

## NOTE OF PUBLIC MEETING IN BALALLAN SCHOOL – WEDNESDAY 2 JUNE 2010

**Present:**       **Mrs Catriona Stewart (Chair)**  
                  **Mrs Morag Munro**  
                  **Ms Joan Mackinnon**  
                  **Mr Malcolm Burr**  
                  **Mr Robert Emmott**  
                  **Ms Lesley McDonald**  
                  **Mr Bernard Chisholm**  
                  **3 Councillors – Alex A MacDonald, Annie MacDonald, Catherine MacDonald**  
                  **Mr Doug Marr – HMle**  
                  **22 parents and members of the public**

Catriona Stewart       Welcome to tonight's meeting. My name is Catriona Stewart, I am Vice-Chair of the Education and Children's Services Committee and with me this evening are Mrs Morag Munro, Chair of the Education and Children's Services Committee, Bernard Chisholm, Head of Education and Resources, the Director of Education Ms Mackinnon, Mr Robert Emmott, Director of Finance, Head of Executive Office, Ms Lesley McDonald and Mr Malcolm Burr, the Chief Executive of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Before we start proceedings could I ask that everybody switch off their mobile phones please because it interferes with the recording not just standby but off. The meeting will be recorded. When you wish to ask questions if you could please wait until the microphone reaches you and give your name before you speak and hold the mic very closely when you do speak. Thank you. We want to have as clear and concise recording of the meeting as possible.

In August 2007 the Comhairle decided to undertake a review of education provision through the Western Isles, since that time a number of informal conversations have been held with communities. As a result the Comhairle agreed to go to statutory consultation on the proposed closure and amalgamation of a number of schools. This meeting is part of the formal consultation process for Balallan School. The aim of the authority is to provide our children with the best educational experiences and outcomes in modern learning environments suitable for 21<sup>st</sup> century needs within the resources available to us. The Comhairle faces serious challenges, schools rolls have fallen to 3681 from 6246 in 30 years and in the last 5 years alone the pupil roll has fallen by over 300. As education is resourced according to pupil numbers funding has decreased. We have 38 buildings, 18 of which are in poor condition. We face generally tightening financial constraints. There is pressure on other Comhairle services and budgets for example community care, roads and transport, waste services and of course we have the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence which takes place from August of this year. We are in the process of building 6 new schools which means that 44% of our pupils will be educated in new, efficient learning environments which will deliver the new curriculum. Our aim, in line with the Scottish Government's Schools Estate Strategy, is for all our pupils to be educated in new or refurbished buildings by 2018. In order to achieve this we have to reduce the spare capacity in our school estate. I will now pass over to the Head of Executive Office Ms Lesley McDonald to go over procedure. Once she has gone through the procedure the Director of Education will speak to the proposal document then I will then open the meeting to the floor for questioning.

Lesley McDonald

Thank you Chairman. Can I first of all say, can everyone hear me? Can you hear me now?

I am quite softly spoken to begin with and I have a bit of a sore throat tonight, so apologies for that. This is a new procedure that is being followed. The procedure has been introduced by the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act of this year which is also known as the Rural Schools Legislation. That point is relevant because although the Act sets out the procedure that must be followed to carry out a number of proposals in relation to a school, including closing that school, it has special provisions which must be taken into account when a school is a rural school and for the purposes of that Act Balallan is an accessible rural school and the proposal document before you and of which we have plenty of extra copies if someone hasn't brought theirs, details how we have taken those factors into account.

Tonight's meeting is part of the first stage of the formal process, the Comhairle having made the decision to go out to consult and prepare this proposal document. An informal process has taken place in the conversations that have taken place to date. The law requires that we allow 30 school days for responses to be submitted to this proposal document. In the case of Balallan School we are allowing 34 school days until, that's from 13 May until 30 June. After that all of those representations together with various other documents will be sent to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. That is a new stage in the process and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education will have until 20 August to produce a document in relation to the educational aspects of the proposal. In producing that document they may visit the school and may speak to whoever they think is necessary. Following that the Council must prepare what is then called a Consultation Report which will take into account and establish clearly how it responds to the statement produced by HMIE in relation to the educational aspects of the proposal as well as picking up any themes and providing responses to any issues raised in the consultation responses. That document will be publicly available and will be available at least three weeks before the Council makes a decision on the proposal and it is hoped that, that decision will be the subject of Report to Education and Children's Services Committee in the last week of October of this year which makes a recommendation to Full Council in the first week of November. There is then a six week period where there may be ministerial call in of whatever decision the Council has made and in the first three weeks of that six weeks the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations that are made to them by any person. Paragraph 2.10 details how we would deal with any inaccuracy that came to our notice during the consultation.

The main purpose of tonight's meeting is to explain a bit more about the proposal, to hear what you have to say and to respond to such questions as we can in the course of the evening. If there are any other questions I would hope to summarise those at the end of the evening and get a contact from you perhaps the Parent Council and we will undertake to come back with responses to any unanswered questions just as quickly as we can. There is another relatively new piece of legislation that also impacts and that is the Equalities Act and I can confirm that an Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out in relation to this proposal which will also feed into the decision making process.

Finally, I think, we will seek to acknowledge any representation that we receive within three working days. In the event that you put in a representation and haven't received an acknowledgment within three

working days I would ask that you get in touch with me and I will make sure that it hasn't gone astray and track it down because it is very important that we get your representations and take account of those representations both to make them available to HMIE but also to respond to them in the preparation of the Consultation report. The deadline for representations is 5.00pm on 30 June 2010 there is a special email address which is detailed in the Report. I think it is schoolconsultations at the council or you can also write an old fashioned letter to the Chief Executive, Malcolm Burr to arrive by the same date. I am happy to take any questions as the procedure, Chair.

Catriona Stewart

Seeing as there are no questions at this stage I will ask Mr Donald Macleod to go round the audience with some of the proposal documents to ensure that people are able to follow. I also omitted earlier on to introduce Mr Doug Marr who is here observing on behalf of HMIE.

Thank you very much Donald. I will now ask the Director of Education to speak to the proposal document.

Joan Mackinnon

Thank you very much Mrs Stewart and good evening everybody. We are here tonight as Mrs Stewart has already said because we have falling rolls across the Western Isles. That has been happening over the last 30 years. In Balallan, here, the roll as we have it today has fallen by over 40% in the last 8 years. This pattern is repeated throughout the islands in all our communities just about and clearly therefore we have more schools that we need at this very time when the Government has published its strategy for the provision of school buildings in Scotland and where it has an aspiration that all pupils, well at least in excess of 90% pupils, should be educated in condition A or B schools as soon as possible. That presents us with a challenge, we can do it only if we have fewer schools.

So why are we in Balallan? Here we have a school that where the roll has fallen and we have spare capacity; at the same time there is another school a few miles up the road which also has spare capacity. Sgoil nan Loch is operating at 55% capacity. Why? The pupils in Balallan can be accommodated within Sgoil Nan Loch, the pupils in Sgoil nan Loch couldn't all be accommodated within Balallan so when we were looking at where we were going to rationalise our estate our proposal was that we should amalgamate Balallan School with Sgoil nan Loch. Therefore we have produced this proposal document after having had a decision by Council that we should come to statutory consultation and you will have had probably access to the document before now, if you are parent it will have been posted out to you, it has been on the website and has been advertised in the local press.

You will probably know that this is one of a number of similar consultations therefore the documents that have been produced have a number of elements that are common to them all and likewise this one that you have here so all the sections up to section 8 are common to all the documents. The beginning of the documents from Section 1 through to Section 7 sets out the Comhairle's aspirations, the reasoning behind the strategy and key factors that have led us to this point. When you come to Section 8, this Section is entitled the Educational Benefits Statement. Now, Lest anybody is under any misapprehension, this Education Benefit Statement relates to if pupils from Balallan School move to Sgoil nan Loch, which is our proposal. This is not about saying that there are no educational benefits to children being in Balallan School, actually quite the contrary, that is not our view, but for the purposes of the document we are focusing on the amalgamation and where the pupils would go to. So, just to reiterate, we believe that Balallan School offers a good education to our pupils as does Sgoil nan Loch, So I want that to be clear, that's the

context with which this section of the document was written. You will have read it yourselves and you will have seen all the issues that have been considered, the learning environment, additional support meets, gaelic medium and so on. These are summarised in Section 8.20 where we are talking about the nub of what we think are the advantages really of the amalgamation. Currently we are at a very exciting time with Scottish Education in terms of the implementation of the new curriculum. Teachers here at Balallan School have been engaging in the outcome and experiences since they were first published. This has also been happening at Sgoil nan Loch. However, we believe that a larger staff and a larger peer group of pupils will bring advantages and these are summarised for us in the Section 8.20 there. Increased opportunities for pupils, greater flexibility in grouping children for learning and teaching, greater flexibility in the deployment of staff to meeting learning needs and a larger staff will offer a wider range of expertise, I mean that's just common sense really, the larger the number of us that would be sitting at the front here the wider the expertise that would be included in, so that's just a fact where you have more people you have more strengths and there would be more collegiate supporting and I think that's important when the new curriculum is just being implemented that the more staff there are to discuss these issues to share best practice, to share their thinking, to moderate assessment and all that kind of thing. I think that is an appropriate time to be looking at this.

Can I also draw your attention to Section 9. It's the consideration of factors affecting rural schools. This is particularly in line with the law, we are required to consider these issues because it's a rural school that we are considering here in the amalgamation. In actual fact I think that all of our schools, all 38 of them, are rural schools so we have had to take this into consideration. So it is viable alternatives to closure which we had to consider, the likely effects on the local community, the travel arrangements and the effects that that will have on pupils and on the environment.

You've had the documents yourselves, you've been listening to us for long enough now. Really tonight is an opportunity for us to hear your views, to hear your suggestions, if you have viable options we would like to hear them and we are also here to answer questions. So for you to express your views, for us to hear them, for us to take account of them and for us to answer any questions you may have if we can and if we can't to take them with us and to respond as quickly as we can. The Comhairle's aim with regard to education is to deliver quality education in quality buildings. That's what we aim to do. That's why we are here tonight having this discussion with you all.

Catriona Stewart

Before I open up for questions from the floor could I just ask that people do make sure their mobile phones are switched off because as you hear it does interfere with the recording and I also have to offer apologies on behalf of Councillor Normand A Macdonald who is unable to be with us tonight. So I am now going to open to the floor. Mr Donald Macleod will have the mic. Now, make sure that when you get the mic you speak directly into it and that you give your name before you speak. Thank you.

Iain Macleod

I am a previous parent of a pupil in Balallan Primary School. I have actually got to go to another meeting in about 5 minutes time but I would like to ask the group in front of us here what the actual net costs of savings in Balallan School would be? This is something we asked for in your previous Conversation that we had in this same room a number of weeks ago and, as yet, I have received no information on those facts and to my knowledge nobody else has either. A lot of the savings in Appendix 3 on page 15, that is the gross cost savings of closing Balallan School

and is very misleading because firstly, Gaelic teaching costs as you suggested in our Conversation a few weeks ago the Gaelic medium would probably be moved to Sgoil nan Loch, or that's the indications you gave, so that £45,000 is not a saving. In addition to that, teaching costs at Sgoil nan Loch would also increase to cater for the extra pupils leaving from Balallan so we would need a proper indication as to the net savings that the Council would make by moving pupils to Sgoil nan Loch. And in addition there's probably other savings on this gross budget which are not catered for in as in catering, that would still have the cost implications for the extra pupils etc, etc. We need a net saving cost to the Council and to see if that's actually worth closing a community school and making the whole community suffer because you plan to save probably what's less than £100,000 a year. Could I have an answer to that please?

Catriona Stewart Thank you Mr Macleod, I'll pass that over to the Director of Finance first of all.

Robert Emmott Thank you. I think it's fair to say that there will be some additional costs at the receiving school when there is any school closure so it's not quite as simple as taking out the entire expenditure here. The typical costs relate to any additional staff that are needed at the receiving school and I'll let Mrs Mackinnon come in on that because she'll have a better idea about the class sizes and the actual additional staff needed at the school to accommodate the additional pupils and there are usually some additional transport costs because we are transporting children further. They are not always significant because there are already children from , you know there is already an integrated public transport network that is going past the school and providing transport for children for other schools so there is usually other additional transport costs. I am sorry if you haven't got further details on the information that you have asked for and I am certainly happy to provide a further detailed breakdown of what the costs are and why it is we believe the savings will be achieved. We think the order for savings is around about £200,000 from discontinuing them allowing for the fact that there are come additional cost inevitably in the receiving schools but they are not proportionate because clearly there is an overhead of having a school and if you amalgamate them together you get some economies of scale. So I will provide some further information back to you after the meeting which breaks that down but perhaps Mrs MacKinnon would like to just comment on the economies of scale when you bring the two together.

Iain Macleod Can I just make comment on that please? It is utterly surprising that given the fact that you are proposing to close a community rural school but you don't have definitive figures for the exact amounts of money you actually planned to save.

Robert Emmott I'll come in briefly. We expect to save £217,000. The exact sum we won't know until we...there is a constantly moving budget for the school. We set a budget of whatever you think its going to cost .....by the time we get to 2012 there will have been variations in the cost of running the school depending on how inflation is, depending on what pay settlements there are for teachers, going forward. So it is not an exact sum that we can say. What we do have a clear idea of is that it's of the order of £200,000 that will be saved from discontinuing the education and that is just one factor that we have to consider and that the Council will consider when reaching a conclusion.

Iain Macleod And does that actually take into account the ongoing costs and maintaining a scheduled building on this site until such time as the council choose to dispose of it?

- Robert Emmott           The Council earlier this year agreed a strategy for disposing of surplus assets. Now clearly a lot of the costs that we are talking about that are in here, the biggest element of savings aren't around the cost of the building they are around the reduction of staffing costs and travel costs associated with the school. I appreciate there may well be some short term costs looking after a building and dealing with the sale of it, the disposal of it in terms of the Council policy which requires us to look first of all whether there's any housing need and then whether there's any community interest in the use of the facility so there may be some costs in the short term but in the longer term there is a material saving from the process.
- Joan Mackinnon           If I could just deal with the issues relating.....you mentioned staffing costs there.....I'll just carry on since the question was asked. If the amalgamation was happening in August we have looked at the numbers as they are for this school in August and for Sgoil nan Loch and we would require four class groups in the English medium side of the school and one class group in the Gaelic medium side of the school therefore we would require two teachers more which is actually the staffing here. However, if we look ahead the roles are dropping in Sgoil nan Loch and here in the next couple of years so we reckon that we would need three class groups in English and one Gaelic medium class groups so there would be one teaching member of staff less possibly in two years time but there are also other staff members here that wouldn't be required in Sgoil nan Loch. That isn't to say that these people wouldn't have work or get work somewhere else but they would not be a cost to Sgoil nan Loch if the amalgamation were to happen. And with regard to meals. The meals is quite a clear thing. The meal here costs 91p to prepare or to cook and that's what it costs at Sgoil nan Loch as well. However, a meal here costs £8 something per pupil and at Sgoil nan Loch the cost is £3 something. Now that might go up slightly, in fact it wouldn't because there would be more pupils having a meal in Sgoil nan Loch and the total cost would be divided by more pupils. The cost here is excessive because of the transport cost involved in taking the meal along here and then also the additional staffing costs required in the canteen.
- Catriona Stewart           Thank you. I think the lady beside you was first.
- Bridget Maciver           It was just a follow up question on the costs. I just wanted to express surprise that the Finance Director said he was intending to save £200,000 and that the staffing and supplies and any changes to Sgoil nan Loch to accommodate a Gaelic medium unit would all be covered by the difference in the current running costs which you have 09/10 as £237,000 That doesn't seem to add up. The Gaelic medium provision is all going to be covered by £30 something thousand a year?
- Robert Emmott           I think that is our best estimate of what it is going to cost and I think the best way to respond to that, is I am quite happy to provide some further information on the break down of how that works out because it is as the Director of Education says, there is a tie-in between moving the two schools together. Catering is the simplest example where by the same establishment of catering staff and cooking facilities you can serve a large number of children with only a very marginal increased cost.

Bridget Maciver Thank you very much, I understand the economies of scale I have a very specific question that when the schools amalgamate in your proposal you will be providing a Gaelic medium unit, we understand, and you claim you are going to be saving over £200,000 so the entire costs of accommodating a Gaelic medium unit, the supplies and the teaching, the on costs for that teacher, we are not just talking a salary we have to pay their pension and everything else, that all comes to less than £37,000 a year?

Joan Mackinnon Can I just take that one?

I have just explained earlier that we would need to take with us the teachers from here to cover the teaching costs. We have room - the on costs are already costed into what we are looking at here. There would not be any additional expenditure for us to provide Gaelic medium education and Sgoil nan Loch.

Catriona Stewart Can you wait until the mic gets to you otherwise it doesn't pick up?

Bridget Maciver I am not trying to say that, I think I must be entirely misunderstanding your point because we have a set of running costs and we don't have a Gaelic medium teacher at Sgoil nan Loch, you haven't said anything about reducing the teaching complement of the English medium so if we are going to increase the teaching complement at Sgoil nan Loch that must be an increase in cost and I was just surprised that you thought savings of £200,000 would be apparent when you are going to be providing for a Gaelic medium unit.

Joan Mackinnon I think Mr Emmott will get some information back to you to describe what it is that we are saying.

Bridget Maciver Ok thank you very much.

Kathleen Macintyre Can I just ask for clarification on, I think you classed this as an accessible rural school, because certainly today when I was looking at the Scottish Government's Schools Closure Proposal document online which was updated April 2010, all the schools in the Western Isles were actually classed as very remote and rural.

Joan Mackinnon That's accessible rural school falls into that.

Kathleen Macintyre Because the definition then following on from that there was actually a classification which highlighted that if we were classed as a very remote, rural school it gives clear definition that it is very different from an accessible remote rural school in this document here. So there is obviously some discrepancy there because I am now left wondering is it what is actually in the consultation document that is correct or is it what is actually documented in the Scottish Government website that is correct as to what we are classified as.

Lesley McDonald I will certainly double check that and come back to you but I can confirm that the proposal document takes account of all of the additional requirements relating to rural schools in the Act in Section 13, I believe it is of the Act, but I will certainly undertake to come back to you on what the precise definition is and if we find that it is an error in the consultation document then that will be dealt with as a correction as detailed in paragraph 2.10 of that document.

Mairi Ferguson Mairi Ferguson, parent. What happens to Council policy for your 30 minutes travelling time?

Joan Mackinnon We believe that this amalgamation can take place with very little variation from that 30 minute travelling time.

Mairi Ferguson Have you been on the Eishken road?

Joan Mackinnon Yes we have.

Mairi Ferguson Who was on the Eishken road? Who travelled it?

Joan Mackinnon Two people from the Transportation department have done that journey. One doing it as if he was driving a car and the other done it with a minibus in mind with pick-ups on the way.

Mairi Ferguson How many pick-ups?

Robert Emmott Well we don't know how many times he stopped. The Council's Transport Manager who is familiar and organises all of the Council's integrated transport drove down to Eishken and timed the run up as if he was doing a change over at the road end and if he was the minibus coming up through the route. Now he is familiar with the times it takes to travel that road, it took him round about 35 minutes to do that journey. When an officer from the Technical Services department did the journey they drove in a car and it took them 30 minutes one way and 29 minutes the other way. So it's the journey..

Mairi Ferguson What have you said to the parents in Eishken? What have to specified to the parents in Eishken how their children are going to being transported? Are they going to come by car, minibus, helicopter to their road end and picked up by bus or are they going to be transported from their door to the door to Sgoil nan Loch?

Joan Mackinnon From their door

Mairi Ferguson Door to door

Joan Mackinnon But they haven't asked us. We would have replied, if they had written to ask us that question we would have replied.

Mairi Ferguson A letter was sent on the 16 April to Mr Bernard Chisholm and we have yet to receive a reply.

Joan Mackinnon From the parents at Eishken?

Mairi Ferguson No, no, no. From Parent Council in Sgoil Balallan they were sent a letter on the 16 April that has never been replied to. It was brought up, issues that were brought up at the conversation in February and they were never replied to. We re-iterated them in a letter that never replied to.

Joan Mackinnon I apologise for that but I had looked at the letter that we had record of and it was my understanding that we had replied to every question that was on but I apologise if that is not right.

Mairi Ferguson Well Mr Matheson never received the reply and neither did I and we were the two named in the letter for the reply.

Joan Mackinnon Well can I apologise for that and we can get the information to you if we can locate the letter because I had thought just very, very recently we had given a reply to questions that were in a letter that came into.....



Mairi Ferguson We received the information by hook or by crook but it wasn't from the Council, the Education Department. We had to go via our local councillor to go and get the information for us. We had tried contacting yourselves and the information didn't come forward and time was pressing on, we are here today and it was only on Monday night we got the information we requested.

Joan Mackinnon This Monday night?

Mairi Ferguson This Monday night

Joan Mackinnon Well I am sorry, I certainly replied to some letter that Mrs Macdonald had come looking for an answer. We thought we had sent a reply to that letter, that letter was then replied to round about the time that Mrs Macdonald came into speak to us. It wasn't as recent as last Monday however, the fact remains if you didn't get a reply I apologise for that.

James Sawers I just want to add to the enquiry there, have you asked the driver who carries the children to Eishken from the school the time it takes?

Joan Mackinnon Personally I haven't, no.

James Sawers No but I mean the Council have a contract has the person in charge of the transport not thought to ask the person who know the most about?

Joan Mackinnon I phoned the school to ask the Headteacher how many children were coming to the school currently from either Seaforth head or Eishken and I was told that there wasn't any currently but that these children that are pre-school age of which there are two would be coming within, the first child within the next two years possibly at the end of two or three, we weren't sure of the age of the child. So therefore there isn't anybody currently as far as I know because I did try to establish that.

James Sawers What about coming from the school you are going to amalgamate with to Eishken?

Joan Mackinnon Sorry?

James Sawers What about the school you are going to amalgamate with who lives in Eishken? Have you thought of that?

Joan Mackinnon Who lives in Eishken?

James Sawers I am not personalising I am just asking if you have checked.

Joan Mackinnon Sorry I didn't understand,

James Sawers Have you checked there isn't someone travelling from Eishken to the school?

Joan Mackinnon No the simple answer to that is no I haven't.

James Sawers Bit of a remarkable performance so far.

- Cathie MacDonald I think again following on from the issue about the time etc, obviously we had asked previously via Parent Council about the distance etc and the 30 minutes and obviously it was a concern. I mean I have a child living in Balallan and thankfully we are lucky enough to walk to school on occasion but I think that in a car from Eishken for anybody to make that journey safely is absolutely-certainly over the winter we have had and just for my own personal interest I had put into AA Route Planner and it gives a distance of 17.9 miles and it suggests that you leave 54 minutes and similarly with the RAC Route Planner they say the same so I would imagine whoever has done it from the Department of Roads etc is obviously how confident are they driving these conditions and like Jim was saying about they maybe doing it without a child onboard. The children that are there they are younger pre-school that in itself has issues and concerns for a child travelling perhaps first day to school on transport like that.
- Malcolm Burr Maybe just a word about the policy here. The policy is that the Comhairle aims to limit all journeys with primary pupils to no more than 30 minutes so it is not an absolute but we, have had two officers drive the route taking account of necessary stops, its 17.7 miles as your route planner indicated and the information we have it is anything between 29 and 35 minutes and I think, we have had two officers do it in response to a request and I think if there had been a bus operating that route currently which there isn't of course we would have taken the advice of the bus driver. But I mean we have had two separate tests on the time for that route and it is coming out within the ambit of the policy.
- Catriona Stewart Excuse you just have to wait for the mic to come and there is somebody else who is actually waiting.
- Catherine MacDonald Thank you Chair. My name is Catherine Macdonald I am Councillor for Harris and South Lochs and I am here tonight because I have had representations and I have been asked to attend this meeting. I was asked to attend a previous meeting too but unfortunately I didn't get the message in time. Eishken is part of our ward and I am here tonight presenting constituents in Eishken. This road is 7 miles from, I went down it last Monday and turned back half way down because of.....the road was long, narrow, tortuous, poorly surfaced, if surfaced at all in parts and dangerous. So dangerous that after turning off at Balallan intending to go down all the way to Eishken I had to turn back half way incase something might happen to me on that lonely road that there would be no mobile signal and that if suddenly my car stopped I would be on my own for several hours. Those who are used to travelling on it will not feel that way. However it is not a road on which you can hurry in the morning, especially when you have young children with you. In 2012 when the school at Balallan, when the proposal is that they would go in 2012, there will be young children due to begin school, that is my understanding. It is the narrowest road I have ever driven on, it is not a road to ensure speed on especially when carrying young children in your car. Sgoil nan Loch, in my opinion, and I speak as a former teacher and somebody who is involved in teacher training in my opinion Sgoil nan Loch is too far away from Eishken and I definitely appeal to you and before I stop let me say that I have no argument whatsoever with the points made with the Director regarding advantages of being at Sgoil nan Loch but in my opinion Sgoil nan Loch is too far away from Eishken and would therefore appeal for you to drop this proposal and lets see what happens in the next three to four years.

Catriona Stewart Thank you Councillor Macdonald.

Eishken road end to Eishken Lodge is a private road, it is 7.8 miles long and it took two officers 15 minutes to drive the road from the Eishken Road end and Sgoil nan Loch is 9.9 miles, it also took the officer independently 15 minutes to drive.

Aileen Mackenzie Accordingly to the local policeman you cant drive in half an hour from Eishken to Sgoil nan Loch.

Joan Mackinnon Thank you for that observation we are just going by the information that we have and our officers did not break the speed limit

Aileen Mackenzie Well I think the police should know

Catriona Stewart Well we note your comments thank you.

Excuse me Donald this gentleman, down here, has been waiting some time.

Man 1 Another matter I would like to raise with you is this building. If this building is emptied and you propose to use it for other proposes or to sell on there will be a period of time where this building will become derelict and be a blot on this village, have you taken that into account in your financial calculation?

Catriona Stewart I think the Director already went through policy but I will ask him to go through it again.

Robert Emmott I think the answer is that we have, the council has very consciously in the last few months looked at its policy for disposal of surplus assets. There has been some unfortunate cases in the past where we have held onto assets to long to enable communities to potentially make use of them. We are very clear just now that what we need to do where assets are surplus to requirements is to dispose of them in a sensible way as soon as we can before they are a liability to the council.

Man 1 Does that mean that you guarantee that change will take place within 12 months or within 5 years, within 20 year?

Lesley McDonald Chairman, I wonder if I could - Mr Emmott made reference to the revised policy because I think asset management is something where the Council in common with other councils has been falling down, is now addressing very seriously. Yes - there are time limits at each stage of the process and when coming back on the two questions I am already coming back on I would be quite happy to let Parent Council see a copy of that disposal of surplus property which details the time limits at each stage of the process.

Man 1 Thank you.

Cathie MacIntyre Hi, can I just ask again. In Appendix 3 in relation to the budget the total number of pupils we have documented here is 21 when in actual fact it is 24 pupils that were in this time period in Balallan school hence obviously the figure we are left with (cost per pupil of £11,300) is inaccurate when in actual fact by my arithmetic it will work out at £9,887 per pupil.



Alex MacDonald      Alex MacDonald one of three local councillors. We all know this is a consultation process tonight and I am here tonight to listen to those present and reflect the views that are being expressed. It was stated early on that good education is available in Balallan and the Director said we are looking for quality education and quality buildings. I understand the building here is graded B which I think is the standard we are trying to achieve but I do have concerns about Eishken, the distance in my opinion is excessive and the road conditions are not good and I think it was very eloquently put by Catherine Macdonald from Harris. Again the building we are sitting in the moment I believe cost £253,000 only two or three years ago and I will be listening to what is mentioned from the floor tonight and try and reflect those when it comes up at Education Committee.

Catriona Stewart      Thank you Convener.

Fiona MacLennan      Hi my name is Fiona MacLennan I am Chairperson of the Croileagan. I just want to represent the number of families that are involved in the Croileagan and Mother and Toddler just so people are aware of the fact that this is healthy thriving community with lots of children in it. There are 9 pre-schoolers between 2 ½ and 5 in the Croileagan and the moment and there are also 9 families attending mother and toddler group that meets in the Croileagan every Friday. If the school closes our croileagan will close, this facility is then denied for mother and toddler, there is no appropriate building in the area to host a Croileagan. The facility is also denied to the mother and toddler group - an essential and great resource for young new mothers. It is also an issue for croileagan parents, you don't get transport to pre-school education so croileagan parents are going to have to be transporting their children back and forth to Sgoil nan Loch which is not always easy if you are a single parent or just don't happen to have a car around the house during the day. You probably will be denying lots of children their pre-school education because of this because parents will just not be able to provide the transport for them.

Joan Mackinnon      Just a point of interest Fiona, do all the pre-school families that you are talking about live in Balallan itself and within walking distance of the croileagan?

Fiona MacLennan      Well a good few of them do, there is a number of people living in the Council estate beside us. I would imagine that as a fair representation....

Joan Mackinnon      But some do use a car, do they, to get to you?

Fiona MacLennan      Some of them do yes. I think a good proportion of these live in Balallan. Only two use a car currently.

Woman 1      Again in relation to a transport issue, there are obviously environmental issues in relation to a vehicle being on the road that normally obviously, if parents from Balallan school children can actually walk to school. Certainly looking from the consultation document it looked as though there was perhaps an other, a midi bus, would be required. Obviously there is a concern there about the environmental impact that you are putting another bus on the road and obviously increasing the likelihood of your carbon emission etc from that I mean long term, has that sort of effect been looked into.

Joan Mackinnon      Yes it has, if the building were closed the utilities bills, one would balance out the other.

Woman 1 When the building here closes what would be anticipated, obviously it couldn't be left without a heating source or it would definitely be derelict and go to rack and ruin, which is certainly something the people of Balallan and surrounding community do not want to be left with an empty building that is off no use to anybody.

Joan Mackinnon I am not sure about whether we keep buildings heated or not, can somebody answer?

Lesley McDonald I am not sure and I will come back. I understand we would either heat the building or we would take such steps as to make the building wind and watertight by perhaps draining heating systems etc to ensure that no damage would take place to the school but again I can check that with the Head of Estates and come back to you on it.

Woman 1 The other thing with the empty building issue, obviously we have quite a problem locally with vandalism etc, what measures would be taken to protect the building if it was being left empty and derelict to deter that sort of problem in the area?

Lesley McDonald I will cover the two at the same time if I might and get back to you.

Donald Maclellan I am Donald Maclellan from BLANK and before I say anything I haven't forgot that at the conversation meeting for saying to much. I don't think I said an awful lot but I would like to say a lot more tonight but I will confine my questions to this sheet of information. The Director of Education I think very early on tonight told us the capacity of Sgoil nan Loch was 55%, is that right?

Joan Mackinnon Yes

Donald Maclellan Well why does this sheet say 77% and 75%

Joan Mackinnon I think it was referring to the whole of school, I am particularly referring to the primary department.

Donald MacLennan Balallan School for this session must not be greater than 34%. That would suggest that the capacity of Balallan School is in the region of 70/72.

Joan Mackinnon I think we may have that information with us.

Donald MacLennan 71 is the figure in their.

Joan Mackinnon Ok

Donald MacLennan When did this school last have anything near 71 pupils?

Joan Mackinnon Well I can't answer that because obviously

Donald MacLennan Ok if you can't answer that I can understand that why are you using a capacity of 71 pupils and how do you define capacity?

Joan Mackinnon The capacity is worked out, it's a regulation document that's issued by the Government and it's a formula so therefore it's an arithmetical equation and the same formula is used to work out the capacity of every school we have got.

Donald MacLennan So, if a number of pupils from wherever, Eastern Europe or Harris or wherever passes through a

Joan Mackinnon I don't think anybody in Harris would be allowed in

Donald MacLennan They would be accommodation for them? There would be seating capacity for them? There would be desks, there would be books, and there would be everything? That's what I would understand as capacity. Would you cope with 75 pupils coming into here tomorrow, the answer is no. So it's very artificial and you can argue, you have got an answer for everything. There is no way this school could cope with 71 pupils.

Joan Mackinnon We can send you the regulations that determine how it is worked out

Donald MacLennan I am not interested in regulations. I am interested in the way you publish figures which look good and when it suits you and you use another figure if you want to support one of your other adverts.

Joan Mackinnon Well thank you for that but to be very honest with you, we use the same information for all the schools even if it doesn't as you say suit us or look good. We publish the information that we have got and we calculate it in the very same way. That is the truth.

Donald MacLennan Right so would you agree with me then that Balallan School could not accommodate anywhere near 71 pupils?

Joan Mackinnon What, nowadays

Donald MacLennan Not without a fair bit of refurbishment

Joan Mackinnon Possibly. However the fact is that we calculate them all in the same way comparing like with like.....

Donald MacLennan Ok. School meals. The cost of school meals. In Sgoil nan Loch it's down as £3.28. In Balallan it becomes £7.95. So the increase is approaching one and half times. We were told at the last meeting that that was due, due to transport costs. Is that true?

Joan Mackinnon That's absolutely true. I can guarantee because I checked it in the last couple of days with the catering supervisor that the cost of cooking the meal is exactly the same obviously for.....

Bernard Chisholm The meals are cooked in Sgoil nan Loch

Joan Mackinnon Are cooked in Sgoil nan Loch the cost of the meal if you want to know is 91p per meal, that's what it costs

Donald MacLennan Yes, so the additional

Joan Mackinnon It's a difference in staff costs. The staff costs at Sgoil nan Loch are slightly more because obviously the cook is there as well as a dining supervisor or whatever. The overheads are the same exactly for both places and the difference is simply in the transport costs.

Donald MacLennan So the £4.67 is due to transport

Joan Mackinnon It's actually slightly more than that.

Donald MacLennan But it's due to transport

Joan Mackinnon It's due to transport that is per meal

Donald MacLennan Per meal, yes yes

Joan Mackinnon Per meal and you know obviously but whatever it costs is divided by the number of pupils taking a meal so if you have 24 pupils here taking a meal and you have got 70 or 90 persons taking a meal in Sgoil nan Loch then obviously we have economies of scale there

Donald MacLennan Yes

Joan Mackinnon But yes the transport per meal is very expensive here.

Donald MacLennan Ok, so when the van, I take it it comes from Sgoil nan Loch in a van

Joan Mackinnon I couldn't say

Donald MacLennan No it doesn't matter. It arrives at Balallan. Do the pupils help themselves to the food out of the back of the van?

Joan Mackinnon No, it's served from the servery there

Donald MacLennan And where does, I take it whoever does that job washes up and tidies up afterwards is paid

Joan Mackinnon Yes

Donald MacLennan So where does that cost come from?

Joan Mackinnon That cost is included there to. I don't want to talk about staff costs but I did say that the staff costs associated with the meals is less in Balallan than it is in Sgoil nan Loch

Donald MacLennan So the additional £4.67 if that is entirely due to transport as we have been told?

Joan Mackinnon I have a breakdown here that I got just yesterday so this will be the new financial year breakdown for the meals. 91p for the meal staff, I don't want to say the amount

Donald MacLennan No, no that's alright

Joan Mackinnon Transport £5.10 and overheads 58p. In Sgoil nan Loch the meal it's 91p, staff I don't want to say, transport 0 and overheads 58p.

Donald MacLennan Transport 0?

Joan Mackinnon For Sgoil nan Loch the meal is cooked there

Donald MacLennan Do they grow there own food?

Joan Mackinnon No but there are no transport costs with delivering the meal on to the plate because the transport costs for getting the ingredients you understand are shared between them and that is included in the 91p which is the food

Donald MacLennan Where does the food come from?

Joan Mackinnon Well that is included in the 91p

Donald MacLennan No I asked where it comes from

Joan Mackinnon I guess from the supermarkets and whoever the suppliers are

Donald MacLennan Sgoil nan Loch is approximately the same distance from Stornoway as Balallan is from Sgoil nan Loch



Joan Mackinnon Yes but the point is the price of the meal, to cook the meal and that includes getting the ingredients to Sgoil nan Loch is the same for both places. The difference is in the taking the meal for Sgoil nan Loch to here that price of taking the meal from Sgoil nan Loch to here does not include the price of the ingredients or where they came from.

Lady sitting beside Donald MacLennan Yes it does.

Catriona Stewart Could you please speak into the mike

Lady Does that go out to tender, you say it does

Joan Mackinnon Yes it does, on a regular basis and it is advertised in the local press

Lady Right, and do we see that? It's in the press

Joan Mackinnon Yes, regularly

Lady And the price? And what they charge yes obviously we've got it yes

Joan Mackinnon No the invitation to tender is regularly advertised in the local press

Lady Yes I have seen that

Joan Mackinnon Yes

Lady It doesn't really answer the question

Joan Mackinnon I don't really know the ins and outs of it but say for example you put in a bid and you were the only bid then you would get it

Lady So you don't get many bids

Joan Mackinnon I am not sure

Lady You are not allowed to say

Lesley McDonald I don't know if I can assist but the information that is being sought is what is the cost of the successful tenderer for transporting meals to Balallan School is what is being requested that is recoverable under Freedom of Information and I would be happy to provide it.

Lady Thank you

Donald MacLennan So you would be able to provide breakdown of the costs for Sgoil nan Loch and for Balallan.

Joan Mackinnon Yes I have given them to you actually, I have given them to you

Donald MacLennan Yes but do you have it on paper

Joan Mackinnon In front of me here yes?

Donald MacLennan You do have them, ok. Would I be able to see that? Afterwards

Joan Mackinnon Certainly

Donald MacLennan Right, the other point that is worth raising is the costs of Sgoil nan Loch prepared to Balallan. This has already been pointed out. A figure of 11,300 was given to us at the conversation. It is infact less than 10,000. So it is not as unfavourable compared to Sgoil nan Loch as this document indicates.

Joan Mackinnon But I think it was made quite clear that it is taken at a specific time every year for every school in the Western Isles

Donald MacLennan What is the specific time?

Joan Mackinnon There in the second bullet point on Appendix 3 it is September of each year and that has been going on

Donald MacLennan That's last September

Joan Mackinnon Every September, yes

Donald MacLennan So we were given this information last February.

Joan Mackinnon Yes

Donald MacLennan So it should have been correct

Joan Mackinnon You got the information that was correct as according to Appendix 3 that we use for every school

Donald MacLennan Yes but that information, if the information was decided on a date last September they shouldn't have been giving out wrong information six months later. This is what you issued at the conversation in February.

Cllr Morag Munro I think these figures are facts. The expenditure there is the expenditure in Balallan for the financial year but we have taken the school roll over the session. The school session and financial year do not agree. The financial year ends in March, the school session ends in June and the school roll numbers are taken in September but you are talking about the yearly costs at the end of March. That's the way they are calculated as we have said on a number of times already tonight this is how it stands, how we are asked to do it by the Scottish Government.

Donald MacLennan Yes but there should be no question that the costs can vary over the year but if the school role is taken on a specific date in September it should be correct and as has been pointed out and this correction should have come from your side of the fence not from ours that the school roll is 21 rather than 24 or vice versa.

Joan Mackinnon And that school roll will be the one that we use when the next calculation is done. It will be the 24 that will be used when the next calculation is done in September

Donald MacLennan The next calculation is for the starting at next September

Joan Mackinnon Yes in September. The school roll, yes.

Donald MacLennan That's for 2011, 2010/11. Isn't it

Joan Mackinnon 2010/11

Donald MacLennan 2010/11?

Joan Mackinnon Yes

Bernard Chisholm The school role for Sgoil nan Loch and for Balallan can vary over.....

Donald MacLennan But they all do

Bernard Chisholm Absolutely over a number of months. The number of months that we are talking about here will remain and continue to remain relatively small 1 2 3 4. The variation they make on the total budgets and the scale that we are talking on are not sufficient to bring that down substantially. So at anytime that we are in that consultation or a discussion we do try to give the numbers as of the time we are dealing with it. If we came here in two months time we would try to give you the figures in two months time but in terms of working our budgets and planning for the future and we try to make these consistent with the returns we make annually to the Scottish Government.

Donald MacLennan Well I regard a reduction of over £1000 per pupil as quite significant that is not at all an insignificant correction.

Bernard Chisholm It may not be an insignificant correction in terms of what we are talking in terms of overall budget and the impact that has for us delivering our service, it doesn't take away the difference that we are likely to save over the year of approximately £200,000.

Joan Mackinnon Can I clarify which £1000 because if there is a discrepancy I would quite like to know where it is.

Donald MacLennan Well this sheet of information gives for 20

Joan Mackinnon 9/10

Donald MacLennan 2009/10

Joan Mackinnon £11,300 for Balallan which is as the same as in Appendix 3

Donald MacLennan If you have 21 pupils

Joan Mackinnon Yes we have said that already

Donald MacLennan Yes. A very very small point in the projected role 2010/11 you table says 18, the chart beside you says 17 minor

Joan Mackinnon Well

Donald MacLennan A minor, for the time being

Joan Mackinnon No but can I just clarify that to at that time we didn't have the enrolments but we now do, we now know

Donald MacLennan You didn't what

Joan Mackinnon We didn't have the enrolments, now we do know how many children are definitely going into primary one in Balallan.

Donald MacLennan That doesn't excuse having two different

Joan Mackinnon One less, one less, yes. Well it maybe doesn't excuse it, sorry. I accept your point if that is the way you feel but it explains it

Donald MacLennan No, no it doesn't. Surely the person who draws, surely who repaired that chart was using the information from the table, that's what I am saying. Just a minor detail

Joan Mackinnon Ok, thank you

Helen Mackenzie (Parent) In 9.4 you say that you don't think the closure of the school will have an adverse affect on the local community significant event but if this school is closed you will not have a primary school between Leurbost and Tarbert and that's one heck of a distance to cover. Do you think that allows you to have flexibility in the future, bearing in mind there could be things like wind farm developments here?

Joan Mackinnon I think it does. I think we feel that would still cover anything that we would need regardless of a development like wind farms as I understand it wind farm of itself would not necessarily generate a lot of work other than in its construction.

Helen Mackenzie (Parent) Yes but you are also saying that it won't have any significant effect on the community. Now when families go, young families look to move into an area, one of the first things they would look for is for school provision and pre-school provision and if they are going to have to travel significant distances and also as well as it might have an effect on Sgoil nan Loch because they might think that well if we have to travel as far as that to get primary provision they might be as well travelling into Stornoway. Do you not think that would have an effect, that that's going to have an effect on the community in the future. That it might make people think twice about moving into the community.

Joan Mackinnon Well we have looked into possible research you know that we can look at when considering this and there was an Outer Hebrides migration study in 2008 which identified the key factors for sustainable communities and actually having a school in the area was not one of the high factors if you like in the study.

Helen Mackenzie (Parent) I suppose that depends on who asked when they did the study.

Blank (female) Well, I accept the point.

Helen Mackenzie (Parent) Hi, again in relation to the educational benefits it states in point 8.20 attending a school with a larger role will have social network education benefits to pupil's currently in Balallan School, where is the evidence to support that?

Joan Mackinnon Sorry could you repeat that again

Helen Mackenzie (Parent) Where is the evidence to support that point 8.20 attending a school with a larger role with have social network education benefits pupils currently, currently in Balallan School?

Joan Mackinnon Well if you have got a class of one or two then your peer group is one or two. You have one choice to make a friend if you like in your own class group but educationally with the curriculum for excellence coming into play now if you were going to look at the learning outcomes there described as from the child's point of view "I can discuss, I can explain my learning". It's much more about interaction between pupils than it was when I was at school or even much more recently than that. Right through the delivery of the 5-14 curriculums it was still very much about children working together but not to the same degree. The curriculum for excellence is not about children learning different things, it's about a different way of learning and it is going to be evermore important that there is a bigger peer group and having a class of one or two would not be the optimum provision now but certainly where there are more children you have more choice to make friends and boys and girls, men and woman fall out from time to time, if

you have one friend and you fall out it's a lonely place.

Helen Mackenzie  
(Parent)

Sorry I have to say certainly from a parent of a child in the school a primary 1 child who I think from the, certainly the, support and input that we have had from the teachers here regarding curriculum for excellence which has been absolutely superb. I can't say that it would have made any difference to my child being in any bigger a class than she is already in because the way the school have used the curriculum for excellence here has been superb and from primary 1 to primary 7 they have all been involved including the community and as far as I can see from what I have read and certainly from what I have seen happening here they have delivered curriculum for excellence from the outset, certainly from my personal experience from my child and to be honest I don't think being, in fact I would say from my child it would be a disadvantage to be in a bigger school and in a bigger class.

Joan Mackinnon

Well can I just say that I would like to echo what you have said because I myself am aware of the work that has been going on at the school here with regard to curriculum for excellence and yes indeed they have been delivering it very well and very effectively and using your community very well as well. However, the fact remains that you of course are entitled to your own view, my professional view is that Sgoil nan Loch isn't a big school either but the more children you have and the more teachers you have the more flexibility you have in delivering learning and teaching.

Helen Mackenzie  
(Parent)

I think definitely yes there is more flexibility but when we are actually getting what's needed here for our pupils why change that because obviously they are learning, they are well educated the way. Kirsty, she is a six year old, she has progressed immensely well in that year and I can't see how taking her out of this environment that she is now settled in and putting her into a bigger class I think that would be detrimental to her learning now.

Joan Mackinnon

Thank you for that.

Helen Mackenzie  
(Parent)

I would just like to say about the community as a senior citizen having worked in schools, having known it inside out from right the way back. You have no idea what will happen to this place if you take a school out of it. It's emotive, I know and I am saying it purposely because you take the heart out of a village, there are villages across the Loch in South Lochs that only have elderly people in them. There is nowhere for anybody to come and live in a village with no young people in it and if you put this through you are going to put the death belt on this end of the island. You are at least five years too early in that case is because there are things happening. There are promises of things to happen and you have to wait for some of these things to happen. We can wait for you to shut schools down anywhere you like but please don't shut Balallan.

Bridget Maciver

I am just returning to the point that Kathleen is making about the small classes. The Council promotes Gaelic Medium Education and all the information that is provided makes a strong point about the small class sizes you get in Gaelic Medium Provision and about the very successful learning outcomes in Gaelic Medium Provision so there does seem to be a mismatch between saying that the children at Balallan would benefit from larger class sizes while at the same time promoting Gaelic Medium and its successful learning outcomes from small class sizes which frequently do have the similar classes to here which is across a number of years.

- Joan Mackinnon Can I just make a point, small class sizes is something that is a kind of relative term. Small is 18, very very tiny and not the best is 1, 2 and 3. So you know there is a difference between. What do you mean by small?
- Bridget Maciver Well yes but I haven't, I am not aware of any detrimental comment from reports on this school about the numbers in the different year groups. Everything I have ever heard has been positive about everything that is done here. Nobody is saying that there isn't good education in Sgoil nan Loch, they are just saying that it's hard to see the educational benefits as required by this statutory process when there is good education being provided here. I think you would be hard pushed to find an educational expert who would say that children receiving less individual attention in larger groups would have benefit especially when this is on top of the disruption of moving to a different school.
- Joan Mackinnon Yes again I take your point and you are entitled to your view but just to say that small is a relative term and you know what is small and what is good and what is small and is made too small is a moot point.
- Bridget Maciver Ok so you kindly said at the beginning you might be prepared to provide information to the parent council. We would be very grateful for the references to the research that sets out the advantages of moving to larger class sizes.
- Joan Mackinnon You mean you want some information about the benefits of having a decent size pier group.
- Bridget Maciver Yes what I mean is, you know, the evidence based research or the group of experts appointed by the Government or whatever it is. Thank you.
- Bernard Chisholm I think as we mentioned earlier that the small schools that we are talking about, we consider Sgoil nan Loch as a relatively small school, and the class sizes relatively small also. It has been the case that over many years we refer to the thirty years that we have kept schools in a rural communities and the evidence is strong that it's schools that bring the employment but employment does bring schools but the evidence for that also shows us that it would require very extensive levels of housing and inward migration and in the meantime we have demands on us as we mentioned here tonight to maintain our buildings, the resources in them for learning and teaching and the staffing. In terms of the distance no schools between here and Leurbost and Sir E Scott, we have Pairc in the South Lochs area and we do have distance that we are talking of travelling 30 minutes etc. These are distances that throughout the rural areas people are having to travel so while nobody has been talking about saying that we are not proud of the education in fact nationally we are very proud of the education standards we achieve but in order to maintain that we need to keep well up there with the game in terms of the quality of the buildings and the resources we can give to the teachers and to continue to do that.
- Blank (female) In relation to 2.6 in the volume of HMIE it states that when the proposal document is published a copy will also be sent into HMIE by the Comhairle. HMIE will also receive a copy of any relevant written representation that are received by the Comhairle on any person during the consultation period "relevant" who decides if it is relevant? Will it be absolutely every piece of representation that is submitted by people of the community and parents?
- Lesley McDonald Yes it will.

Blank (female)	So there will be an assurance that every and would we get some sort of clarification back from HMIE that they had received this.
Lesley McDonald	I can't answer for HMIE but what I will undertake is that every piece of paper that comes into the Comhairle will go to HMIE and as I mentioned earlier that's why I want to make absolutely sure if you don't get an acknowledgement from us please chase me up because everything that is acknowledged by us will be copied to HMIE.
Blank (female)	Thanks.
Cllr Annie MacDonald	<p>As previously indicated Cllr Norman MacDonald is not here he is at a Community Council Meeting over in Bernera and he sends his apologies. I have listened and I agree with what Cllr Catherine MacDonald has said prior to now. I have received a number of representations in relation to the closure of Balallan School and undoubtedly it does give a very good education provision as stated as does Sgoil nan Loch and as pointed out here it is the only school left now in the Kinloch community area and that's following many closures prior to now as you all know. There is one thing we don't have many people present here this evening because of two reasons I believe, there's Mod night, well we are in the local Mod and many parents some parents aren't here and also it's a church night so obviously the people who are attending church are certainly not here either. Have concerns that Eishken the distance obviously and the weather conditions as well in winter it's not just nice summer days that we have here, we have winter as well. We are moving from a category B school, if we are going to close, to a category B school. Have concerns in relation to the Croileagan Pre-School Provision and also some of the capacity issues and I have concerns as well about the Gaelic Medium Provision because I have heard all of this from people that have come to me and told me but I agree with what Margaret has said and if we lose the school in our community then it is going to rip the heart out of the community and I would like to take this opportunity to ask the people here in attendance if they would like to see this school closed or not, just by a show of hands please so at least I have a wee mandate at the moment. Thank you. Do you want to see Balallan School closed yes or no, that's all. Hands up for yes then please. Hands for retaining the school. That wouldn't surprise me.</p> <p>(show of hands overwhelmingly in favour of keeping school open; no votes to close)</p>
Joan Mackinnon	We would be very surprised if it was other than that. No its doesn't.
Cllr Annie MacDonald	Thank you.
Donald MacLennan	Thank you. This is a consultation, you haven't closed your minds to a thought of leaving Balallan open, have you?
Cllr Catriona Stewart	It is a consultation meeting as you said.
Donald MacLennan	Yes. You haven't closed your mind. Could you answer that question?
Cllr Catriona Stewart	No minds are closed, we are listening.
Donald MacLennan	Right, that's very comforting.

Kathleen Again in relation to the learning environment 8.5 certainly does sing the praises of Sgoil nan Loch and all the facilities available there. But I think you just have to look around you to see the facilities we have at Balallan as well and this in itself, the facility provides all these facilities I would say short of the floodlit ball court which certainly for some of the children here the school day ends shortly after 4 o'clock short of the after school club on a..... a flood lit ball court would be of no benefit. Most of the children here that are attending football, sports etc would be going to Stornoway anyway to the Sports Centre. The only thing that I can see is.....it has a dedicated library. That's the facility that we don't lack here, we do have a library and certainly the children have easy access to that. The art room is provided here, the art facility. The ICT suite maybe an issue but I think certainly provision of 24 computers for the children to access and there being 24 pupil I wouldn't consider that a concern either. It would be interesting to see how many computer facilities there are at Sgoil nan Loch and would they be getting one to one access to a computer for their education as well and certainly a modern equipped gym hall, I mean here we are, we've got it all as far as I can see in Balallan School.

Blank (female) Further to Kathleen's points there, point number 8.9. We have here a category B school in Balallan who would be moving to a category B school in Sgoil nan Loch and you say that Balallan School would need some improvements to be disability discrimination act compliant. This is also the case for Sgoil nan Loch so we have a good facility here, an excellent facility here and the benefits don't way up in that respect.

Blank (male) I suppose the challenge for us is inclusion for all young people with disability and others is the regulations constantly, quite rightly to, raise standards that we would expect to provide. The challenge we've got is that do these in 38 schools requires a budget as well and its increasingly difficult for us and that's one area to do that in all the facilities we are required to do and that includes further sports and other activities so I do think that's one element that is a real challenge. We want to do these and so many make reference to the developments that have been done in the school. We try to keep pace with as much as we can but it is increasingly difficult with number of schools and the lack of use of them.

Joan Mackinnon Like we said at the beginning we simply cannot afford to do everything that we have to do and keep the 38 schools which is why we are coming forward with proposals.

Blank (female) I do appreciate what you are saying but this is a category B school. We're satisfied with it, we are delighted with it, that is our case. We're not moving to a better facility its as simple as that.

Blank (female) I think you mentioned the 38 schools and you said was it 18 are below the standard at the moment. Are all of these 18 in the first proposal of closures?

Joan Mackinnon No.

Blank (female) So how many of them are actually in the first proposal of closures? If there are 18 that are under the standard now how many of these are actually involved in the first proposal?

Joan Mackinnon I couldn't give you the number right now but we can include it in the information we send back because we do have it, I just don't have it in my head. Maybe Mrs Munro has.



Cllr Morag Munro 3 of the 18 are actually senior secondary schools.

Blank (female) So how many of the 15 Primary schools are in the first set of closures?

Joan Mackinnon We said we'd get that information to you because we just don't have it to hand.

Blank (female) Can you tell me where its viable to have a Croileagan and a pre-school facility in the same building to give the parents the option when you are trying to promote the Gaelic language and show how good it is and try and increase parents to put their children through the Gaelic medium education? And if you give parents. A child with two English speaking parents the choice of Gaelic or English a majority of them would come for what they are used to and what they can help their child with rather than put them through the Croileagan aspect. Whereas when you have a Croileagan in your community you support your community and you put your child through the Croileagan and at the end of it you have a percentage who put their children through Gaelic medium education because they have seen for themselves that its not hard work and that its good to learn the Gaelic language.

Joan Mackinnon Just can I say that we've got a lot of evidence to support the fact that parents who don't speak English choose Gaelic medium education for their children even when they do have a choice and without wishing to put him on the spot, Mr Emmott our Director of Finance is one example where his children have gone through Gaelic medium education, neither he nor his wife speak Gaelic. They had the option to send their child into English medium pre-school provision and school and they chose the opposite. Now that's just one example. Many, many, many, parents who don't speak English choose Gaelic for their children. In fact more than half the children.....

Blank (female) But in the Croileagan setting, I'm talking about the Croileagan setting.

Joan Mackinnon Even when you have a choice. When parents have a choice parents.....

Blank (female) Sitting in the same building?

Joan Mackinnon Absolutely.

Blank (female) Where is it on the Island?

Joan Mackinnon In Aird

Blank (female) So they have it in Aird?

Joan Mackinnon In Aird, yes.

Blank (female) They've got two Croileagans in the same building?

Joan Mackinnon They've got a play group and a Croileagan and if you look the Gaelic medium numbers in Aird primary school are very, very healthy. They've got two class groups. And just to say that we have every intention of providing a Croileagan provision in Sgoil nan Loch if the amalgamation were to take place so that parents would have the choice of either having an English pre-school experience or a Gaelic pre-school experience and we would be hoping that more parents would opt for the Gaelic option if that were the case.

- Blank (female) It wont be from the Kinloch area because its very difficult for parents of Kinloch to go to North Lochs because it is not their community.
- Blank (male) Its in relation to Gaelic we also have good evidence that its services people are looking for, so we do have situations where we have English an Gaelic. We do make the emphasis on the increased provision of Gaelic and we do see increase in enrolments and so the issue for us is to continue to promote the Gaelic provision and to try and ensure that we increase the services in Gaelic and I would hope that as we've looked at the school estate proposal we are ensuring that that Gaelic option is available in every school and in many of them only a Gaelic option and as a consequence of that we are seeing a steady and consistent rise in the enrolments which I think is really positive and a credit to all those working.
- Joan Mackinnon For example this year into primary one in the Western Isles 37% of the pupils going into primary one are going into Gaelic medium education compared to last year at 28%.
- Peter Storow I am a foreigner here but I have lived in Lewis for 25 years and I have 2 daughters who are both Scots and my elder daughter was in Uig. We moved out here back to Lochs and there was no Gaelic medium available in Uig which I think was a grotesque situation. Most Gaelic relevant area of the Islands didn't have it and I am an English speaker obviously, well some sort of English, and my wife also but we very much wanted our child to have Gaelic medium education from the earliest age possible. I think it is a wonderful facility and one that should be spread more widely and for heaven sakes if you haven't brought it back to Uig, you must bring it back to Uig. Uig is losing its culture. Incomers like myself are taking.....we are drowning with the local population, driving up house prices as you know it's a great loss and once Gaelic is lost at the grass roots level then Gaelic is well and truly lost. I think there is nothing more important and the younger a child is when its exposed to a second language the better and my child was always more than ready to take the Gaelic. The only other thing I would like to say is my child goes to Sgoil nan Loch, I have nothing but praise for Sgoil nan Loch but it has not got that wonderful intimacy which we found prevailed at Uig and her education is not....its doing alright but its not as well as it was in the smaller school to the point that she wants now to go back to Uig next year. I don't know whether that will happen or not but only want to say that a small school, the outgrowth of a particular community and passionately supported by the people of that community is something extremely precious.
- Joan Mackinnon Its not really an answer because you didn't really ask a question but just a clarification. Gaelic medium education was indeed available at Uig and still is if parents wish to avail themselves of it. What had happened at Uig was that the numbers had got so small that there was one pupil left in the Gaelic medium class and the parents, rightly I believe, said that wasn't a good thing for their child and moved him into the English medium. But if significant numbers, 2, 3, 4 wanted coming into primary 1 wanted Gaelic medium education in Uig we have never ceased to provide if there was a desire for it.
- Blank (male) We also want to say that we would welcome everybody to come to the Islands and the more that can come into our schools the more we can protect the facilities and the resources that we've got. Whether that's by work or otherwise.

Peter Storow	Thank you very much. Perhaps I have another child who is going to be entering Croileagan somewhere hopefully in Lochs in the next coming school year. I am grateful, extremely grateful indeed for the community being as welcoming as it is. It has been wonderful for an incomer like myself. Thank you.
Blank (female)	Can I make a point in relation to point 8.16 it is believed BLANK have no impact on local social or economical activities understanding from that that the school isn't used much in the community that's because we have a hall us behind which is used for regular events that's because the cost of using the school by community groups is excessive. No doubt we would probably be a lot happier in here than we are up at the hall which this is a much nicer facility but the costs to a group using the school are huge. That is why nobody actually uses it in that respect so therefore seeing that it will have no impact on local social and economic activities you can't really say that.
Joan MacKinnon	Well the cost of BLANK are the same everywhere and some schools get very heavily used so we are just saying that this one isn't. That's just the point we are making. I take your point that it is too expensive and you get somewhere else, I understand that but you know the let costs across the authority and some schools are very heavily used.
Bernard Chisholm	And in some of our communities the number of buildings we do have mean that the groups can't take in the revenue costs for the maintenance BLANK that's the challenge.
Blank (female)	Have all 18 schools refused to close? 15 of the primary are they all not are they all wanting to stay put?
Joan Mackinnon	We are in the consultation process. Are you asking me is any school are any group.....
Blank (female)	Have any of them agreed with you?
Joan Mackinnon	No nobody has agreed with us because nobody, this is a proposal, there has been no decision but is there anybody who wants there school to close. I think clearly the answer to that is no. Nobody wants to see their school closing.
Donald MacLennan	I apologise for being a nuisance to you before I, I would like to answer a number of questions on this document here but before that one question that I didn't ask concerning this, how do you explain the 30% increase or the 50% increase according to one set of figures in the cost of Balallan School from 08/09 to 09/10.
Cllr Catriona Stewart	Are you using the document the proposal document which is the one we are talking to you just now Mr MacLennan
Donald MacLennan	Well I think the corrected figures are the same as on this. The cost of Balallan School according to this sheet I may add for 08/09 is approximately £180,000 now if you take 24 pupils at £11,300 in the current session that comes to something in the region of £240,000 which is approximately 30/33% increase. Can you shed any light on that?
Cllr Catriona Stewart	We are using the 09/10 figures in the proposal document not the 08/09
Donald MacLennan	Well if we use the original ones which are wrong it's 50%. If we use the corrected ones which you have agreed to it is 30%. If you multiply the number of pupils in 08/09 which is 21 by £8,600

Joan Mackinnon Are you using the sheet that was handed out at the community conversation on 26 February?

Donald MacLennan I am using that sheet

Joan Mackinnon And you're question is?

Donald MacLennan My question is the increase in cost the significant increase in cost between those two sessions and I am using our 08/09 I am using the figures on the sheet and for 09/10 I am using the figure of £11,300 times the corrected number of pupils of 21.

Robert Emmott Can I just have a we look at this. Do you want to move onto your next question and I will have a we look at this while you. I am not familiar with this sheet but I will have a look.

Donald MacLennan Ok I have a number of concerns about this document here.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Which one are you using Mr MacLennan just for clarification. The proposal document? Thank you.

Donald MacLennan Paragraph 1.2. The Comhairle took a decision in February 2009 to undertake etc. Second sentence, the Comhairle then decided to undertake a series of community conversations to enable it to decide whether any school would become the subject of a statutory consultation process. At that, now what that suggests that conversation meetings would enable the council to decide whether it was appropriate to close any schools. Is that right?

Cllr Catriona Stewart & Joan Mackinnon No. no

Donald MacLennan Yes

Cllr Catriona Stewart No

Joan Mackinnon No.

Cllr Morag Munro It is exactly what it says there. The Comhairle then decided to undertake a series of community consultations to enable it to gather information to decide whether any schools would become subject of a statutory consultation process.

Donald MacLennan Yes

Cllr Morag Munro A statutory consultation process.

Donald MacLennan Yes but a that meeting we were told that the school, Balallan's proposal was to close Balallan School in 2011 and you graciously accepted that you could put it back for a year and that it would be no problem to you and would be very concerned if it was to cause you any problems but it seems strange that you told us in February the date for closure when infact the council was actively collecting information on whether a school would be a subject of closure.

- Cllr Morag Munro Ok I think it was made very clear in conversations that what we were doing was gathering information which we were taking back to the Comhairle for the Comhairle to make a decision and I think that was said to you at the community conversation that the next stage would be to take that information back to the Comhairle who would then decide whether they would go out to a statutory consultation process. One of the points that you raised at that meeting was that could the closure be deferred and we took account of that and we fed that back to the Comhairle at the time and that is why you are sitting with a proposal to go out to statutory consultation on proposal to close in 2012 it's because we listened to what you said at the community conversation
- Donald MacLennan So the proposal had then been made before the conversation
- Joan Mackinnon Can I explain that we as officers had put forward a strategy for the council to consider because I won't go over old ground but because of the pressures that we were under and because we wanted to consolidate the number of buildings that we had so that we could deliver education in good buildings for all pupils across the Western Isles. In looking at that strategy we had decided that we had more schools than we required. We have got many schools with a lot of empty space and it's not good use of our money or our resources to try and maintain the number of buildings we have. We then put forward a proposal that we would go and have community conversations in places where we thought amalgamations could take place at the community conversation. That night our, myself and Bernard the officers had put forward a proposal that if we went to statutory conversations for an amalgamation here that that could happen at 2011. After the conversation we put forward another proposal that we go to statutory consultation but that the amalgamation take place in 2012. Councillors considered that and decided that that was the way that they would move forward.
- Donald MacLennan Paragraph 2.1. Proposal document has been issued as a result of a decision approved by the Comhairle. Is that a decision also taken by the Comhairle?
- Joan Mackinnon The proposal to go out to statutory consultation was approved by the Comhairle. We wouldn't be here tonight if the Comhairle hadn't approved to go to statutory consultation on this amalgamation and the proposal document has to be produced in order to move that forward as Ms McDonald explained at the beginning.
- Donald MacLennan Ok then. Moving on to paragraph 2.8, I think someone has already touched on this. Second sentence HMIE will further receive a summary of any BLANK representation made to the Comhairle and infact in the first sentence. The second sentence HMIE would also receive a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Comhairle during a consultation period or if HMIE agree a summary of them. Now I would be very concerned about any group wishing to make representations having their points of view or concerns summarised by the Comhairle and the reason I say that is this sheet of paper here. At the conversation we went through a sort of brain storming exercise that might have.....
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Please can you keep the mike nearer you Mr MacLennan

- Donald MacLennan Sorry the BLANK in the olden days it was known as a brain storming session and we were told that the findings of that would be summarised and a report would come back to the community council and the parent board and what we get back is this and how exactly do you describe this sheet of paper. I regard it as an insult to the people who took part in that exercise. It is called, headed notes from community consultation Balallan School February 2010 and all it is is a collection of random statements which are totally meaningless in the absence of any indication of what they are in response to and that is why I would be very concerned if any representations we were making to HMIE or any other body were to pass through the hands of the council. How do you explain this document?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Ms McDonald will speak to some of the concerns that you have raised at the beginning.
- Lesley McDonald What can I confirm to you is that all written representations will be submitted to HMIE. If HMIE request a summary they would obviously be provided with that summary but that would be an addition to making sure that all of your representations were submitted to HMIE. What will also be submitted is the transcript of this meeting. I understand because of the difficulties we experience earlier with the first chip we are currently running out of recording space so that will be transcribed as far as it can be but certainly from now on myself and Mr Emmott will be taking very careful notes and that will be what is submitted to HMIE and available to anyone who is at the meeting or indeed who requests it.
- Donald MacLennan So there would be, there is no possibility that representations made to HMIE going through the council would be doctored.
- Lesley McDonald Absolutely none.
- Donald MacLennan Now, can anyone be brave enough to explain what this is?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart I have no idea what it is, we can't see.
- Bernard Chisholm I would welcome the opportunity just to have a look at it. I certainly know that a summary of all the conversations actively was appended to the committee report that went up. I can also add that all of the sheets that the information was recorded on were collated have been retained and are retained on file and certainly on the basis of the community tonight can ask that all of these documents are available in the primary forum to HMIE or others. I will get a chance to have a look at this when come back to.
- Cllr Morag Munro I think what happened was that people wrote down on paper their comments and I think these notes and certainly what was reported to education committee was a transcript of what appeared as the answer to the questions on these sheets of paper that each had that was what went to the education committee.
- Donald MacLennan Yes but what I am saying is a statement from that sheet of paper that are totally meaningless if you don't know what the question were in response to. Who prepared that document.

Bernard Chisholm In terms of the statements that we hear and from my recollection of if this isn't the document that I prepared or was prepared for the committee report but what I can say is that the sheets as you mention were given as brain storming activities were to give opportunity for groups of people to record issues of concern. In some of the ones itemised here I don't know that they required a statement to it because they were a view of for example I think it has been expressed here tonight the loss of the community identity and confidence I think that has been well identified here tonight. The school allows pupils to participate in activities to promote self esteem. New employment developments I think that has been mentioned so a significant number of these do cover but I would be happy to check against the actual record I put to committee.

Joan Mackinnon Can I just say that anything that was done formerly in our office would have the council logo and a code, a typing code attached to it. It just strikes me as strange that there isn't a typing code because everything that is done for us at the office we can identify who it was that prepared the paper for us.

Donald MacLennan So are you saying that there is a possibility that that did not come from the Education Department?

Joan Mackinnon Well it certainly didn't come from my office.

Blank (female) Where did it come from?

Cllr Annie MacDonald Yes this did come from your office it was requested and it did come from the education office.

Joan Mackinnon From my office?

Cllr Annie MacDonald From an office in the education department, which office exactly are you meaning?

Joan Mackinnon My office, the one that I sit in and use. All the documentation that is done by the secretary in my office is done with a code on it.

Cllr Annie MacDonald It was not done by the secretary of your office, it was done in the education department. Do you want me to identify the person who wrote it. I will identify that person later on to you.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Mr MacLennan there is a lady behind who wishes the mike

Blank (female) There has just been an issue raised if obviously this isn't going to be recorded the remainder of this meeting is it legal to continue tonight with this consultation. It is. And it is being minuted, is that right from now on in?

Lesley McDonald It's being minuted from now on in, yes.

Blank (female) Ok that's fine. Thanks.

Lesley McDonald But I think we are also trying Mr Macleod's Iphone recording facility and we will produce a note from the two of them.

**(Prepared from notes as recording equipment not sufficiently clear)**

Bernard Chisholm	It may be the case that a transcript of what was said at the Conversation was produced rather than a narrative which would have presented comments in context which had presented the difficulty.
Malcolm Burr	It should be stressed that what is being discussed is an informal conversation. This consultation is a more formal forum and assurances have just been given as to how responses would be treated.
Mr MacLennan	If a Councillor asked for that report the piece of paper provided is not of the standard which a Councillor has a right to expect. It narrated statements and does not place them in context.
Catriona Stewart	A Report was submitted to the Education and Children's Services Committee and circulated to all Councillors which summarised the outcomes of each conversation.
Mr MacLennan	We were promised that too and we did not receive it.
Mrs Morag Munro	I do not remember giving that undertaking. Following some conversations, copies may have been requested to be made and these were made and left in the school but I cannot recall whether that undertaking was given at the Balallan Conversation (it was confirmed that it had not been) I should be happy to arrange for the report to be provided.
Mr MacLennan	In relation to paragraph 5.4 does that mean that if the Council's strategy is implemented that Gaelic medium education will be available in every school?
Joan Mackinnon	Yes, that is the case. If all the proposals put forward from the Director's point of view are accepted. At the moment 14 schools do not have Gaelic medium education. If all proposals are ultimately agreed Gaelic medium education would be provided in each remaining school.
Mr MacLennan	Is that blackmail? The Comhairle could well afford to provide Gaelic medium education in every school. (Mr MacLennan quoted the terms of paragraph 5.6(d)-(f)). If all of that money is sloshing around why do you want to close so many buildings?
Joan Mackinnon	What is being proposed is the optimum number of buildings taking account of the capacity of the buildings.
Robert Emmott	The Comhairle is facing significant financial constraints and will require to find approximately £5,000,000 in savings/efficiencies over each of the next 3 years. It will be necessary to consider costs as well as consequences and the benefits of any decision.
Cathie Macintyre	The Chairman refers to 38 schools of which 18 were below the satisfactory standard. Why are those schools not being prioritised for closure?
Mrs Morag Munro	As well as the condition of the building it is necessary to look at the location of the school. Some category C schools are 20 miles from the nearest alternative. Linciate and Castlebay secondary schools are also category C. The Comhairle aims to ensure that pupils have access to the best educational experience.
Cathie Macintyre	Will the shared Headship continue?



Joan Mackinnon	The document takes cognisance of the Head Teacher and Depute Head Teacher in Sgoil na Loch (Seonag to comment)
BLANK	Could the Panel comment on the projected school rolls?
Joan Mackinnon	A decrease in rolls was evidenced and the rolls took account of children in pre-school education aged between 3 and 5years.
Cathie Macintyre	There are 24 children under school age in the catchment area, would they all be shown?
Joan Mackinnon	Only those who are entitled to pre-school education.
Bridget Maciver	The Gaelic ethos was embedded within Balallan school, with the English medium children as well as those in Gaelic medium. An excellent Christmas concert has been held in both languages. I feel it is a disbenefit to move to a facility without a full Gaelic speaking teaching complement who are therefore less likely to promote local language and culture.
Catriona Stewart	It has not been the Comhairle's experience that there would be detriment to Gaelic or non-Gaelic speakers by such an arrangement.
Donna Macdonald	The gentleman from Keose referred to Sgoil na Loch as not very good and as being a stepping stone to The Nicolson Institute. I wish to stress that Gaelic is also promoted in Sgoil na Loch.
Marion MacLennan	My children and grandchildren were educated in Balallan School to a very high standard. Why change something that is working so well?
Catriona Stewart	Thank you.
Mr MacLennan	A question was raised at the Conversation in relation to the fact that, of the £44,000,000 budget for Education and Children's Services, £38,000,000 was spent in schools. If £2,000,000 saving are being sought from this, what savings are being sought from the other £6,000,000. If £2,000,000 has to be saved surely at least a fraction of that figure should come from the other £6,000,000.
Robert Emmott	The predominant area which is not education is Children's Services (which is principally Social Work) The Comhairle is looking at all areas with a view to achieving savings. Currently there is £2.7million social work provision for children and families and approximately the same for children with special needs who are placed in mainland placements.
Parent	I am very happy with the care provided to my son but want to know why he was flown first class to England?
Joan Mackinnon	This can be looked at as a separate matter outwith the consultation.
Mr MacLennan	What representations have been made to Scottish Government for extra funding taking account of the special circumstances of the Western Isles?
Robert Emmott	Council funding is calculated principally on the basis of two factors – road length and population. Education funding is calculated according to the number of children in education. There is also a mechanism called the floor which has protected the Western Isles for many years and the result of the application of this mechanism was that the Western Isles received £14million per annum more than the strict application of the formula would dictate. The Comhairle's Senior Officials and Politicians put a lot of effort into maintaining that position therefore there was no enthusiasm to "rock the boat". I consider that we are getting a fair share of Scottish funding,

the challenge is how to use those resources.

Mr MacLennan      How many qualified teachers are employed in the Education Department who don't teach? We were informed at the Conversation that the figure was approximately 10 but this has not been confirmed.

Joan Mackinnon      I shall provide this figure.

Mr MacLennan      How much money from the Education and Children's Services budget is spent on air travel and mainland hotels in a year? What is being proposed is not an amalgamation but the closure of the last school in Kinloch. It is a matter of shame that this has been allowed to happen. There is a massive waste of money in the department. Itinerant teachers have told me that they spend as much time travelling as teaching. Why are other Local Authorities not looking at this?

Malcolm Burr      The Comhairle is by no means the only Local Authority looking at school rationalisation. I am aware that Highland and Moray and I think Shetland, are also having to address this matter. As Chief Executive I carry out a regular comparison of management structures and the Comhairle is not particularly management heavy.

Mrs Morag Munro      As a former teacher I would comment that teachers appreciate the support provided by having other teachers in the top posts. In relation to itinerant teachers, geography is undoubtedly a factor and I am not sure how else we could provide the necessary amount of specialist teaching.

Mr MacLennan      Those who are doing this travel say it could be better organised.

Mr Morag Munro      I hope that employees would pass that on to their management and indeed consider it their duty so to do.

Bernard Chisholm      Itinerant teachers are deployed throughout the Western Isles. I would appreciate details on any issue where it is felt that they could be more effectively deployed. There are comparatively few qualified teachers who are not working in schools.

Joan Mackinnon      Specialist Art, Music and P.E teachers are available to all primary schools in the Western Isles which is not a common feature in Scotland.

Catriona Stewart      The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to the HMle Report, written representations that it has received and oral representations made to it by any at the public meeting. A Consultation Report will then be prepared. This report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be published in local newspapers. The Report will be available on the Comhairle website and from Comhairle offices as well as at the schools concerned 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, which will then be considered for approval by the Comhairle.

Should the Comhairle decide to close the School at this stage, it is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of the decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and 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 that final decision to decide if they wish to call the matter in.

Lesley McDonald

May I just check the information which I have undertaken to provide and ask to whom it should be provided (confirmed should be Chair of Parent Council)

- 1 a copy of the policy on disposal of surplus assets;
- 2 details of measures which would be taken in the interim to ensure the integrity of the building while this policy was applied with particular reference to measures to avoid vandalism;
- 3 details of the Balallan school meals delivery contract;
- 4 details with reference to research if possible of the benefits of a larger peer group to a child's education;
- 5 the number of schools categorised as poor in the schools currently subject to statutory consultation;
- 6 Mr Chisholm has undertaken to come back on the document provided to him at the meeting;
- 7 An undertaking has been given to provide a copy of the Report to Education and Children's Services Committee in April 2010 which summarised the outcome of the Balallan Conversation;
- 8 Ms Mackinnon has undertaken to provide details of the number of qualified teachers employed in the Department who do not teach; and
- 9 Details are to be provided of how much money from the Education and Children's Services budget is spent on air travel, could I confirm whether that is mainland or inter-Island travel? (Mr MacLennan indicated that all air travel should included and mainland hotels in a year).

Details to be provided to Bridget Maciver, Chair, Parent Council, 3alaxay@waitrose.com.