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**Review of Education Provision**  
**at**  
**SHELIBOST SCHOOL**  
**Isle of Harris**

**CONSULTATION REPORT**  
**SEPTEMBER 2010**

**Roinn an Fhoghlaim is Seirbheisean Chloinne**

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# Review of Education Provision at Shelibost School, Isle of Harris Consultation Report

## Report by Director of Education and Children's Services

### CONSIDER THE PROPOSAL THAT :

- **Education provision at Shelibost Primary School be discontinued with effect from 29 June 2012**
- **That the pupils of Shelibost Primary School continue their education at Sir E Scott School, from 16 August 2012**
- **That the catchment area of Sir E Scott School be extended to include the current catchment area of Shelibost Primary School.**

### BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Comhairle, at its Meeting on 29 April 2010, authorised the Director of Education and Children's Services to proceed to undertake the necessary statutory consultation with parents, staff, pupils and other interested parties affected by the proposal regarding the proposed closure of Shelibost School as required by the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 1.2 This decision relates to the implementation of the Strategy for the Future Provision of Education in the Western Isles. The Comhairle is required to provide its statutory services as effectively and efficiently as possible. It is therefore necessary to be strategic in the delivery of education to ensure Best Value. School rolls in the Authority as a whole have been falling year on year for the last thirty years and this, based on population projections, is a continuing trend. This trend has resulted in there being more buildings in the school estate than are considered necessary for the delivery of high quality education.
- 1.3 In order to ensure appropriate investment in education at a time of financial challenges it is necessary that the Comhairle make the most efficient use of its finances and resources. The current level of over-capacity in schools combined with the high maintenance costs and poor condition of many of the school buildings throughout the Western Isles is a significant drain on resources and presents a major obstacle to investment in education and school buildings.
- 1.4 Shelibost School is designated as a very remote rural school. In terms of Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010, the Comhairle has given special regard to -
  - any viable alternative to the closure proposal,
  - the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to
    - (a) the sustainability of the community,
    - (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

- the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to
  - (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular),
    - (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities,
    - (ii) any environmental impact,
  - (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities.

## THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

2.1 The current requirements for consulting on proposed school closures are set out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

- A proposal document was issued as a result of a decision approved by the Comhairle as detailed in Appendix A. A copy of this document was issued free of charge to the consultees as listed in the Proposal Document and was also published on the Comhairle website.
- An advert was placed in local newspapers on 13 May 2010 and the consultation ran thereafter for a period of 34 school days until 30 June 2010.
- A public meeting was held on Wednesday, 16 June 2010.
- Pupils and staff were also consulted separately.
- HMle involvement included being sent a copy of the proposal document, their attendance at the public meeting and their visiting the affected schools and meeting with parents, pupils and staff. They also received a copy of all written representations. They then prepared a report on the educational aspects of the proposal ( Appendix D)
- This Consultation Report is the Comhairle's response to issues raised during the consultation period including a response to identified inaccuracies in the consultation information.
- This Consultation Report will be published at least three weeks before a final decision is taken by the Comhairle on the proposal.

### Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment

2.2 An Initial Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment (Appendix C), in line with statutory legislation, was undertaken in relation to the proposal for the School. There were no discriminatory or detrimental consequences identified in relation to the proposal being implemented. Therefore a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

## CONSULTATION MEETINGS

3.1 Consultation meetings were held as follows:

- Public meeting at Shelibost Primary School on 16 June 2010.
- Meetings with staff at both Shelibost and Sir E Scott Schools were held separately.
- Meetings with pupils at both Shelibost and Sir E Scott Schools were held separately.

## OMISSIONS AND INACCURACIES

4.1 Within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 there is guidance on how errors or omissions should be addressed. The advertisement regarding the proposed closure of Shelibost School stated, in error, that the receiving school was Leverhulme Memorial School when in fact it should have stated Sir E Scott School as the receiving school. A letter was sent to parents and staff informing them of this error and a corrected advertisement was placed in local newspapers. HMle were also informed. Following representations at the public meeting with regard to this error the Comhairle agreed to extend the deadline for representations for one week, from 30 June 2010 to 7 July 2010.

- 4.2 In paragraph 8.1 of the Proposal Document the school was categorised as condition C when in actual fact it is a condition B building. This error was not deemed to be material and therefore no further action was taken in relation to this matter.
- 4.3 In paragraph 9.1, Shelibost School was described as an accessible rural school when in fact it is a very remote rural school. An advertisement to that effect was placed in local newspapers. Attention was drawn to the error at the Public Meeting and the correct definition was given. This error was not deemed to be material and therefore no further action was taken in relation to this matter.

## REPRESENTATIONS

- 5.1 The written representations received during the consultation period are detailed below.

Representations from:	Number
• Individual written responses (1 with 2 signatures)	22
• Parent Council	1
• Associated Presbyterian Church	1
• Community Council	1
• West Harris Trust	1
• Staff Professional Associations	2
• Bòrd na Gàidhlig	1
• NHS Western Isles	1
• Fire Service	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>31</b>

## SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS AND COMHAIRLE RESPONSES

- 6.1 This section details the relevant points raised at public meetings and in the written submissions. A full transcript of the public meeting is included as Appendix B. A copy of all written representations will be published as part to the Report to Comhairle Members.
- 6.2 The responses to the issues raised are detailed below.

<b>FINANCE</b>
<p><b>ISSUE:</b> Concern was expressed about the accuracy of the financial figures, the level of savings and running costs of the new Sir E Scott School Primary Department.</p> <p><b>RESPONSE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsequent to the Consultation meeting, information in relation to the savings was provided by the Director of Finance to the Parent Council by letter.</li> <li>• A saving of approximately £116k from the closure of Shelibost Schools is a significant saving within the overall Schools Estate Strategy and therefore provides the best opportunity for investment in schools to ensure the long term viability of education in rural areas.</li> <li>• Based on initial estimates, the projected running costs for the Primary Department of the new Sir E Scott School are £750k should Shelibost and Scalpay Schools close.</li> </ul>

- The annual budgeted school running cost per pupil, as reported to Scottish Government, is obtained by dividing the total budgeted school running cost by the school roll. The total revised cost for 2010/11 is detailed in the following table.

<b>Shelibost School 2010</b>	
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>
Employee Expenses	123,964
Premises Related Expenditure	4,487
Utilities Related Expenditure	3,486
Resources Related Expenditure	5,823
Transport Related Expenditure	8,728
Catering Related Expenditure	13,588
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>160,076</b>
Parent Council Funding	430
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>160,506</b>
Number of Pupils	11
<b>COST PER PUPIL</b>	<b>14,591</b>

- The Comhairle welcomes all initiatives that will ensure best value and promote effective partnership work. Such initiatives have to be based on a sound business model with evidence of ongoing revenue income. No such plan or proposal has been presented to the Comhairle and any suggestions made by the West Harris Trust at this time must be seen as aspirational.
- Neither the condition of the building, nor the running costs are the principal reason for the closure recommendation. Even if the utility costs were reduced, pupil numbers would not increase, and the educational benefits would still support the amalgamation with Sir E Scott School.

## **BUILDINGS**

**ISSUE:** Concerns were expressed that Sir E Scott School would not have the capacity to accommodate the pupils from Shelibost School and that levels of noise from the Secondary Department could distract the primary pupils.

**RESPONSE:**

- School enrolments have for the last 30 years declined in the Western Isles. Whilst all schools have had an element of variation over this period of time it is clear that, based on current population statistics, the school rolls in Shelibost and Sir E Scott Schools are not likely to rise significantly.
- Growth in pupil populations would have to reflect a significant development in economic activity, housing expansion and migration. There is no evidence at this time to suggest that this will happen.
- The new Sir E Scott School Primary Department will have the capacity to accommodate Shelibost and/or Scalpay Schools based on current enrolments and future projections.
- The design team for Sir E Scott School have taken into account the acoustic issues of noise transfer between the first and second floor. They have included acoustic insulation to address the issue.

**TRAVEL**

**ISSUE:** The community was concerned that the distance from Scarista to Tarbert would result in young children having a protracted school day and that travelling long distances would be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of young children.

**RESPONSE**

- The journey from Scarista to Sir E Scott School is approximately 16 miles but for some pupils, the proposal will result in them being educated closer to their home, than at present.
- The Comhairle's Home to School Travel Policy provides transport for children who have to walk more than 1 mile. In the majority of rural schools within the Outer Hebrides, the catchment area is greater than the one mile distance.
- The distances that pupils have to travel to and from school are clearly important in any assessment of appropriate transport provision. Distances of themselves have to be set in the context of road conditions, and the time that such travelling takes.
- The Comhairle Policy states that Primary pupils should not, as a rule have to travel more than 30 minutes on a bus, or Secondary pupils more than 60 minutes. On occasions where pupils are living in a remote location, which would mean that their journey to school was longer than the policy stated, reasonable steps would be taken to minimise their journey time.
- A number of the pupils currently attending Shelibost School travel distances similar to that proposed for Sir E Scott.
- With the revised travel arrangements, all Shelibost pupils will have a travel time which is within the Comhairle's 30 minute policy.
- All bus contractors meet rigorous contractual obligations. All bus drivers have appropriate SCRO checks and the service is delivered to a high standard. Drivers and the public have, where appropriate, made referrals in terms of any nuisance behaviour on buses or child protection concerns. All of these are robustly investigated and addressed.
- Research conducted into the effect of travel to school does not say that children should not travel, but has highlighted some things which should be considered to reduce any negative effects. These include:
  - Providing a good quality bus
  - Competent and friendly driver
  - Shortest route possible
  - Exercise before school
  - Travelling on school rather than public buses
- In addition to these factors, it is clear that the research suggests that pupils tend to choose friends with whom they come into contact with most frequently within school and in their community, and that school-related participation does not prove to be greatly affected by travel time. A longer school day, an uncomfortable bus-ride and an inability to take part in extra-curricular activities, were factors found to be associated with poor academic performance. On this basis, the Education and Children's Services Department has ensured that there are good buses on the route, competent drivers, and that pupils travelling from the same area are together.
- The drop-off point at Sir E Scott School would be considered a benefit in the context of the national 'Walk to School' initiative. The Comhairle would ensure, in consultation with the school, that there would be adult supervision between the bus drop-off point and the school entrance.

**PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION**

**ISSUES:** Parents asked how pre-school provision would fit in with the plans for Sir E Scott School.

**RESPONSE**

- The pre-school provision in Tarbert is currently provided through the voluntary sector. The new school would have dedicated pre-school facilities and could accommodate the Croileagan if there was a desire for the provision to be managed by the Comhairle.

**EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS**

**ISSUES:** Parents felt that the smaller class sizes at Shelibost School were preferable to the larger classes that would result in the schools combining.

**RESPONSE**

- Shelibost School currently has one English Medium class of 11 pupils with children in six out of the seven stages of primary education.
- In the event of Shelibost School amalgamating with Scalpay and Sir E Scott Schools class sizes would still be within the maximum composite class size of 25.
- Effective learning and teaching is highly dependent on children's ability to interact with their peer group and teacher, in relation to their learning. There is no evidence to suggest that very small composite classes do better than the maximum composite class size of 25 pupils.
- Some of the specific benefits of attending a school with a larger roll in the context of the Western Isles are:
  - Increased opportunities for pupils, including both curricular and extra-curricular
  - A larger pupil population will enable greater flexibility in grouping children for learning and teaching
  - There will also be greater flexibility in the development of staff to meet the learning needs of pupils
  - The pupils will have access to a wider range of activities than are available to them at present in larger groupings alongside pupils of similar ages.
- It is the view of the Education and Children's Services Department that quality of teaching is the single most important factor, not the class size.
- This view is supported in the recent 'Review of Class Size Control Mechanisms' as reported in August 2010 by the Working Group set up by the Scottish Government.
- Douglas Cairns, HMIe Assistant Chief Inspector advised the Scottish Government's Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee (2010) that "by and large, the spectrum of quality across small rural primary schools seems to be much the same as the national average." Therefore it can be seen from the above comments that there is no definitive advantage to be gained from pupils being educated in a smaller school.
- The Comhairle in recent years has seen a steady growth in its enrolment in Gaelic Medium Education. The Education and Children's Services Department's revised Gaelic Plan will set a target of at least 50% of P1 enrolments in Gaelic medium education over the next 3 years. This is considered realistic on the basis that many parents whose children are enrolled in Croileagan, do not enrol their children in Gaelic medium education where their local school only provides education through the medium of English.



**ISSUES:** Parents feel that the proposal to close Shelibost School would remove parental choice, particularly with regard to English Medium education.

**RESPONSE**

- The Education and Children's Services Department recognises that any school closure reduces parental choice. However, in Harris there would still remain a choice of two primary schools.
- The Comhairle has no intention to consult on the discontinuation of English Medium Education at Leverhulme Memorial School. If Shelibost School were to close, we accept that there would be less choice, but believe that the proposal would provide an enhanced education provision.

**ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

**ISSUES:** Parents feel that the small rural school and Shelibost School in particular provides good care and support for children with additional support needs.

**RESPONSE**

- The Education and Children's Services Department is required to provide appropriate support for all young people with ASN as detailed in legislation. Support is provided irrespective of the school, and currently the Education and Children's Services Department supports approximately 1100 children in 38 schools is being compliant with current legislation and best practice guidance. The Authority's ASN provision has been positively evaluated by HMIe inspection processes.
- Sir E Scott School has the facilities to cater for the needs of all children with additional support needs, similar to those at Shelibost School.
- Within the Western Isles we have approximately 1100 young people with Additional Support Needs in 38 schools representing 19 categories of need ranging from pupils with Learning Difficulties, Health Needs, Physical Disability, Sensory Impairment, Developmental Delay of Needs and those with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.
- Sir E Scott School will provide qualified staff with access to a significant range of teaching areas inclusive of mainstream classrooms, small group and individual tuition rooms. The accommodation will be fully DDA compliant and have appropriate intimate care resources and medical room provision. This is in addition to access to all other school and community facilities such as swimming, gym and outdoor areas etc.
- Sir E Scott provides a mainstream environment which can provide appropriate social groupings and settings for young people with additional support needs and ensures that learning groups are better balanced in aspects of learning and teaching.
- The larger school population and environment of Sir E Scott provides a social context which better replicates normal community settings. This will require young people and staff to work together to meet the challenges that this presents. Inclusion/ASN needs are not necessarily best met in very small segregated provision, or small classes or schools.
- The support provided in Sir E Scott and other large schools is effective, and there is no evidence that young people do less well. It could be argued that they do better, in that they cope with the increased social and learning demands that the larger school provides. All provision within the Western Isles is designed to meet individual needs and as far as possible we work to ensure Inclusion in all local schools. It is clear that all provision benefits from resources that are available in each school environment and community, and that the larger, newly developed Sir E Scott School will have many enhanced facilities, which will enable a broader range of children's needs to be met.

**AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES**

**ISSUES:** Parents expressed concerns regarding access to after-school clubs at Sir E Scott School in relation to transport and supervision between the end of the school day and after-school activities starting.

**RESPONSE**

- After-school activity funding is transparent and equitably distributed across all schools in the Western Isles. It is the case, that the bigger the school and the more staff within it, the broader the range and provision of after-school activities.
- If children want to participate in after school activities, schools usually make arrangements for children to get passes for the service bus or, where possible, arrange other transport.
- After school activities will also continue to be supported through Community Education, Sport and Health and the Voluntary Sector in local communities.
- The Comhairle will look to provide after-school supervision for pupils who wish to participate in clubs and activities.
- In response to the issues raised in the community consultations, the Department is actively looking at ways of providing a community development resource in each area, where a school may close. This is to encourage and support local communities to develop and use local resources for recreational, learning and other community uses. A stage 2 European Social Fund application has recently been submitted.

**IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY**

**ISSUES:** A number of concerns were expressed in relation to the school being the heart of the community, that its closure would result in the loss of facilities and that it could adversely impact on economic development.

**RESPONSE**

- Over a period of 30 years, with significantly more schools than we currently have, there has been an annual decline in the pupil population and there is no evidence within the Western Isles that having a school in a community increases inward migration
- The decline in population is not always greater in communities where schools have already closed. In fact, in some communities, the population has increased despite the closure of the local school.
- The Education and Children's Services Department recognises that many parents choose to move to the Western Isles for very positive reasons, such as an opportunity to live in a small town, small villages and very rural areas.
- A school is only one of a number of services in any community and, like other service, it can only exist where there is a viable demand. Service provision in a community more frequently reflects the demands placed upon it by demographics, population and the economy.
- The School Estate Review should be seen in the context of a wider review of Council services and community planning.
- It is not possible to provide schools in every location where people choose to live in order that children can walk or cycle to school. The Department attempts to provide schools within community areas that are considered accessible within the Home to School Travel Policy.
- The Education and Children's Services Department recognises that school closures will affect employment in an area. In order for the Comhairle to develop a robust development strategy and a stronger economic base for the local economy, it is necessary to identify funding that will support economic regeneration, rather than inefficient investment in unsustainable schools.

- We acknowledge that this proposal, if implemented, would create some difficulty for the APC congregation. The Comhairle's policy for the disposal of assets makes provision for interested community groups to submit a business plan for the use of such surplus buildings. There are other community facilities available, albeit on the east coast of Harris, which may be geographically suitable.
- The Education and Children's Services Department recognises the aspirations of the West Harris Trust and accepts that in 2009/10 there were 10 outline planning applications submitted, of which 9 were for houses. It is understood that a number of these applications are for holiday homes, and of those remaining, there is no way of determining the number that would have children of primary school age, or whether parents would choose to enrol their children in Shelibost.
- Research suggests a ratio of approximately 28 primary school children and 20 secondary school children for every 100 houses built.
- There has been a demographic change in recent years, whereby couples are having their families later in life, and the average size of a family has dropped significantly.
- The North Harris Trust has been in existence for 7 years and in that period the school population in Harris has continued to decline.
- The South Harris Community Council vision for a community windfarm as a significant project for economic regeneration may not provide the expected impact, in terms of population growth and pupil enrolments. Research, based on experience nationally, suggests that such a project could generate 5.16 jobs over a 25 year period. However, it is not possible to determine the impact on school rolls.

**HMIe REPORT**

- 7.1 In line with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, a report was provided by HM Inspectorate on the educational aspects of the proposed closure of Shelibost School and the transfer of pupils to Sir E Scott School . This report is attached as Appendix D.
- 7.2 The Report also identifies issues for consideration by the Comhairle as follows.

<b>HMIe REPORT</b>
<p><b>ISSUE:</b> The Comhairle should consider carefully the proposal of the West Harris Trust and other community views in taking forward this proposal. In particular, it should assess whether the proposed regeneration of the community could mean a rise in the pupil population, making Shelibost Primary School a viable remote rural school.</p> <p><b>RESPONSE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Education and Children's Services Department recognises the aspirations of the West Harris Trust and accepts that in 2009/10 there were 10 outline planning applications submitted of which 9 were for houses. It is understood that a number of these applications are for holiday homes, and of the remaining, there is no way of determining the number that would have children of primary school age, or whether parents would choose to enrol their children in Shelibost.</li> <li>• Research suggests a ratio of 28 primary school children and 20 secondary children for every 100 houses.</li> <li>• There has been a demographic change in recent years whereby couples are having their families later in life and the average size of a family has dropped significantly.</li> <li>• The North Harris Trust has been in existence for 7 years and in that period the school population in Harris has continued to decline.</li> <li>• The South Harris Community Council vision for a community windfarm as a significant project for economic regeneration, may not provide the expected impact, in terms of population growth and pupil enrolments. Research based on experiences nationally suggest that such a project could generate 5.16 jobs over a 25 year period. However, it is not possible to determine the impact on school rolls.</li> </ul>

**ISSUE:** The Comhairle should review and assess the impact of its arrangements for transporting children, particularly the very young, from Shelibost Primary School to Sir E Scott School in relation to the capacity of the transport used; levels of supervision; the presence of other fare paying passengers and severe weather arrangements.

**RESPONSE:**

- The Comhairle will continue to provide transportation that meets all contract specifications and ensures safe travel for all its pupils. There are no specific issues relating to severe weather arrangements for travelling from Shelibost to Sir E Scott School. The arrangements that are currently in place for all pupils are appropriate for Shelibost pupils.
- The journey from Scarista to Sir E Scott School is approximately 16 miles, although for some children the proposal will result in them being educated closer to their home, than at present.
- The Comhairle's Home to School Travel Policy provides transport for children who have to walk more than 1 mile.
- The distances that pupils have to travel to and from school are clearly important in any assessment of appropriate transport provision. In addition, distances of themselves have to be set in the context of road conditions, and the time that such travelling takes.
- The Comhairle Policy states that Primary pupils should not, as a rule have to travel more than 30 minutes on a bus, or Secondary pupils more than 60 minutes. However, on occasions where pupils are living in a remote location, which would mean that their journey to school was longer than the policy stated, reasonable steps would be taken to minimise their journey time.
- A number of the pupils currently attending Shelibost School travel distances similar to that proposed for Sir E Scott.
- With the revised travel arrangements, all Shelibost pupils will have a travel time which is within the Comhairle's 30 minute policy.
- All bus contractors meet rigorous contractual obligations. All bus drivers have appropriate SCRO checks and the service is delivered to a high standard. Drivers and the public have, where appropriate, made referrals in terms of any nuisance behaviour on buses or child protection concerns. All of these are robustly investigated and addressed.
- Research conducted into the effect of travel to school does not say that children should not travel but has highlighted some things which should be considered to reduce any negative effects. These include:
  - Providing a good quality bus
  - Competent and friendly driver
  - Shortest route possible
  - Exercise before school
  - Travelling on school rather than public buses
- In addition to these factors, it is clear the research suggests that pupils tend to choose friends from those with whom they come into contact with most frequently within school and within their community, and that school-related participation did not prove to be greatly affected by travel time. However, a longer school day, an uncomfortable bus journey and an inability to take part in extra-curricular activities, were factors found to be associated with poor academic performance. On this basis, the Education and Children's Services Department, has ensured that there are good buses on the route, competent drivers, and that pupils from the same area are travelling together.
- The drop-off point at Sir E Scott School would be considered a benefit in the context of the national 'Walk to School' initiative. The Comhairle would ensure, in consultation with the school, that there would be adult supervision between the bus drop-off point and the school entrance.

**ISSUE:** The Comhairle should also consider, in consultation with parents, arrangements for supervising children after school who may wish to stay on in the school before attending clubs in Tarbert village.

**RESPONSE:**

- The Comhairle would look at providing after-school supervision for pupils who wished to participate in clubs and activities.

**ISSUE:** The Comhairle should further clarify its costings for the proposal to assure stakeholders about transparency.

**RESPONSE:**

- The annual budgeted school running cost per pupil, as reported to Scottish Government, is obtained by dividing the total budgeted school running cost by the school roll. The total revised cost for 2010/11 is detailed in the following table.

<b>Shelibost School 2010</b>	
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>
Employee Expenses	123,964
Premises Related Expenditure	4,487
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<b>Net Expenditure</b>	<b>160,076</b>
Parent Council Funding	430
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>160,506</b>
Number of Pupils	11
<b>COST PER PUPIL</b>	<b>14,591</b>

**ISSUE:** Comhairle nan Eilean Siar should take full account of the composite response submitted by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

**RESPONSE:**

- Bòrd na Gàidhlig commented on areas where the Education and Children's Services Department should do further work to promote Gàidhlig and, in particular, the uptake of Gaelic Medium Education.
- As a result, the Education and Children's Services Department has re-focused its bid proposal for Gaelic Specific Grant to work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and partners to increase the primary enrolment numbers and maximise opportunities for Gaelic Medium Education. This will also include the possibility of later entry to Gaelic Medium Education and an emphasis on Gaelic Medium Education in all pre-school provision associated with local primary schools.
- The Comhairle in recent years has seen a steady growth in its enrolment in Gaelic Medium Education. The Education and Children's Services Department's revised Gaelic Plan will set a target of at least 50% of P1 enrolments in Gaelic medium education over the next 3 years. This is considered realistic on the basis that many parents whose children are enrolled in Croileagan, do not enrol their children in Gaelic Medium Education where their local school only provides education through the medium of English.

## SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION WITH PUPILS

- 8.1 Dependent on the size of the school, consultation with pupils was carried out on the basis of a representative focus group and a cross section of stages or whole school. In each school the children and young people were asked to work in groups to identify:
- Benefits in bringing the schools together
  - Issues of concern
  - Areas they felt they might need help with
- 8.2 In this consultation it was the unanimous view of all pupils that they wanted to retain their own school.

### Summary of Consultation with Shelibost School Pupils

#### Benefits:

- More friends
- Bigger school – more places to play and bigger gym
- Get to know more people
- Less movement between schools
- If everyone went all your friends would be there
- Would win Gaelic Mod lots of times because they have Gaelic Medium Education
- Get the chance to participate in the school pantomime
- Know more people going in to secondary with you
- Better cafeteria menu selection

#### Issues of Concern

- More crowded
- Would not get to play on the beach
- No public playground
- Know their teachers better at Shelibost
- Everyone here has a computer
- Shelibost is closer and can walk to school
- Would not have a good mural or climbing wall
- Would not know everyone in the school
- There are lots of things in the sports cupboard to play with at break times
- There is a bike for everyone in the school
- May not learn as much in bigger classes

#### RESPONSE:

These issues were discussed with the pupils and where possible answers were provided. .

#### Areas where we might help

- Have friends sit beside each other
- Make Tarbert a bigger school
- Give Tarbert more teachers
- Provide more grass areas in Tarbert
- Keep friends together and enable them to pick a buddy
- Use money for new schools to keep Shelibost school and other schools from closure
- Would they have to pay more for lunches

#### RESPONSE:

- Most of the suggestions provided by pupils were reasonable and an undertaking was given that, should the proposal be accepted, there would be further discussion with the pupils in order to prepare a transition plan.

## Summary of Consultation with Sir E Scott School Pupils as the receiving School

### Benefits

- More money for school
- Children who don't have friends have a chance to get friends
- More friends, new friends
- The teaching system would be better since the schools are all together

### Issues of Concern

- No Sports Day for the Primary or Harris inter school competitions or Local Mod
- Bus journeys might be longer
- Sir E Scott pupils may feel territorial/might not want them in their school
- Need to buy more resources
- Could be more bullying
- Overcrowded classes, less space
- If there are more children each child won't get as much attention as they did
- Children with learning difficulties, eg autism might find it hard to adjust

### RESPONSE:

These issues were discussed with the pupils and where possible answers provided.

### Areas where we might help

- Arrange activities to help encourage friendship and team working
- Speak to them regularly
- Have an Induction day for them/pupils could have a session to meet with them
- Buddy system
- Play with them/play stuff they like to do
- Get some teachers to go to the schools and tell them what Sir E Scott is like
- Arrange activities which would include team working so that they wouldn't be competitive
- Throw them a big party

### RESPONSE:

Most of the suggestions provided by pupils were reasonable and an undertaking was given that, should the proposal be accepted, there would be further discussion with the pupils in order to prepare a transition plan.

## SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION WITH STAFF

- 9.1 All teaching and non teaching staff were invited to attend consultations regarding the Comhairle's proposals. The staff made the following observations which they wished to be recorded.

### Shelibost School Staff

- Staff felt that they should have had earlier consultation.
- Staff did not feel enough information was given to them.
- Staff believed there were errors in the consultation document e.g. in relation to the roll of the school.
- Staff believe the school is at the heart of the community.
- Staff believe there would be a loss of jobs and this would impact of the small rural community.
- The West Harris Trust focus on regeneration and housing plans may be threatened and therefore they consider this a bad time to be considering closure.
- The school is a particularly attractive feature of the area.
- Shelibost has had a stable school population and has shown recent increase in pupil population.
- Sir E Scott catchment is huge and provides parents with less of a choice.
- Possible lack of expansion available in Sir E Scott if population grows.
- Gaelic medium numbers in Sir E Scott are growing and there are concerns that there may not be capacity in the school.

**In relation to the Proposal Document staff wished to make specific comments on the followings sections.**

- Staff felt that Sir E Scott would have a large catchment area and Scarista pupils would have to travel more than 30 minutes per day.
- Staff feel that issues to do with structure could find new ways of being addressed through community partnership and parent partnership.
- Correction – should read condition B and numbers should say 13 on roll.
- Staff feel Shelibost School already has class in the box.
- CPD is very effective and staff have partnership involvement with other schools.
- Shelibost has a Gaelic ethos and in primary in Sir E Scott they do not feel as many staff are as fluent in speaking the language.
- Additional Support Needs – Staff believe there is no advantage in Sir E Scott as all children with ASN have statutory rights and needs have to be met in their local school. Staff also feel that the staff to pupil ratio in Shelibost is an advantage. Staff feel this section could have been more detailed regarding the additional resources.
- Staff find it difficult to see how children with ASN could have learning enhanced in Sir E Scott. In addition they believe that staff and parents work well together in Shelibost.
- Shelibost provides choice and opportunity with an enhanced staff to pupil ration which benefits all children with Additional Support Needs.
- Bigger class, lots of needs not being met as some staff believe that they are able to do better in Shelibost in comparison to Sir E Scott
- Staff are concerned that parents may feel that there is a lack of support.
- Staff feel Shelibost are already working well with pre-school in transitions and on an individual basis
- Staff feel Shelibost is in an outstanding physical location that does not exclude the external geography of the area
- Staff feel all pupils are represented in all the extra curricular clubs in the area. These are not funded or provided by the Education and Children’s Services Department and that all children have access to after school clubs with 100% attendance of pupils from Shelibost. Consequently, staff do not feel that this description is accurate.
- Staff feel some of the facilities are not as easily accessed as described in the document e.g. the swimming pool, playing field. These facilities are only accessible within certain parameters.
- Staff are concerned about what might happen during a period of uncertainty when everyone feels that there life is on hold.  
Staff felt that they were disadvantaged by not having the information and feel that there was a lack of information. Consequently, some staff felt that they weren’t provided with sufficient information in relation to the implications for their employment. One member of staff had moved back to the island and now feels that her employment is threatened.
- Staff feel that the length of the school day would be extended and Sir E Scott hours need to be longer due to secondary and shared buses. There is a concern for safety on school bus and integrated transport.
- Staff feel that the growth of costs over recent years was due to sickness absence and feel this should have been addressed more effectively by the authority.  
Funding of school lets is not included in the document and may have affected outcome. Economic impact on the transport provider etc. should have been considered in the document.

*Sir E Scott School Staff*

- Clerical staff asked if the arrangements for resolving staffing issues following a closure applied equally to teaching and non teaching staff.
- Concerns about staffing in the receiving school were expressed.



## CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Throughout this consultation the Comhairle has given special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010,
- 10.2 In recognition of the impact of school closures on local communities, the Comhairle undertook, in addition to statutory consultation, community conversations, in order to share with stakeholders the challenges for education together with its aspirations for a review of educational provision designed to provide 'Quality Education in Quality Buildings'.
- 10.3 The consultation process was robust and provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Comhairle's response detailed in sections 6, 7, 8 and 9 above.
- 10.4 The Standards in Schools (Scotland) Act 2000 requires local authorities "to secure that the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential". (para 2.1)
- 10.5 HMle visited Shelibost School to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They attended the public meeting on 16 June 2010 and had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses.
- 10.6 In summary, the HMle Report recognises the merits of the closure proposal.  
*"The proposal from Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar to close Shelibost Primary School and transfer children to Sir E Scott School in Tarbert with effect from August 2012, offers some educational benefits to children directly affected by the proposal and to the wider community of Eilean Siar. The proposed move to the upgraded Sir E Scott School offers children from Shelibost Primary School enhanced educational experiences in a new, modern and well-resourced building. They would have access to Gaelic medium education and increased interaction with learners of their own age and stage. The proposal would not adversely affect the quality of education for children in Sir E Scott School."*
- 10.7 The HMle report provides evidence that the proposal to amalgamate Shelibost School with Sir E Scott School will produce:  
Educational benefits:
- Can deliver Curriculum for Excellence effectively
  - Will assure more effective use of resources – financial, staffing and estate
  - Will ensure that pupils are educated in buildings fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- 10.8 In its submission in response to the consultations, Bòrd na Gàidhlig commented on areas where the Education and Children's Services Department should do further work to promote Gàidhlig and, in particular, the uptake of Gaelic Medium Education. However the Bòrd welcomed Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's aspiration that GME should be available in all primary schools in the Western Isles through the implementation of the Schools Estate Strategy. In particular, Bòrd na Gàidhlig would not oppose the closure of Shelibost School.
- 10.9 The Director of Education and Children's Services, on reviewing all of the submissions, the HMle report, Bòrd na Gàidhlig's response and the Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix C) recommends that the best and most sustainable educational provision for the current catchment area of Shelibost Primary School would be provided at Sir E Scott School and that the education provision should be discontinued at Shelibost Primary School from 29 June 2012.
- 10.10 The Director of Education and Children's Services recommends that a transfer of pupils from Shelibost School to Sir E Scott School will have educational benefits and that the learning opportunities and experience for pupils will be significantly widened. There will be :
- increased opportunities for pupils, both curricular and extra-curricular activities;
  - greater flexibility in grouping children for learning and teaching;
  - greater flexibility in the deployment of staff to meet learning needs;
  - a larger staff will offer a wider range of expertise resulting in increased opportunities for sharing effective practice, more collegiate support and a wider range of learning and teaching approaches;
  - more management support to promote school improvement.

- 10.11 Pupils and parents of Shelibost School would have access to a modern educational establishment, which is fully equipped and designed to meet the needs of pupils and fully deliver a Curriculum for Excellence. There is an opportunity for the pupils, staff and parents of both schools to benefit from working together to ensure that the very best quality of learning and teaching is available to all pupils, irrespective of their needs or abilities.
- 10.12 The proposal will result in pupils at Shelibost School attending a building that is modern and better designed for the delivery of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century curriculum.
- 10.13 The closure of Shelibost School will both improve efficiency of the school estate and enable investment in education and provide a better educational experience for pupils.
- 10.14 Should the proposal be approved the Director of Education and Children's Services will work with parents and staff in Shelibost and Sir E Scott Schools to develop a transition plan that will ensure an effective transition for pupils and staff to Sir E Scott School.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 11.1 It is recommended that:
- a) the Education provision at Shelibost Primary School be discontinued with effect from 29 June 2012;
  - b) the pupils of Shelibost Primary School continue their education at Sir E Scott School, from 16 August 2012; and
  - c) the catchment area of Sir E Scott School be extended to include the current catchment area of Shelibost Primary School.