

Present: Cllr Catriona Stewart
 Mr Peter Carpenter
 Mr Robert Emmott
 Mr Calum Mackenzie
 Mr Allan Smithyman
 Mr Dan Macphail
 Mrs Patricia White
 Ms Lesley McDonald
 Cllr Archie Campbell
 Cllr Neil Beaton
 22 parents and members of the public.

Appologies: Cllr Uisdean Robertson

STATUTORY CONSULTATION MEETING – PAIBLE – 30 OCTOBER 2013 AT 5.30pm

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Good evening, I am Catriona Stewart, I am Chair of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Education and Children's Services Committee and I will be chairing this evenings meeting. With me this evening are a number of Council Officers and I think if I start here and I will work my way down, it will be easier for you all to identify who the various ladies and gentlemen are. We have Mr Allan Smithyman who is the Learning Community Principal for this area, Mrs Patricia White, our Early Years Officer, Mr Robert Emmott, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Mr Peter Carpenter, Director of Education and Children's Services, Ms Lesley McDonald, Head of Executive Office, Mr Calum Mackenzie, Head of Asset Management and Mr Dan Macphail who deals with the delivery of various projects on behalf of all departments within the Comhairle. We have two other officers who are with us this evening who are recording and we have Morag behind here making sure that the tapes are working and Evelyn will have the roaming mike at the end of the presentation that we are about to give you.

Now it is very important that your mobile phones are actually switched off, not on silent mode or meeting mode, but actually off, because it interferes with the recording and we want this to be as accurate a recording as possible without any interference. Thank you.

In August 2007 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar decided to undertake a review of educational provision throughout the Western Isles. Since that time a number of formal consultations and informal conversations have taken place in various communities which has resulted in the closure of some schools and the amalgamation of a number of other schools. This evening's meeting is part of the formal consultation process in respect of the discontinuation of primary education at Paible School as required by the Schools (Consultation) Scotland Act 2010. It is proposed that education provision at Paible School be discontinued with effect from 26 June 2015 or such late date as the Director of Education and Children's Services shall determine following service availability of the new North Uist Primary School; a new North Uist Primary School be established on the existing school site at Paible, Isle of North Uist from 13 August 2015 or such late date as the Director of Education and Children's Services shall determine following service availability of the new school and that pupils of Carinish, Lochmaddy and Paible schools continue their education there. The catchment area of the new North Uist Primary School be extended to include the current catchment areas of Carinish, Lochmaddy and Paible Primary Schools. The new North Uist School will include provision for statutory pre-school education.

The aim of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is to provide out children with the best educational experiences and outcomes in modern learning environments suitable for the 21st century requirements within the resources available. The Comhairle continues to face serious challenges, school rolls have practically halved in 30 years and as

education is resourced centrally according to pupil numbers, funding therefore has decreased accordingly. We face ever tightening financial constraints and some of you here present will have attended various budget consultation meetings and will have been made aware of exactly just how significant the savings that we are required to make are. Our Capital Programme leading up to 2018 is about half of the value of the previous programme, some £42 million. The Comhairle has allocated £6.5 million of that programme to build the new school in North Uist along with money that the Scottish Government have allocated, which are somewhere in the region of £1.5 million, so a not insignificant sum.

There are various pressures on other Comhairle services such as Community Care, Roads and Infrastructure, Waste Services just a few of the services that are provided, that again have significant pressures on their budgets. We have built 6 new schools across our islands and I hope that many of you have had an opportunity to visit our new school in Balivanich.

On completion of the new primary school in North Uist, over 50% of our pupils will be educated in new, efficient learning environments in which Curriculum for Excellence is delivered. Quality education being delivered in quality buildings. Our aim in line with Scottish Government's Estate Strategy is for all our pupils to be educated in new or refurbished buildings by 2018. I will now pass you over to Ms McDonald who will go over procedure after which Mr Carpenter will speak to the Report and then I will open up the meeting for questions from the floor. Ms McDonald.

Ms Lesley McDonald:

Thank you Chair. I think that you will all have received a copy of the proposal document which will be the subject of discussion tonight. This is the first stage in the statutory process, well the first stage is the Council Decision to produce this proposal document but anything up to this date, the conversations that have previously been had in the school are in addition, but this is us now getting to the formal part of the process. This meeting forms a very important part of that and the note of this meeting will go to the Councillors when they are making their decision, it will go to HMIE and it will also go to Scottish Ministers at a later stage in the process in the event that the Comhairle decides to proceed with the proposal next February. So, when Evelyn is going about with the roaming mike, it would be good if you could give your name and then that makes the note of the meeting all the more accurate.

In addition to noting what you want to say tonight, we will answer any questions. We have brought quite a lot of people with us tonight so, we will answer any questions that we can. If we don't have the answer to the question, I will take a note of that question and I will get back to you with an answer to that question just as soon as I can because I am conscious the last date for submission of written representations is the 22 November. Which is just three weeks on Friday really, so we will get that to you as soon as we can. There is an e-mail address that you can send your written representations to it's schools consultation, it is in the document and you can also send them by posting them to Mr Malcolm Burr. Following 22 November we will send everything we have, HMIE already have the proposal document, we will send on the note of this meeting and any written representations we get to HMIE, they will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of our proposal which will be done before the 18 December 2013. We then prepare the next formal stage for us in the process, something called the consultation report which is the Report on the basis of which the Council Members will make the decision. That report will go to the Education Committee on 4 February next year and that will make a recommendation to the Council the following week on 13th February. That will have the proposal documents, a note of this meeting and a copy of every representation we receive. Every representation we receive goes to the elected members, a copy of the HMIE report and crucially a critique prepared by the officers

as to how we respond to each of the issues raised to enable the Councillors to make an informed decision in February.

Following that, we have a very few days, 6 working days to submit all of that to Scottish Ministers and Scottish Ministers then have 6 weeks to look at the proposal if we make the decision to proceed with the proposal and let us know whether they think that we have failed in the process in any way in terms of the Act or not taken adequate account of what people have had to say to us and if they do not call-in the proposal within that length of time, then the proposal would be implemented as at August 2015 or such later date depending on school availability. One final comment, I think there was comment last night about what was not in the document. This is a very formal document, it relates to the formal statutory process, therefore only relates to formal education provision and formal provision of pre-school education as the Council is legally obliged to do. I am happy to take questions as to the process Chair.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Thank you Mrs McDonald. Are there any questions at the moment on procedure? I will open to general questions later but if not I will just ask Mr Carpenter to speak to the proposal document.

Mr Peter Carpenter: Thank you Chair. In January 2013 the Comhairle led a community conversation regarding future education provision in North Uist and at those meetings which were attended by parents and members and other community representatives, there was voiced a strong support, strong approval for the creation of a new school in North Uist. In September 2013 further community conversations were held and at this stage the discussions focused on the proposed site for the school and the arrangements for 0-3 and 3-5 education.

I don't propose to speak at length regarding the advantages of a new school building or new facilities for primary aged pupils. I know speaking to the children today at this school and to the staff, many have had the opportunity to visit Balivanich School and other schools. But as well as providing in the long term, better value for money to the Comhairle, new facilities are advantageous for a number of educational reasons for our children now and in the future. These include an enhanced learning environment, better facilities, a larger school roll offering social and educational benefits to our children, more pupils and more staff and a Gaelic medium education which is not currently available at Lochmaddy School.

The school will have four classes from primary 1-7. There will be 2 Gaelic medium classes and 2 English classes. There will be 2 pre-school classes for children aged 3-5 years, 1 for Gaelic medium education and another for English medium. It will have a capacity of 100 pupils plus the early years classes. The design at the current stage has also included 0-3 provision. This was incorporated because parents and community representatives expressed a strong view at the community conversation and subsequently that the Comhairle should plan a new school that provided a one stop, single site educational provision. Parents stated not only that this would be convenient and practical, reducing travel from one site to another for them and for their children, but also ensuring effective transition, continuity of good educational experiences from nursery to pre-school into primary.

Officers from the Education Department in preparing the proposal document you have seen, were asked to evaluate the different potential sites from an educational point of view. We were asked to look at the advantages and disadvantages of the shortlisted site, looking at first of all the transport, the access, the availability of learning opportunities in the locality, access for buses, and ensuring children's safety on the site of the new school and the officers found a number of educational benefits in each of the shortlisted sites. A number of common strengths across those sites were found. All of the sites had good access and a

good range of educational opportunities. But Paible was selected as the preferred site from an educational perspective for a number of reasons. Firstly that the land is owned by the Comhairle and therefore would possibly be able to access the school earlier than would be the case in other sites and not only would this save money but it would give us the opportunity for our children and staff to get into the new school as early as possible. Secondly, the Paible site includes facilities such as the school field which could be incorporated into the design and allow a wider range of facilities available to the children of the new school. In conclusion from an educational perspective the opportunity of a new school for children in North Uist is a positive, vital step in our efforts to improve the educational outcomes for the current and the future generations of young people. As is the case in all of our new schools it will be educational provision, sector leading and forward looking it will then share 21st educational facilities for staff as well as pupils. The proposed document has been made available to you, and we want now to listen to your views and either myself or my colleagues will be pleased to answer any questions that you may wish to ask. Thank you.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Thank you Mr Carpenter. I will now open the meeting to questions from the floor and if you put your hands up if you want to ask any questions and Evelyn will get to you. Please give your name before you ask a question.

Ms Anne Maclellan: Is Paible being agreed as the definite site for the new school for North Uist? Can you confirm that?

Ms Lesley McDonald: The Comhairle has agreed to go to consultation on Paible as its preferred site. So what will go up to the Comhairle next February is will it be Paible or won't it be Paible. Paible is the site on which we are consulting because it is the site that came top in the technical appraisal.

Ms Anne Maclellan: So what will be involved? Is this consultation part of the process for deciding other sites or will the outcome of these meetings feed into that?

Ms Lesley McDonald: The outcome of these meetings will inform the Comhairle whether to proceed with building the school at Paible or whether not to proceed with building the school at Paible and if they choose not to do so then they may look at other sites but it is not a variety of sites that are before you, it is the Paible site that we have gone out to consult on and if Members decide not to proceed with the Paible site, then they may look at other sites.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Clearly we had a number of reports in front of us which looked at quite a number of sites and having taken advice from officers on both educational and technical aspects of the site, the Comhairle agreed to go out to consult on Paible as being the preferred site having looked at some 12 sites.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: I take it then that you are quite happy for us to proceed.

Mr Angus MacDonald: I am very pleased for you to proceed, obviously we are from the area, it would be good to see the school kept here in the heart of the community. The only question that I would ask and I know you are probably going to give the answer that it is not viable. Why can we not just do up the existing school and bring in the kids from wherever they are coming from, Lochmaddy, Carinish. When I was a pupil in the school here in the 70's there was close to 300 pupils in it. Have you got the money to do that, or is that possible.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Well sadly as in a lot of communities we are seeing a reduction in the number of pupils. The monies that we got from or have been promised from central Government are for new builds, that is why we will not be proceeding to refurbish a building and I think we are aware. I will pass over to a technical officer when I finish but I think you will be aware that

more often than not, it is better to start new but we are able to put in facilities that we couldn't put into some of our older buildings but I will pass over to Mr Macphail if he wants to do some technical's. He is very good on technical stuff. Thank you.

Mr Dan Macphail: Just so that I understand the question, is it really in relation to the merits of retaining this building in order to function as a new school. Is that the question?

Unknown Male: Yes.

Mr Dan Macphail: Yea. I think generally speaking, I think there are things that you have to do nowadays in a new build which I think you would find difficult to do in a refurbishment of this building, whether it be anything to do with energy efficiency or insulation levels, airtightness, all these types of technical issues and I think this probably presents itself as a very worthwhile opportunity to provide, I mean we had a similar question in Daliburgh for example two years ago where the locals there, some of the locals there were quite keen to retain the old building which probably dates back to something along the same date of construction as this building and at that time Technical Services undertook a feasibility study to assess the merits of retaining that building and the results of that feasibility study were that it would be far better for you to build a new building and to enjoy the benefits of a new building and not just that but in terms of educational functionality and the designs of schools nowadays where you have more flexible learning spaces and such like, these things are far more difficult to incorporate into a refurbished building as they are for a new build. With a new build you can do things the way they are meant to be done and the Director there mentioned 21st century education and a school that is built and designed nowadays is far different to a school that was built maybe 50 years ago. So it is a good opportunity to start afresh and to design a school that best meets the needs of the pupils and in addition to that there are other technical advantages as I mentioned earlier with its insulation requirements and building regs, accessibility, all these things. Does that answer your question?

Mr Angus MacDonald: That does right enough but the way I look at it, I have quite an experience in building myself, I would say that the materials that you are building the new school with certainly won't outlive the time since this school has been built in the 1960s, I don't think there will modern schools that you are building at the moment will be around in 2070. I don't think they are going to last because personally they are just not up to it. Simple as that.

Mr Dan Macphail: The output specification, that is the document that is written and it is what the designs are based on and it goes out to tender for the contractors and such like. The longevity of the buildings being designed are 60 years. That is the longevity period for these buildings so it should last until then basically. It hopefully will.

Ms Michelle MacDonald: We are going to the new school which is brilliant for those reasons that you stated, do we have to wait until February until it is definitely decided that it is Paible and then will parents have the opportunity to specify certain things that they would like to see in the new school. For example because we are an ex-secondary here we have a fantastic HE Room, will we still be able to say look if we have got to save money because we are building on a current site, can we then ask for an HE room that has cooking units and the children can benefit from that?

Mr Dan Macphail: The instruction that we are being given is to build a school which is similar to Sgoil an Taobh Siar and Sgoil Baile A Mhanaich in terms of accommodation schedule, a mixture between the two. As the Director mentioned there, there will be four classrooms. Now four classrooms are a 25 pupil design capacity, that is a total design capacity of 100 but there would not be a Home Economics room but there would be a general

purpose room in addition to these four classrooms and the general purpose room would be used for things like art, music, home economics. It would not be a home economics room, that is not on the accommodation schedule that is being approved by members. The other point I would like to make it that when we built Sgoil Dhalabroig, pardon my Gaelic, Daliburgh School there was many lessons learnt from the first couple of schools that we built from technical matters down to educational matters. There were many lessons learnt. If you go down to Daliburgh, you will hopefully see that is manifested in the way that the school is run and the way that it operates.

We are now using the benefits from that exercise again, so the new school at North Uist should hopefully incorporate all the good things that we have learnt over the last 3 or 4 years. The accommodation schedules will be similar and I think that one of the things that we were talking about with a member of staff about the home economics room, the danger is in some of these older schools like in Bayble in Lewis and in Daliburgh down in South Uist, is that through time the primary departments has kind of grown into the Secondary units and people have grown into that space and got used to that space and it will be a little bit coming back the way now. But not to the point which I think you will notice it though or think that it is worse or anything like that. I think it will be pretty pleasing. If you go into Daliburgh or Balivanich, I don't know if you have the opportunity to do so, it would be worth going there because that is essentially what you will get but hopefully as we have been calling it, WISP plus is what we are aiming for. A WISP school plus the added benefits of the lessons learnt.

Ms Michelle MacDonald: Thank you for that. It is just as you say it will feel like a step back and the beauty of living in a community where food is produced and if there is going to be a garden and things like that, if there is that opportunity to be able to educate, it is a huge problem in society now to educate children more in things like that and that is available, that will be good.

Mr Dan Macphail: Currently we are working on the basis of incorporating similar facilities for example the environmental garden, the hard and soft play areas, the multi use games areas, the all weather pitches, the court yards. All these things that are features of the WISP schools, we are looking to incorporate in the school. That is what my instruction is from the Director.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Mr Carpenter.

Mr Peter Carpenter: I guess your question is also about the degree of consultation and involvement in the decision making and I understand that a reference group is established, once we get to that point in February this reference group will then include pupils, staff, parent council representatives so that we have an opportunity to see what's wanted as well as what has been learnt from the previous projects.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: It would be very useful if people made the Comhairle aware of whether they would be happy with the proposal that we have in front of us and I would urge you to do so. Because it is very good as Ms McDonald said all Members will receive the transcript of the meetings, they will receive a copy of any letters that are sent into the Comhairle, those that are against and those that are for and it would be very helpful to see letters from various communities.

Ms Catriona McCorquodale: I am very happy that the proposal is to have the school in Paible, my concern is that in living in the community and listening to the community, it is the objectors that are maintaining what's the talk in the community and how much will that influence what happens in February. Should the ones that are pleased with the proposal start to become more vocal which is something you don't want to start in a small community.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: It would be very good for you to put your views down on paper and submit them to the Chief Executive by the date, the 22 November. Very useful indeed.

Ms Catriona McCorquodale: Also would a strong opposition for the current site mean that you would consider going back to the drawing board.

Ms Lesley McDonald: I think the important thing as the Chair has said is the Act refers to representations not to objections, so if you want to make a representation, if you think it is a good idea, please tell the decision makers because yes you have your local elected members here but it will be 31 Members who are voting in this. They need to know what everyone thinks and a copy of everyone of your letters will go to HMIE, a copy of every one of your letters will go ultimately to Scottish Ministers so we want to present as complete a picture as possible to let Government know the decision, the information that the elected members used to make their decision. That is very important. The decision making finally that's for the elected members, the consultation report will be available at least three weeks before the elected members sit down to look at it and that will have our analysis of everything in it. The decision is theirs. What we try to do is, they are very good at making decisions when we give them as complete a picture as we possibly can.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Thank you very much. It doesn't look as if there is anybody else who wishes to ask a question.

Ms Anne Maclellan: I am following on from what Catriona asked there about objectors to the proposal. Is there an option for objectors to go to the Scottish Ministers, kind of go beyond the Council's decision after that has been made in February. What happens after that?

Ms Lesley McDonald: What happens after the Council makes its decision for the sake of argument if the council decides to go with the proposal, it notifies Scottish Ministers of that and Scottish Ministers have an opportunity to call-in the proposal but in terms of the Act, that is only if there is either an element of the process we have got wrong or we have failed to take adequate account of what people have to say. So that is why Mr Carpenter and myself and a lot of other officers will work very hard in producing the consultation report and to say, we usually produce a table, infact I could easily e-mail to people what we have done for other schools. This point was made for the sake of argument, the children will have too far to travel, here is our response to this point, here is what we are doing. So that is what we do so that we can prove to Government that everything has been put in that consultation report and what we also do, which we don't have to do in terms of the law is, we will prepare a transcript of the debate that takes place at the Education and Children's Services and Council and submit that to Government as well just to let them know that this isn't a matter of rubber stamping, this council takes things very seriously and debates them very seriously. Sorry, I wasn't on the mike, I hope you heard me there.

Ms Catriona McCorquodale: I would also like to make the point, the reason that I have been supportive of the site being in Paible is that I currently have children there and they have been able to use the external facilities outwith the school gates which I don't feel the children would be able to use if it was in any other of the two sites that were short leeted, ie Claddach and Carinish because they are on the trunk roads of North Uist. With this site here we are off the trunk road and the children have the privilege of being able to access a beach, go out to do running, fund raising through fun runs and I think it is very important especially when we are trying to promote child health and wellbeing and also educational experiences out with the classroom and I feel that if we went to either of the other two sites that these experiences would not be able to be achieved because they would not be able to go outside the school gates which we currently are able to on this site.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: And also we will be looking at enhanced facilities as Mr Macphail has said, you know, and all our new schools have exceptional outdoor pitches and areas for the children to play in and that includes the pre-school provision. They really are quite exceptional and I am sure those of you who have visited Balivanich or Daliburgh have seen the provision there and you know, I take on board everything you have said and I agree with you.

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Well thank you very much. If you have no further questions I will just make a few closing remarks. The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to the HMIE Report, written representations and oral representations made at the various public meetings. A consultation report will then be prepared which will be published in electronic and printed formats and its availability will be published in local newspapers. This report will be available on the Comhairle website and from Comhairle offices as well as the affected schools free of charge. This consultation report together with any other relevant documentation will be considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee on 4th February 2014 for their recommendation. The Committee's recommendation will then be subject to the approval of the Comhairle on 13th February 2014. Should the Comhairle decide to close any of the schools at this stage it is required to notify Scottish Ministers of that 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 of the decision being made. Scottish Ministers have a six week period from the date of that final decision to consent to the proposal or grant their consent to the proposal subject to conditions or unconditionally. Within the first three weeks of that six week period Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them made by any person. Until the outcome of the six week call-in process has been notified to the Comhairle, the Comhairle will not proceed to implement the proposal. The last date for the receipt of written submissions is 5pm on Friday 22 November 2013. All submissions should be forwarded to Mr Malcolm Burr, Chief Executive of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar at Sandwick Road Stornoway or electronically to schoolsconsultation@cne-siar.gov.uk. That address is at 3.5 of the proposal document. Thank you all very much for your attendance this evening. Moran Taing agus oidche mhath leibh uile.