My remit is to briefly just go through the procedure which I think is pursuant to the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act but as we have stated it is laid out pretty well here in the Proposal Document. Also if you have any questions, if you could please give your name, that would be useful because this is likely to be transcribed and then that would form part of what is produced for Education Scotland and also what will form part of the Consultation Report, ultimately which will go before Members for a decision. So, as Catriona said the Proposal Document which we have here has been approved by the Comhairle and this is to seek a view from the proposal in the paper. We have until 11 December 2013, Wednesday 11th December to make comments etc which will be considered as part of these proposals. There are various ways which are set out in this paper of doing that, making your comments to the Comhairle. As stated here again once this procedure has been undertaken and the consultation, all the papers will be sent to Education Scotland and then they will undertake their role in the process and then ultimately what will happen is that the Comhairle will review the proposal having looked at what Education Scotland have to say, the written representations, these meetings, the transcriptions of these meetings and will prepare a Consultation Report and this will be published electronically and printed formats will also be available. The Report will contain a statement explaining how it complied with the requirements to review the proposal in light of the Education Scotland Report and the representations they have received. The Consultation Report will be published at least three weeks prior to the Comhairle making a decision. Then ultimately the Consultation Report together with other relevant documentation will be considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee on 15th April 2014 which will make a recommendation. The recommendation will then be subject to approval by the Comhairle on 24th April 2014. So, really the main date to have in your minds at the moment is the 11th of December date and if you have any comments, please make them this evening or they can be made on the e-mail address given in the proposal document or you could write directly to the Chief Executive. But please do so before the 11th of December.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you Mr MacDonald. I am now going to ask Mr Chisholm to speak to the Report and then I will open up for questions from the floor.

Bernard Chisholm: Could I just mention a correction that was brought to my attention today by staff and others. So if you look at Section 8.1 and if anybody doesn't have the proposal I have a copy here if you would like it. But in 8.1 where we list the villages etc, then Sir E Scott School third line from the bottom there, Marivig is in Lochs, we actually meant Maraig, have I got it right, the pronunciation right. Are you all ok folks, do you know where I am talking about? It's not Marivig, it's Maraig.

Unknown Female: INAUDIBLE

Bernard Chisholm: Is it? Ok but not the village? Ok, Allan you will keep me right on that with the corrections. Thank you very much. Ok.

Ok folks, as Councillor Stewart has indicated subsequent to the decision on consultation we were contacted by a number of parents who were anxious about the decisions they wanted to make about children and families. And in a number of our schools we found ourselves in a situation that the receiving school coming in wasn't one that parents [wanted] and there were various geographical and other considerations they had so looking at what decisions people had already made on transport applied and some of the concerns were raised with us with travel. They made up these slightly larger, but I think you can both recognise the distinction between the villages of Seilibost and Horgabost there and south of that area wanted to make that into the catchment of Leverhulme Memorial School. As part of this discussion there were a number of appeals systems you will also be aware. Some parents had taken their opportunity to do that, so it felt only fair that if there were real reasons that people felt that school catchments were worthy of making placing requests or appeal and they sought for us to review them. It seemed reasonable that we could have this discussion as was mentioned I think earlier but just to reassure you. We have met also today with the children of primary and secondary and staff in the schools so we are trying to establish how they feel about it as well and how it affects their friendships and their understanding of the geography and they have given me some views on that which I don't want them to contaminate your views but when we hear yours we might share with you some of what they have shared with me today. So, really there was little more I wanted to add to that but just share exactly where we are talking about and the reason for it and I am very happy with that to take any questions.

Catriona Stewart: I am going to open to questions from the floor. Because it is recorded, please wait until you get the mike and say your name so that we have a true reflection for the minute so whoever would like to ask the first question if you just let Martin know.

Robin Reid: Hi there I am Robbie Reed, I live in Manish in the bays of Harris and I have got one child, pre-school age and she is in Croilegan here in Tarbert and another baby on the way. I have got a few comments if I may. The first one is really a point of clarity really, that this consultation mentions the change in catchment on the Westside, but it doesn't mention a change on the east side of the island. From discussions I have had with folk, and I haven't had anything in writing, but I have been under the impression that the Manish Township that we live in was within the Tarbert catchment, so this came as a surprise that Manish and Geocrab were listed in the Leverhulme catchment. So that was the first point that is really one of clarity, whether there is a change there or what the historical situation is there. The second point I would like to raise is that I would argue that both Geocrab and Manish are currently in the Leverhulme catchment are actually closer in terms of time and geographically, travel time and geographically to Tarbert. So the consultation mentions about trying to ensure that kids are going to the closest schools to them and I would argue that if you are using that rationale, Geocrab and Manish should be included in the Tarbert catchment. And then thirdly, I guess just purely on my own situation which is that we have actually been building a

house in Manish for the past two years, we are living in Leverburgh and we have spent a lot of time and effort and actually money on transporting our child to Tarbert through that period living in Leverburgh because we thought that, we were under the impression that Manish was going to be in the Tarbert catchment. So, having put all that effort in and feeling that with my daughter in Croilegan, she has entered the schooling system and I would like her to stay in Tarbert and obviously any siblings that she has. Just a final point as well. There is very very few kids in the bays area and all pre-school children that we know of, there is actually only one other and its in primary school in the bays area within three miles of our house are going to Tarbert, or are going to go to Tarbert and therefore if we were going to Leverburgh, she doesn't have that many children around about her and she would be going in the opposite direction to kids around about so, those were the points I wanted to make.

Bernard Chisholm: Yes, ok. The brief response then. In terms of the document, the only area we altered the boundaries was on the Seilibost because that is where the changes came and people asking us. It is a historical one in terms of any of the other catchments. However the purpose of the consultation is that we knew that it was time for us to have a proper look with the folk who were sending their children which direction and school, there were six schools, three areas where people found themselves in situations like your own and historical ones would have left to placing requests etc. So that is the purpose now to have this discussion. While the proposal states this, it is a genuine one to get the feeling of the people, hence the children today and that information you give us with Geocrab and Manish, will be significant in any decision that we or recommendation we wish to take to our Council. I think it would be helpful maybe on this one if I ask David also to talk about the Transport. Historically one of the challenges that often confuse things for people on the transport is we had buses going round the island one way or another and historically it wasn't very difficult for people to have children going to Leverhulme or where ever. As we introduce the School Transport Policy, a lot of issues then about charging and all that goes with it so I think maybe worth looking at how any change like that would affect our buses.

David Smart: Just to take your point up on Manish, that is where you live. We do have a bus service that goes to Sir E Scott that starts from Rodal and works its way up.

Catriona Stewart: [It just interferes; all Martin will hear is clicking.]

David Smart: I apologise. That service is still there. Looking at the list of all the pupils going to Sir E Scott and Leverhulme, from that southern part of the bays to Leverhulme, you have hardly got any pupils at the moment, but again there is a service going in that direction so in terms of Bernard, in terms of where Manish sits in the table, it looks like there is an option to go either way.

Bernard Chisholm: My point really to you on this one is that the reason we have gone out to these six is that families have approached us with exactly the questions that you have raised. So it makes greater sense for us to talk to families and then see if in fact that type of difference, its not a financial one this, because we have the transport going in both these directions anyway so it is more about have we got the boundaries in the right place that will sustain us over the next few years from where we see it.

David Smart: The main part of this proposal document is that the exact boundary on the Westside and it is Horgabost, North of Horgabost. What I can say is that we are currently in the process of retendering bus service contracts throughout Lewis and Harris and options are built in to suit that boundary change should it be formally accepted.

Robin Reid: I think I will be making those points in writing. But I think the main point is really that at the moment there is so few kids in that area, it is important that they go into the same school. So there is one child in Finsbay who is going to Tarbert because historically they were at Seilibost and they would want, they

have got one pre-school child as well that they would then want to go to the same school. That would be Tarbert. There is a child that has just started going to school in Tarbert from Geocrab and so actually our daughter is the only other child I know in that sort of area, of pre-school age.

Bernard Chisholm: You will be pleased to know that when I talked to the children today, that these were the very type of conversations they were having with each other and trying to point out to me. So I think they also have a good understanding of that geography and the implications so we will most definitely take that back.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you Mr Reid.

Sandra Morrison: Hi there. My name is Sandra Morrison. My, its not a concern that I have but my wee boy, he is one at the moment and I live in Seilibost and I am actually happy that Seilibost is in the Tarbert catchment area, the only concern that I have is that if you go down to Leverburgh tonight, I am just worried that maybe they will try and extend the catchment area of Leverburgh as far as the Causeway in Seilibost.

Bernard Chisholm: Oh right.

Sandra Morrison: So I am just scared, but I am happy as things lie at the moment. Just to voice my happiness that that is where Seilibost lies at the moment. Sorry I am a bit nervous, I don't like speaking.

Catriona Stewart: No, it is an intimidating situation, we don't want it to be but I can well understand how you feel.

Sandra Morrison: But no, I am happy where it lies at the moment. What would it take, say if you went down to Leverburgh tonight and to the Parent Council to say that Manish and Geocrab area, can the pupils of Geocrab and Manish go to Tarbert then can we extend the Westside of Harris. Would you then say, we will give you Seilibost as well then?

Bernard Chisholm: Well ok. I was involved with the consultations and I have had a number of conversations with the Parent Council and you are right. In Leverhulme, the Parent Council were anxious about the viability of the future of the school. Their biggest concern when we discussed in that area was making sure that we offered the opportunity of English as a medium of instruction. As you will know, last year it was an entirely Gaelic actual school and we had no English provision. Now, this year we have promised them then that we would retain English and no matter what happened we were committed to an English provision and we have honoured that and it is still there. The reason the line is exactly where it is that in the consultation all of the families that we were working with at the time were quite clear which direction. And the reason we have ended up out at this consultation is in this and a couple of other school areas, there were some families who for very positive reasons and not just manipulate more school numbers or anything like that or trading off, it would just have been their preferred choice and well in this particular one the majority of parents chose to come to Tarbert and it only left the family that asked us to go south in that catchment. So, I'll hear what is said tonight, but what we are doing there is what we are doing here, we just want to find out what parents and children want to tell us and we will see. I am not aware of anyone making any representations yet about the causeway.

Sandra Morrison: What would the costs be though? Just out of curiosity. What would the costs be for, I take it the parents would have to pay if they decided to put their child to another catchment area. And if there wasn't a bus service that ran through there, because I am aware that Leverburgh are now starting that wee bit earlier, the school day starts a wee bit earlier. So what would, the parent would obviously have to either provide their own transport.

David Smart: I don't have the exact figures but just even in the past year parents have an option if you are not entitled through a placement or distance, you would have

the option to buy a pass from the Council or a book of travel vouchers. These are discounted on the half fare you would pay on the bus service. But that is actually quite a good deal that the Council offer. I don't have the figures because I would have to have the miles and all that.

Bernard Chisholm: Just to add to that about what you are saying. One of the reasons in these selected areas we came out on this is that Councillors, Councillor Stewart and the other Councillors felt that there was a real problem where because of the changes made with the school catchments that legitimately some parents were closer to another school than another and it seemed unfair that they were having to make placing requests and meet costs when in fact we could alter the bus routes if this was the view so that is why we are doing this. Hopefully we will avoid parents having to do that.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you.

Bruce Jardine: Bruce Jardine Chair of the Sir E Scott Parent Council. Just a few points, am I right in saying from what has already been said that if a parent has a child in [INAUDIBLE] or Manish and they decide to send that child to Sir E Scott that they will not have to pay for the bus in the coming future?

Bernard Chisholm: Well at the moment the catchment is within Leverhulme, what we are looking at at the moment is getting a view from the community as to whether they would like us to move that into this one. What we are saying is we have got no view against what would be the will of people who are in the areas, so we are just checking out in these discussions.

Bruce Jardine: If it is decided then that they are going to make Geocrab go to Leverburgh, a parent in [INAUDIBLE] would then have to pay for the child to come on the bus?

Bernard Chisholm: They would have to make a placing request.

Bruce Jardine: Even though originally when they placed their child in Sir E Scott they weren't asked for a parent request. Has the catchment area actually changed?

Catriona Stewart: Could I just say, are you talking about a child who is presently in School and well I am not aware that there would be a change in the provision that is being made if the child is in the school. We are talking about changes to the boundaries.

Bruce Jardine: So if the child is from Geocrab just now and they get the bus, then that won't change?

Catriona Stewart: [INAUDIBLE.]

Bernard Chisholm: Ok, they would continue to come on the bus, as David says there is a bus going North and there is a bus going South.

Bruce Jardine: Free of charge? And they wouldn't have to put a placement request in for next year?

Bernard Chisholm: They may have to put a placement request in because they are coming to a different catchment but the bus is on and for those children currently attending there would be no change to the costs.

Bruce Jardine: Currently attending?

Bernard Chisholm: Yes,

Bruce Jardine: But if after August 2014, would they have to put in a [placing request]?

Bernard Chisholm: New ones.

- Bruce Jardine: New ones but, but not currently. The other question that we had was the priority of Harris children coming to Sir E Scott School over children from Lewis. This is sort of a historic problem that is being felt amongst parents and it is just when we are getting up to a capacity that some parents are concerned that if South Harris Children would like to come to Sir E Scott, that they would be given the opportunity to do so even though you know, the capacity is, you know we are nearing capacity at Sir E Scott.
- Bernard Chisholm: I can't speak for everything in future, what I can tell you at the moment is the Council has a strong commitment to maximising the placement, ensuring placement for every Harris child in the schools in Harris. It has not been something the Council has looked at the change in the number of schools that we have, so [in] answer to your question, we would be keen to say that we would support all the placements in the Harris schools clearly though we do have boundaries and placing requests, but if a child made a placing request, I think this was asked to me today by the staff in the school as well and I think if I had been asked in Leverhulme, I think we have got a good understanding that sometimes because of parents' work and other things, it makes differences where children are located, so I think we would be sympathetic to trying to ensure that the school had the resources to meet those from the Harris area where they chose to enroll and we would look sympathetically if that was a placing request as well.
- Bruce Jardine: The other point was I think over our siblings. If there was a case where a sibling was given a place in Sir E Scott from South Harris and then a couple years later there is another sibling come along, would they still get into the same school or would they have to go to a different school?
- Bernard Chisholm: I think as my colleague David mentioned in this particular case, we have buses going North and South and I think practice of Council to date has been where siblings who are already enrolled in a school, the Council has been sympathetic for them going on the bus provision was there.
- Bruce Jardine: So I mean, we are getting quite close to a capacity for the primary school in Sir E Scott, I think this is a question that, it would only take for a family of three or four children to come in and it could be an issue.
- Bernard Chisholm: Do you know, to be honest see capacity in our schools in the Western Isles, getting to capacity is a good problem for us and even if we could exceed it, we would treat that positively. As long as it was coming from the population of Harris. What we are wanting with this school estate is to develop it, so I think if we had 200 coming in, we wouldn't treat that as a negative thing, we would treat it really positively. So the more the merrier.
- Bruce Jardine: Would it be possible to get some of the sort of positive comments that you have made to some of the queries here tonight, would it be possible to get them in writing and incorporated in this document.
- Bernard Chisholm: Well actually, one of the purposes for us when we go through to Council will be to incorporate, not only those things that you are saying but some of the things that we are saying also. Hence it is all recorded.
- Catriona Stewart: Yes, that is the purpose of the meeting being recorded. A transcript of this meeting will be made available to everyone that needs a copy of it.
- Bernard Chisholm: I can share with you, staff were asking me today what if we get more numbers and genuinely I mean this, there would be nobody more delighted than the Elected Members of the Council to see more people settle in Harris, and us have the problem of finding more space.
- Bruce Jardine: Is it possible to get some sort of clarification of what the old catchment area was for the Bays.
- Bernard Chisholm: Sure. The old catchment was as is here but a right to confirm it just so that it's clear.

Bruce Jardine: I think that if you know, I am thinking of the parents may have a problem in the future, it would be good to see what the change has been in The Bays because some of them are coming to Sir E Scott and they didn't have to put in a placing request. That might make all the difference.

Bernard Chisholm: I know, ok, sure.

Mrs Macsween:
(Headteacher) Mr Chisholm is it ok if I say a few words. Thank you very much. Aileen Macsween, Head Teacher. Could I just clarify what Mr Jardine said there about placing requests from Lewis parents. They tend to be predominantly coming into the Secondary Department and yes as Mr Jardine said, quite rightly we are very close to capacity in the primary department, we do have room, there is scope in the secondary department at the moment and I am pleased to hear that you did say should we go over capacity that you would help us out in that. I do feel that it is definitely time for us to know what the exact boundaries are because there certainly have been children enrolled at Sir E Scott School from Manish and Geocrab who did not come through the route of a placement request. So they very clearly thought that they were within the catchment area of Sir E Scott School. So, I think it is time that we did know exactly where the boundaries are and we are all very clear about that. I did earlier on speak to Mr Chisholm about you know, having a wee girl who was enrolled in the nursery sector of the school and I would hope that you would view that as a pupil, as a child who is already enrolled at Sir E Scott School because we are a 3-18 campus, and I hope that would be looked at favourably. Thank you very much.

Bernard Chisholm: I think Councillor Stewart would be able to give more detail on this than me but apart from the schools that we are consulting on now, that type of anomaly of lack of clarity of boundaries existed around Stornoway Primary and the catchment with Laxdale, two of our biggest primaries and this is one of these opportunities. Good to go out, share with parents and see what kind of view folk have got and we can take that back to Council.

Catriona Stewart: Clearly it is important that we listen to parents but there are anomalies in this system and we are trying our best to get rid of the anomalies so that parents know exactly where they are because we have gone from what was 3 catchment areas to what we are looking at 2 catchment areas. If there are no more questions. Ok.

Bernard Chisholm: I wondered if I would mention, just because I know everyone else tends to know each other here, but just to advise as has been already indicated. Even though we are only a small number, it is a serious decision so we do have a representative from Education Scotland here and that is the face that you might not have known. But your children may go home and tell you. I thought I would make sure that you are aware of that.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you Mr Chisholm. Well Education Scotland received a copy of the Proposal Document which is why they are here this evening and Education Scotland will also receive a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Comhairle by any person during the consultation period or if Education Scotland agreed a summary of it but normally we send everything to Education Scotland. Education Scotland will further receive a summary of any oral representation made to the Comhairle at the public meeting which is being held tonight and a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a Report on the Educational aspects of the proposal not later than 17th January 2014, after the Comhairle has sent them all representations and documentations as mentioned. In preparing their Report Education Scotland are here visiting the School and they are making reasonable enquiries of everybody that is involved within the areas that we are talking about tonight. The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to the Report that would be produced by Education Scotland, written representations that it received and oral representations made to it by any person at the public meeting. It will then prepare a Consultation Report. This report will be published in electronic and

printed formats and will be advertised in local newspapers. It will be available on the Comhairle website and from Comhairle Headquarters as well as the affected schools at Sir E Scott and Leverhulme free of charge. Anyone who has made written representations during the consultation period will also be informed about the Report. The Report will include a record of the total number of written representations made during the consultation period, a summary of the written representations, a summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting, the Authority's response to the Education Scotland Report as well as any other written or oral representations it has received together with a copy of the Education Scotland Report and any other relevant information including details of any alleged inaccuracies and how these are being handled. The Report will also contain a statement explaining how it complied with the requirements to review the proposal in light of the Education Scotland Report and representations both written and oral that it received. The Consultation Report will be published at least three weeks prior to the Comhairle making a decision. This Consultation Report together with any other relevant documentation will be considered by Education and Children's Services Committee on 15th April 2014. That Committee will make a recommendation to the Comhairle which will be subject to the approval of the Comhairle on the 24th April 2014. Now what is very important to emphasise here is that this consultation period will run until Wednesday the 11th December 2013 at 5pm. I would urge you to make your representations either by e-mail to the Chief Executive at the e-mail address that's included in here and I think it is schoolsconsultation@cne-siar.gov.uk. But if I am wrong, it is within the document or else in writing to the Chief Executive at Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Sandwich Road, Stornoway. I would urge you to take advantage of the timescale that we are talking about here. I thank you very much indeed for your presence here this evening. Thank you.