

**SCHOOL CONSULTATIONS ERISKAY – 9 OCTOBER 2013**

Present: Cllr Catriona Stewart  
 Mr Peter Carpenter  
 Cllr David Blaney  
 Mr Allan Smithyman  
 Ms Lesley McDonald  
 9 parents/members of the public

Appologies Cllr Ronnie Mackinnon

Cllr Catriona Stewart	My name is Catriona Stewart and I am Chair of the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Education and Children's Services Committee and I will be chairing this evenings meeting. With me this evening are Mr Peter Carpenter, our Director of Education and Children's Services, Ms Lesley McDonald, who is Head of the Comhairle's Executive Office and Mr Allan Smithyman, who is the Learning Community Principal for this area. This evenings meeting is being recorded so could I ask you now to ensure that your mobile phones are switched off; even on silent it does interfere with the equipment. So we would be very grateful if you could make sure that all these are switched off. Thank you very much.
	The other thing is, when we come to the section of the meeting where you can ask questions, would you wait please until the microphone actually reaches you and if you give your name so that we have true record for the transcript of who said what and when during the course of the meeting. Thank you very much.
	In August 2007 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar decided to undertake a review of education provision throughout the Western Isles. Since that time a number of informal conversations and formal consultations have been held in various communities which resulted in the closure of some schools and the amalgamation of a number of schools. This evening's meeting is part of the formal consultation process for Eriskay school. The aim of the authority is and has always been to provide our children with the best educational experiences and outcomes in modern learning environments, suitable for the twenty-first century requirements within the resources available to us. The Comhairle continues to face serious challenges. Our school rolls have practically halved in thirty years and as education is resourced centrally according to pupil numbers, funding has therefore decreased dramatically also. We face ever tightening financial constraints. Those present have probably attended various budget consultations and will be aware of just how significant the savings we are required to make are. Pressure on other Comhairle services such as Community Care, Roads and Infrastructure, Waste Services and many more continue also to cause us difficulties and the implementation for curriculum for excellence has impacted directly on the Education budget.
	We have to date build six new schools across our islands and I trust many of you have had an opportunity to visit the new school in this area at Daliburgh. We will be consulting on the proposal to build a new school in North Uist at the end of this month and on completion over 50% of our pupils will be educated in new, efficient learning environments in which to deliver the new curriculum.
	Quality education being delivered in quality buildings. Our aim in line with Scottish Governments estates strategy is for all our pupils to be education in new or refurbished buildings by 2018. In order to achieve this aspiration we must reduce the spare capacity in our school estate.
	I will now ask Ms McDonald to go over procedure. Once she has done that I will ask Mr Carpenter to speak to the proposal document and after that I will open the meeting for questions.
Ms Lesley McDonald	Thank you Chair. Can you hear me because I know I am quite softly spoken?
	The process that we are going through is laid down in terms of the Schools

	<p>Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010. In terms of that act we require to be out to consultation with parents and members of the public for thirty school days. That is the October holidays don't count. In this case we are going to be out for thirty one school days from 19 September until 14 November. A note of this meeting will be taken and will be used as I will explain later and I would ask you if you are speaking to give your name because that makes the note all the more accurate and that will go to out Elected Members. Any written representations made by 5pm on 14 November, either by writing to Mr Malcolm Bur the Comhairle's Chief Executive or by writing to the Schools Consultations email address which is in the proposal document. The first thing we will do with those is; the law says we either send the representations or a summary of the representations. It has always been our practice to send the representations. We will send any representations and a note of this meeting to HMIE. HMIE will then come out into the school and they will prepare a Report on the proposal by 6 December of this year. The Director of Education and Children's Services and colleagues will take that Report, the note of this meeting and any representations that have been received in to account in producing what is called a Consultation Report. That will be published on the Comhairle's website and anyone who makes a representation or who gives me their email addresses tonight will get a copy of that. That requires to be published at least 3 weeks before the decision is made. That will go to our Education and Children's Services Committee on 4 February next year, which will make a recommendation to the Comhairle meeting the following week. If the Comhairle determines on that date to close the school, what will then happen is within six days of that we have to send all of the documentation, the proposal document, the representations, a note of the meeting, the HMIE Report and the Consultation Report to Scottish Ministers who then have six weeks to determine whether they wish to call in the proposal. The reason they would have to have for call in is that the Comhairle had done something wrong procedurally or had failed to take account or adequate account of a material consideration. They have six weeks to do that, for the first three weeks of that six week period further representations can be made which Ministers will also have a look at. It is all very very tight time wise until that point if however ministers do call in the application, there is then no statutory timescale for how quickly they have to deal with that however, I would have to say that the council's previous experience is that when ministers do call in they have dealt with it pretty promptly.</p>
	<p>I am happy to answer any questions as to the process and just for the sake of the recording and the Minute, Councillor Ronnie Mackinnon has submitted his apologies for this evening's meeting. Thank you Chair.</p>
<p>Cllr Catriona Stewart</p>	<p>Thank you Ms McDonald. I'll now ask Mr Carpenter to speak to the proposal document.</p>
<p>Mr Peter Carpenter</p>	<p>Thank you Chair. I hope that everyone has, or has seen a copy of, the proposal document and I don't suggest it is wise for me to go through it section by section. I would just like to give you a brief, short presentation of the key issues involved within the document and am happy to take questions following that. The initial proposal to close Eriskay school came primarily as a result of the falling roll over recent years and the decision by the Comhairle to review education provision throughout the Western Isles from August 2007.</p>
	<p>In the broader context, falling roles and a significant number of schools that were under occupied, in poor condition, or both, led to this process of school review and six years later the education authority is in better position. As the Chair has indicated to you, around half of our pupils are now taught in new premises with state of the art facilities. However, our rolls continue to fall with the gradual decline to around 3400 pupils at the beginning of this academic session. In summer of 2013 Education and Children's Services Department received placement requests from parents of pupils at Eriskay school seeking to transfer their children to Daliburgh school. The publication of the positive inspection Report on Daliburgh at that time was stated to be a factor in the decision to transfer. Subsequent to the approval of the transfer all families met with our</p>

	<p>Learning Community Principal, Neil Macdonald and the transfer of all pupils was agreed.</p>
	<p>This consultation meeting is therefore unusual in the fact that there are currently no pupils attending Eriskay Primary School. All of the children are now attending Daliburgh. I met with the children today with the cooperation, support and help of the head teacher and staff. I discussed the children's views about their move to their new school and they stated a number of advantages of their new school in conversation with me, particularly they said that they had in the lessons and in the after school activities they enjoyed, a wider group of friends. They enjoyed a better play park and school facilities. They felt it was positive that they were able to give a wider group of friends and socialise with a wider group of other young people and all children indicated to us that they were happy at their new school. They also said lunches were better because they were made at the school. They did say that they missed their old school but they said to us that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages.</p>
	<p>I also met with the staff. Staff of Daliburgh school and also staff currently working at Daliburgh school who previously had worked at Eriskay school. They stated that they felt that the move to the new school was quick, but actually that that was not an adverse affect on the quality of education that the children received and there were benefits in that quick transfer. The staff were very keen for the Comhairle to see the old school premises used positively in the future and that the building should not fall into a state of disrepair. They were also keen to see existing community links between Eriskay school and the community continue, perhaps with traditional events such as the carol service to continue to take place in Eriskay as much as possible. From an education and Comhairle point of view, there are a number of other factors to consider in addition to those raised by the pupils and staff. It is estimated that it would cost around £150.000 to undertake the necessary repairs and maintenance work to the Eriskay primary school. There is also an arguable case that very small schools despite the close individual attention that the children may receive can limit the pupils' opportunities within the curriculum. We therefore believe that a larger staff and larger peer group groupings will bring advantages to the children as the children themselves stated. These include increased educational opportunities, both curricular and extra curricular. There are more staff available and therefore more opportunities for breadth in the curriculum and more and greater flexibility in grouping children for teaching and learning and greater flexibility to the school in the deployment of staff to meet the different learning needs of the children in the school.</p>
	<p>There are better facilities at Daliburgh which provides a modern and attractive learning environment to the children and greater levels of management support in the school to promote school improvement. In the proposal document and the time between the advert and the information being distributed the Comhairle has received one letter in response to the consultation advert and proposal statement. This letter requests that the Comhairle should consider all alternatives to closure and the main argument is that the school should be moth balled meaning it should be left available for future use. The Comhairle has carefully considered this option. The reasons that we consider it to be untenable is that the financial costs would be significant and the required costs for repairing maintenance of the school to make the premises fit for purpose would be substantial. Maintaining a building for future use pre-supposes the need for the building in the future. All indications from the returns would suggest that the roll would not change substantially in the coming years to that of the last few years. In conclusion I would ask you if you would be kind enough to give us the opportunity now to discuss with you, your views about the proposal document. We are here to listen and also if necessary to answer any specific questions that you may have about the proposal document. Thank you Chair.</p>
<p>Cllr Catriona Stewart</p>	<p>Thank you Mr Carpenter. I'll now open the meeting out to the floor for any questions and as I said previously if you will wait for the mic to come to you to give your name before you ask the question. If you put your hands up the roving mic</p>

	will be given to you. Thank you everyone.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	I am very disappointed you have come to this kind of decision. As far I can see you are doing a consultation sense: sham. The school was closed from the end of last term. You have let yourselves down. You should have kept that school open, there is nothing wrong with the school. On the last day of term one of those schools were getting lots of praise for education and the same day that pupils were getting removed from a nice wee school. Seemingly because one of the parents said that because the education side was good. I know that the school was getting praised for its education and all of a sudden its being closed down because education isn't good enough. Another thing is the answers to the consultation questions we never ever got any answers from the conversations that were had in the past. You are saying it is going to cost £150,000 for the repairs for the school. Who's going to pay £150,000 for repairs. You try to save money, you're saving money already if you're prepared to switch the heating off. After school clubs are a (sense: red hearing). All the kids go to these clubs anyway.
Mr Peter Carpenter (19:45)	I am saying to you that the decision about the closure was due to parental preference and that from the Comhairle's point of view there was no criticism of the quality of education provided by Eriskay school.
	The second point was about the repairs to the school. We have a condition survey document that was undertaken at the schools premises in January 2013. So it is a very, fairly recent document that is done independently of the Comhairle by an external organisation who independently review the state of our buildings and advise us of the costs of the required work and that is the figure that was presented to us for the repairs and maintenance of the current building. I think you are right about what you said about the clubs and I know that it is true that many of the children from Eriskay school did attend the athletics club and other clubs at Daliburgh. I think that had helped in their view with some of the transition into Daliburgh but there was also a wider range of clubs there that they were also able to access and my point was simply that they also were able to access more friendship groups and better facilities as part of the move.
Cllr Catriona Stewart	Ms McDonald
Ms Lesley McDonald	Thank you. Just to explain the legal position I quite appreciate that there are currently no pupils in the school but the school has not closed. We wouldn't be here tonight if the school had closed. This is a consultation on the closure of the school. The situation is that the parents of the children who would have attended the school in August of this year put placing request for their children to go to Daliburgh school. The Education Department of the Comhairle has not chosen to close the school. It is carrying out this consultation on a proposal to close the school in the light of the fact that there are currently no children within the school. Thank you.
Cllr Catriona Stewart	If you could pass whoever has the microphone.
Ms Kirsty Rodgers	(22:19) Unable to hear.
Mr Peter Carpenter	The buildings are categorised in to gradings A, B and C and part of the building in Eriskay is classified as C, (poor) at the moment and some parts as B and the £150,000 would be necessary to bring much of the building to that category B level and that would be necessary for it to be used effectively as an effective context of teaching and learning. So some parts of the building are in a much worse state of repair than others and that money would be required to do a whole range of work including floor repairs, sinks, windows, ingressive water into roof spaces, There is a whole range of information within the condition survey which would undertake that work over a number of years over the most immediate future

	of the school from 2013 for the next five years.
Ms Kirsty Rodgers	(23:42) Unable to hear.
Ms Lesley McDonald	Thank you. If I could just pick up on what Mr Carpenter said. The £150,000 would be to bring the school up to the Comhairle's policy as to how it wishes it schools to be for educational use which would include probably a sum of money to deal with the very specific requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act in so far as the apply to schools that I don't know Eriskay school particularly so I am not sure where it stands with disabled access but that can sometimes be quite a lot of money. Now, I noticed you have mentioned heating and the gentleman before you also mentioned heating as did Councillor Mackinnon when I spoke to him earlier on today when he gave me his apologies, so I have certainly asked the department to confirm what the position is with the heating in the school because I understand there is a concern that the building is deteriorating already because it is not being heated and it certainly is a lot chillier today so certainly it would be our normal practice to keep the heating on at a minimum level certainly so that the school should not deteriorate. Both during this process and doing any subsequent process for disposal of the school.
Ms Kirsty Rodgers (?)	(25:20) Unable to hear. (sense: question re future use of Eriskay school building.
Ms Lesley McDonald	What would then happen to the building would be in terms of our disposal policy for any building that is surplus to the council's requirements. The first thing is it is declared surplus to the council's requirements which I don't think would be an issue here. The second stage is that in terms of Government guidance an offer is made to Hebridean Housing Partnership as to whether they require the site for housing and not wanting to put too much pressure on the gentlemen immediately to your left, I don't know if he would know if they would be interested. The next thing we do and this is certainly what has happened to all of the schools that we have closed recently that have come up thus far is we assess community interest in the school and if there is community interest, the community is given the opportunity to put in a business plan for how the school would operate for some other purpose and the price has been determined in terms of something that is called The Disposal of Land Scotland Regulations which allows a Local Authority to dispose of something at less than its market value because of the community benefit that would be obtained from that. Just to give you an example we have recently concluded the transfer of Bragar school which the market value was either £132.000 or £152.000 and the transfer value of that school, was £10.000 and if there is no community interest or a viable business plan cant be produced then we would seek to go to the open market.
	Now, I know you have been particularly ill served in this part of Uist with previous disposals and I was in fact looking at a resumption application for Lochboisdale Old School just earlier on today and we have encountered difficulties with the title deeds that we acquired from the County Council of the County of Inverness, particularly in dealing with the formalities of crofting before schools were built, but we would then dispose on the open market and I would hope that it could be a considerably swifter process that you have experienced in Uist of late. Thank you Chair.
Cllr Catriona Stewart	(28:20) Unable to hear.
Evelyn (?)	On the heating, it is electric heating and we don't have the heating on just now.
Cllr Catriona Stewart	That is certainly something the department will look into, Evelyn.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	You never answered one of my questions about the community conversations, when are we getting the answers back and what was the reason for that. (29:15)

Cllr Catriona Stewart	Yes, but I was not aware until this evening that you hadn't received any feedback.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	Well, we didn't.
Cllr Catriona Stewart	We will look back in the record and find out from the department why no feedback came. It is the first time I have been made aware of the fact that no feedback came back.
Ms Lesley McDonald	Certainly that concern has been noted. We will check on that when we get back to the office in Stornoway and we will get replies to you. If you could perhaps give me your email address.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	Well it's a bit late for that.
Ms Lesley McDonald	Well, what we can do is we can dig it out, we can get in touch with you and if you wish to have answers we can give you those answers and we'll make sure that the answers to those questions go on the consultation report that goes before the members.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	Do you not think you've made a horrible mistake by doing this?
Cllr Catriona Stewart	Yes. You have made the point again, but I think as Mr Carpenter has said to you we are in the situation where parents have chosen to remove their children to Daliburgh school so we therefore have to come out and deal with the situation which is why we are here this evening.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	It's still a horrible mistake.
Ms Lesley McDonald	I think certainly we can record your point of view on that. The only point I would make legally is that if a parent puts in a placing request to go to a school, the only legitimate reason we have for refusing that request is if there isn't space in the school. So if a parent puts in a placing request we have to say yes unless there isn't room for the child, but your points are well made and they will be noted in the note of the meeting.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	But you charge for transport.
Ms Lesley McDonald	Yes there are different rules for placing requests for the school and the school transport policy indicates that you would normally be expected to pay if you were attending a school by virtue of a placing request.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	Eriskay and Daliburgh school are eight miles apart. (32:08)
Mr Peter Carpenter	I understand it is a little bit less than that from my information I think it is slightly less than you are indicating but it is also a matter of stopping to pick people up and do various other jobs.
Mr Iain Mackinnon	The bus doesn't go direct to Daliburgh school because we all have ability to get it.

Mr Peter Carpenter	Yes. That is often the case with such provision that they would be picking other children up and stopping for part of the journey. It cannot be direct for every pupil, I'm afraid.
--------------------	---

Cllr Catriona Stewart	Thank you. Gentleman at the back Evelyn.
-----------------------	--

Mr John Macinnes (?)	If for instance there were pupils in the future whose parents didn't want the school closed. What the council have done is to take that choice away (sense).
----------------------	--

Mr Peter Carpenter	It is a bit of a hypothetical question. I would say that in my introduction I did say that there was a process of school review across the authority in a number of schools and therefore regardless of the decision of those parents that you have indicated this school and other schools are part of the broad school estate review and we would have found ourselves reviewing the potential challenges faced by providing the school in Eriskay with the number of pupils. No matter how many there were, three or four, or seven who would have to go through that process. We would probably be sitting in this room doing the same thing and the fact that parents chose to move their children in that way, in many ways we have been able to see the advantages of that as I indicated from speaking to the children and to the staff today.
--------------------	--

Cllr Catriona Stewart	Thank you very much everyone.
-----------------------	-------------------------------

	The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to HME report, written representations and oral representations made at this meeting, 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. The report will be available on the Comhairle website and from Comhairle offices, as well as Daliburgh school, free of charge. The consultation report together with any other relevant documentation will be considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee who will make a recommendation to the Comhairle for ratification. Should the Comhairle decide to close the school at this stage it is required to notify 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 six working days of the decision being made. Scottish Ministers have a six week period from the date of the final decision to decide if they will call in the proposal. Until the outcome of the six week call in process has been notified to the Comhairle, the Comhairle will not proceed with the implementation of the proposal. The deadline date for the receipt of the written submissions is was said earlier 5pm on Thursday 14 November 2013. All submission should be sent to Mr Malcolm Burr, Chief Executive of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Sandwich Road, Stornoway or electronically to <a href="mailto:schoolsconsultation@cne-siar.gov.uk">schoolsconsultation@cne-siar.gov.uk</a> that address is in the proposal document.
--	---

	I would just like to thank you all for your attendance at this evening's meeting. I appreciate our proposal to close Eriskay school is difficult for many people in this community however, change is inevitable for progress to continue in many areas life and educational provision must evolve to keep base with children's needs and requirements. The children who formerly received their education in Eriskay school are now being educated in a new facility which is resourced to the highest specification available within the resources available to us as an authority. They have purpose built outdoor facilities and opportunities for sport, which not only excite them as we have heard but also challenge them to learn new skills. Children may receive their formal education a short bus journey away from this beautiful island, but they will always belong to Eriskay and will continue to absorb its traditions and culture during their childhood years and feel proud of the values instilled in them by family and community.
--	--

