

NOTE OF PUBLIC MEETING IN SEILEBOST SCHOOL– 16 JUNE 2010

Present: **Mrs Catriona Stewart (Chair)**
 Mrs Morag Munro
 Ms Joan Mackinnon
 Mr Robert Emmott
 Ms Lesley McDonald
 2 Councillors – Catherine Macdonald and Philip McLean
 Mr John Brown – HMle
 40 parents and members of public

Introduction

Mrs Catriona Stewart: Feasgar math a thuile duine agus failte gu coinneamh na h-oichdhe nochd. Good evening and welcome to this evening's meeting. My name is Catriona Stewart, I'm Vice-Chair of Director of Education and Children's Services Committee and I will be chairing this evening's meeting. With me here are to my right Miss Joan Mackinnon Director of Director of Education and Children's Services and beside her is Mr Robert Emmott who is Director of Finance and Corporate Resources - I've had a complete blank there – I've been saying this so often you'd think I would know it. To my immediate left is Mrs Cllr Morag Munro who is Chair of Education and Children's Services Committee, then Miss Lesley McDonald who is Head of Executive Office and these gentlemen there are recording proceedings tonight and because of that I would like you all to switch off your mobile phones, not simply put them to silent or meeting but switch them off because they will interfere with the recording and it's very important that we get an accurate recording because a transcript will be available to you in due course. With us tonight in the audience tonight is Mr John Brown representing Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. Please do put them off because you'll hear all funny noises and it does interfere with the recording.

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 unanimously agreed to go to statutory consultation on the proposed closure and amalgamation of a number of schools and we are here tonight on behalf of the Comhairle. This meeting is part of the formal consultation process for Seilebost School. The consultation process is lengthy and will be explained by Miss McDonald shortly. This meeting is being held to enable you to give your views and ask questions of the Panel. The aim of the authority is to provide our children with the best educational experiences and outcomes in modern learning environments suitable for 21st century needs within the resources available to us. The Comhairle is facing serious challenges. School rolls have fallen to 3,681 from 6, 246 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 we have from August this year the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence. 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 Ms Lesley McDonald to go over procedure and after that I will ask the Director of Education and Children's Services to speak to the proposal document.

Lesley McDonald Thank you Chairman, can you hear me? As the Chairman mentioned this meeting tonight is part of the formal process in terms of the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010. There has already been an informal process in the conversation that took place in the school. The main purpose of tonight's meeting is to tell you a little bit more about the proposal but principally to hear your points of view which will be recorded in the transcript and to answer any questions that we can answer on the night. If there are questions that we can't answer on the night I will take a note of these questions and come back to whatever contact you ask me to as soon as I can and in any event before the end of the consultation period so that you have those answers before the time limit of 30th June which is the end of the consultation period. You can put in responses in two ways – by e-mailing to the schools consultation address which is in the proposal document or by writing to Malcolm Burr the Chief Executive of the Council.

After the 30th June a copy of the transcript of this meeting, a copy of every representation we receive and also, if they request it, a summary of these representation, will be sent to HMIE who then have until the 20 August to prepare a report in relation to the proposal and in preparing that report they can speak to anyone they want to speak to. The Council will then produce a consultation report which will take account of any representations received and any points made by HMIE and that report will be sent to anyone who has made a representation and also made widely publicly available at least three weeks before the Council makes a decision on the proposal. It is anticipated that the matter will be considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee in the last week of October of this year which will make a recommendation to the council meeting on 4 November. Following that there is a six week period where if the council were to decide to close the school it could not implement that decision because there is the provision for ministerial call-in and during the first three weeks of that period, Ministers may entertain representations in relation to any decision the Council may make.

The main purpose as I said, of us being here tonight is to make sure that we answer what questions what we can answer and also that we capture your views so it would be really helpful if when the microphone comes round you could identify yourselves as people in my team have been transcribing a lot of notes of these meetings. If you perhaps haven't spoken for ten minutes or so and you speak again, if you wouldn't mind reidentifying yourself because being here I'll probably know who you are but the person who is typing it up might not recognise your voice. We think we have fairly robust administrative procedures in place and we will endeavour to provide an acknowledgement to any representation you make within three working days of having received it. If you don't receive an acknowledgement to any representation you make, as the Chairman said, my name is Lesley McDonald, please get in touch with me and I'll make sure that we track down your representation in case it's got a wee bit lost because its very, very important that we capture everything that you have to say.

There's also in paragraph 2.10 of your proposal document a provision in relation to how we make corrections and there is one factor in this document as in all of the proposal documents that I think Miss Mackinnon will correct when it comes to her. That's everything I have to say about procedure but I am happy to answer any questions anyone may have.

Cllr Catriona Stewart

Thank you Lesley, I will now pass over to Miss Mackinnon, the Director of Education and Children's Services.

Joan Mackinnon

Good evening everybody – thank you Chair for that. Can everybody hear me? I'm looking at the voice(?) rather than the audience.

We're here tonight because of the main issues that Councillor Stewart has outlined. The facts facing us are stark – our school rolls are falling and have been for the last thirty years. Here at Seilebost over the last eight years there's been a stable roll which peaked round about 2004/05 to I think sixteen but it has fallen since then and next year the drop will be equivalent to 31%. This pattern is repeated throughout the islands and clearly therefore we have more schools than we need and that at a time when the government has published a strategy which sets out the aspirations for schools in Scotland as set out in this document here. Our aim at the Education and Children's Services department is to ensure that all the pupils in the Western Isles are educated in buildings that are fit for purpose for education in the 21st century. In order to do that we believe that we need to amalgamate our schools so that we have just the right number of schools from which we can educate our young people in the very best conditions that we can afford at this time. We're in Seilebost tonight because here we have a very small school which is within ten miles of Sir E Scott school which in 2012 will be brand new and have enough capacity to take all the pupils in Seilebost and also more. We are looking at maximising the space we've got, the capacity we've got in the best educational surroundings.

We're at a very exciting time in Scottish education in terms of the implementation of a new curriculum. The teacher and the pupils at Seilebost school here have been engaging with the outcomes and the experiences since they were first published. This has also been happening at Sir E Scott school. However, we believe that for the new curriculum, a larger staff group and larger peer groupings will bring advantages. The curriculum outcomes and learning experiences are written in such a way that they really reflect education from the child's point of view. They are set out in using words like "I can discuss, I can explain" and so on. The intention being that young people would be as active in their learning as possible and therefore we would need to ensure – we create opportunities where they can work collaboratively in peer groupings that will allow them to discuss, explain and if young people are given an opportunity to explain learning then their learning becomes deeper. We know that if pupils have opportunities to work collaboratively, we know that research tells us that they learn faster, they learn more efficiently, they have greater retention and they feel more positive about their learning experiences.

I'd like now maybe just to draw your attention to the proposal document and just to explain a little bit about it. The first sections are really – sections 1 down to the bottom of section 3 really set out the process as laid out for us in the Act which Miss McDonald referred to. Section 4, 5, 6 and 7 really set the context within which this is all happening and the Comhairle's aspirations and the key factors that have driven us to come forward with a strategy which would result, if it were successful, in us having less schools but having the requisite number within which to educate the number of pupils we have. I principally want to draw your attention to the section headed "Educational Benefit Statement" section 8 and in so doing I would really like to emphasise that you may have read this document and think that we, I or my colleagues, are in any way dumbing down or ignoring the fact that there are educational benefits for pupils who come to Seilebost school. This is not written with that in mind, with me thinking that all the benefits are somewhere else and not here but just so that you understand, the proposal document – I'm proposing that pupils move from here to Sir E Scott so that the educational benefits I'm highlighting here are the benefits that I would see from the proposal being effected. Not to say that there are not – of course there are benefits for pupils here but these are the educational benefits as we see them for pupils moving – 8.4, 5, 6 and 7 really outline the learning environment. Now although this is a very nice little school with very nice new toilets, we believe that a brand new school would offer a better learning environment for pupils and so on it goes down - looking at issues like capacity, extra curricular activities, likely effects on the local community and we recognise that people here will feel probably quite strongly that there will be a negative effect on the local community. The issue of travel for pupils has been considered as well but I would just like to draw your attention to 8.1.9 - there's a summary there of the benefits and this really is the nub of it from my point of view. I believe that pupils will have increased opportunities both curricular and extra curricular simply because there will be more of them, they'll be in a larger peer group and they will be in a situation where there are more staff.

A larger pupil population enables greater flexibility in grouping children for learning and teaching. There'll be greater flexibility in the deployment of staff because there'll be more staff, more staff brings more of a skills base. Staff from Seilebost school would benefit from additional CPD opportunities. At this time when the curriculum is just being introduced I think it is critically important that staff have that peer group support where they can share their thinking about how they want to develop the new curriculum. A larger staff will offer a wider range of expertise – that is simply just a fact. The more people there are in this room the larger the expertise that would be in the room and we believe that working on a 3-18 campus will facilitate cross-sectoral working. The new school will have a pre-school provision right through to eighteen and the new school will be very well resourced and with a wide range of facilities to meet the educational requirements in the 21st century – that's the summary of where we think we are at with this proposal.

As Miss McDonald indicated, section 9 here is the consideration of factors affecting rural schools and I would like to point out an error in the document because in 9.1, Seilebost school is described as an accessible rural school – actually, the Scottish Government’s designation for Seilebost, as it is for all the schools in the Western Isles, is that they are very remote rural and the designation comes really as an explanation for the fact that we are not near a centre of population with 10,000 people and I suppose possibly Inverness would be our nearest centre of population that would have that critical number so that is the designation for very remote rural and that includes all our schools – just to point out it is an error and it will also be advertised as such in the local press I think this week or certainly next.

The factors that we had to consider with regard to rural schools are viable alternatives to closure, likely effects on the local community, the likely effects caused by the different travelling arrangements that may be required as a consequence of the proposal and in 10 we’ve just looked at other factors, maybe interesting for yourselves to look at some just stats with regard to the school. I don’t think I want to say anything else just now because actually tonight is your opportunity to let us hear what you feel about this proposal and to, as Miss McDonald said try and answer any questions that we can. If we can’t we’ll certainly try and get answers back to you as soon as possible.

Cllr Catriona Stewart

Thank you very much, Director. For those people who came in after the meeting started, could I ask you to ensure that your mobile phones are off tonight because it does interfere with the recording and please wait for the microphone to actually come to you before you speak so that we ensure that we do pick up everything that is being said. Martin will come to you and again as Miss McDonald has said if you could please say your name every time you want to speak so that it is clearly audible for the record and we’ll get the transcript right. I will now open the floor to questions.

Neil Campbell

My name is Neil Campbell - I think before we go into any kind of detailed questioning, I think it would be useful if the top table are able to give us a bit more information on the new school in Tarbert – the number of classrooms, the anticipated number of pupils, anticipated number of teachers and support staff because we know we’ve got a fantastic school here, fantastic staff and we need a lot of convincing – thank you.

Joan Mackinnon

I totally appreciate that you think very, very highly of your local school. I would be really surprised if it were otherwise. Off the top of my head the stats that I know about the school – if you are interested at any point I would be very happy to come along with the plans for the schools so that you could have a look at them. It will have a capacity for seventy five pupils, it will be staffed according to its requirements – we have a formula for staffing schools so depending on the pupils it would be staffed according to formula. Every classroom has got a large activity area adjacent to it. It has very good adjacencies, it has a library facility which is currently within Sir E Scott as you know. It will have new gym facilities, it will have a new canteen facility, it will have a pre-school area and of course access to the swimming pool as part of the school campus and as I said it will be 3-18 – what they describe as an all through school. I don’t think talking about it like that will give you an idea of what it will actually look like. It will have very good light as well. There is a lot of glazing in it and it will be a most attractive learning environment for young people to learn.

Cllr Catriona Stewart

It will also of course have Gaidhlig medium stream as well as an English stream.

Neil Campbell

Neil Campbell again. Can you just confirm the number of classrooms?

Joan Mackinnon I can confirm the number of classrooms. There will be two classrooms with their own activity area and one large teaching area with a double size activity area. That's the primary of course – we're just talking about the primary wing.

Neil Campbell Based on anticipated numbers, how do you anticipate the three classes be split between English and Gaidhlig?

Joan Mackinnon Based on the numbers as we have them just now we would have two composite classes in English and the Gaidhlig class would use the open larger area. However, there is very good flexibilities within the school and it would just depend on the numbers and how the class groups would be organised. There is flexibility there - it really would depend on when the school opens, how it would be used. We are very confident that there's more than enough room in it. We reckon that the total roll in 2010 even if Scalpay and Seilebost were to go into it would be about forty six or forty seven.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Just before you ask a question. I was just going to ask Mr Campbell, would it be useful for somebody from the department to come down to a meeting of parents with plans for the new school - would you like that?

Patricia Martin or Morrison My question is relevant to that because I am the Chair of the secondary parent council. I have been very involved in all the plans for the new school, primary and secondary and the new primary school – beautiful school it is going to be but at no point was that school ever designed with the idea that children would be going there from Seilebost and Scalpay and a point very early was raised and I think probably by me was what would happen and then it was well into the meetings that they said that they were going to possibly close these schools – I said well, this school doesn't have the capacity. I think now it's a wee bit sort of strange that it is now being sold that this school is being closed because we're getting this great school in Tarbert. I don't think that's the right way round.

Joan Mackinnon No, this school isn't closing because there's a new school in Tarbert but the fact is there is a new school in Tarbert that will have capacity to take the pupils from this school.

Patricia Martin My other concern about the new school and I'm sure other parents here will raise this is that the amount of time travelling. I know Seilebost is only ten miles from Tarbert but when my children went to this school – we live in Scarista which is six miles from here – its an awfully long way if you have children like the Campbells have who are travelling up from there – I also think it's a wee bit disingenuous of the Council – at no point – yes money did come into it right at the very end but yes there is a lovely new school in Tarbert and its great and that that's happening for the secondary school but the reason this school is closing is money – I mean it comes down to it, its money and I don't really think that that's..... and I understand and I sympathise and everything else and we understand that but I still think that it should be number one – it shouldn't be all these reasons – I think there needs to be more honesty here.

Joan Mackinnon I accept money is a factor, however, really and whether you believe it or not the bottom line is that there is a strategy where we hope to be able to have the optimum number of schools that we require across the islands and we hope to have them in the very best condition that we can. In order to do that, we do need to close some schools because we don't need thirty eight schools for the number of pupils we have and in closing some schools, we will make savings that we will be able to use some of that money towards – putting it towards a building strategy that will improve all the other buildings and bring them up to a standard that we would expect for the 21 century.

Neil Campbell I don't want to hog the meeting and hold this microphone any longer but I have to take issue about what Joan said about pupil numbers there. In the Comhairle's own document, it says we anticipate in 2012 there will be sixty pupils. You are now saying forty six-forty seven.

Joan Mackinnon Sorry Neil maybe my arithmetic is out tonight – apologise for that - I'll do the calculation tomorrow and send you the right number.

Neil Campbell I'm sorry – it doesn't show you in a very good light. If I can just go on to say that we've calculated the total roll and we're pretty sure that our figures are correct – they're based on the primary school numbers as they exist in the three schools and the pre-school children in the catchment area and for your information, the numbers for next year will be seventy eight, the following year, there will be sixty nine. For 2012 the roll will be fifty nine and remain at that figure for the following three years and that is without any people moving into the area. I don't know where the forty six/forty seven figure comes from but later on we will demonstrate to you that the capacity is not sufficient.

Joan Mackinnon The school has a capacity for seventy five.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Some of the pre-school is in the private sector as well although there is going to be pre-school provision within the new school for 2010.

Kate Langley Hi, my name is Kate Langley. I just wanted to pick up on that last point you just made that some of the pre-school provision would be private and some of it

Cllr Catriona Stewart I said that some at present is within the private sector within the Tarbert area.

Kate Langley How do you envisage it fitting in with the plans for the Sir E Scott – is there anything that you want to tell us at this point regarding croileagan I mean?

Cllr Catriona Stewart I was just thinking of the numbers of pupils you know some are actually in our statistics at the moment and some won't be.

Robert Macleod Robert Macleod from Luskentyre. You've mentioned that the overall aim is to enhance the pupil or the class sizes to give them peer interaction and we've already discussed that we are at this meeting tonight not really looking for further information tomorrow but really that's why we came here tonight. We've got two classrooms in the English stream and one in the Gaidhlig stream – can we just expand a bit on how the split would take place and how two classrooms shared amongst seventy five pupils – less the Gaidhlig I understand is going to be better than Seilebost school.

Joan Mackinnon I can describe how it would look if pupils were moving, if Sir E Scott and Scalpay were going to amalgamate. You would have a primary 1, 2, 3, 4; a primary 5, 6, 7 – that's at Sir E Scott at the moment. In the new school you could possibly have a 1, 2, 3; a 4, 5; a 6,7. Actually because my numbers are obviously not right I don't actually want to

Shouting from audience

Joan Mackinnon I'm sorry – I don't want to start giving numbers when I'm not sure that I have the right

Angry Male We're not going to get this opportunity again.

Female The numbers are quite fundamental - inaudible

Joan Mackinnon I understand what you're saying but I don't want to just now start saying you'd have this and this and this.

Cllr Catriona Stewart The total numbers that we have at the moment are in the region of sixty one – that’s what we have at the moment. It would be asking the Director to go into definitive numbers which really, you can’t - you can only give average numbers at the moment because as you know the population is somewhat fluid at times but in the region of – I calculate about sixty one is the numbers that we have – the official statistics that we have. That of course will change because you will have children who will be eligible to come into the school who will be included in the statistics for that so that could afford for the discrepancy that we have in numbers at the moment.

Lucy Toor We’ve got until 30th June to respond to this document. That gives us – it’s the 16th now – we’re still waiting for answers to questions we put as a parent council in March – we still don’t even have these answers – how are we supposed to put a rational argument, when we obviously very strongly believe that our educational benefits are far, far stronger here and if it’s not down to finances, its down to improved education, well we just don’t see that at all and nothing you – you can’t even give us the information we’re even asking for now. We’ve got two weeks to put together our response to that and we’re still waiting for information from March – never mind but you still can’t even tell us what we’re asking now – I just don’t see how we’re supposed to do that, I don’t think it’s fair or professional.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Are you saying that you’ve had no communication in answers to your questions?

Lucy Toor Neil will give you the details

Cllr Catriona Stewart The department hasn’t responded to you in the questions – so you’ve had answers

Rhoda Campbell We have had some answers – there are one or two fundamental unanswered questions that are still outstanding – Rhoda Campbell, Scarista.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Ok Rhoda if you would like to ask some questions.

Rhoda Campbell There’s one or two questions that were outstanding from the meeting in March that we were promised. At the meeting in March we were promised that we would have responses to the questions that we raised then and Bernard Chisholm was there and Miss Mackinnon was there - took our questions and said that we would get a reply

Cllr Catriona Stewart You haven’t had a reply.....

Rhoda Campbell No, no that’s not what I’m saying. That was followed on by a letter from the parent council just to follow that up and we only got a reply the week before the last parent council - the morning of the parent council meeting I think it was and it was only part reply to the questions that were asked and there’s one or two fundamental ones – I think Neil’s got them. I’ll just pass the mike on.

Neil Campbell This is becoming a double act - Neil Campbell again – just for the record I think it’s important to get the dates right here. We had the conversation meeting here on 11th March. The officials including Joan, Bernard and councillors who were present left that meeting with a list of questions - we were promised a speedy answer - we heard nothing. On 20th April we followed that up by a letter from the Chair of the parent council, again it appeared to be ignored. It wasn’t until 7th June following an e-mail from Cllr Munro asking if we had a response – we responded “no”. We have not had the decency of a response. A couple of days later we got a partial response from Joan Mackinnon. I’m sorry but its been a shambles.

Cllr Catriona Stewart I can only apologise and I’m very sorry that, that is the situation. I was not aware of that. If you questions that you would like to put just now Mr Campbell

we will see if we can answer them. We are here to give answers, we are here to listen and give answers as best we can. We have the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources here. If not, what we will do is that I will guarantee you that you will have a response very, very shortly.

Yes, I am aware - but when I mean shortly I mean within the next couple of days - aware that today is Wednesday.

Robert Macleod Robert Macleod again. I think the salient point is that we expected everyone in the panel to come with all the answers tonight and have done preparation and homework before this meeting. We've done our homework and we think we've got more answers than you have and that's very, very disappointing I'm afraid to say.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Neil do you have questions you would like to put?

Neil Campbell I know there are a lot of questions in the room so - inaudible

Cllr Catriona Stewart I was wondering if you had specific finance queries that you wanted to ask.

Neil Campbell Neil Campbell again. The main question and to ask the fundamental question is that we've asked repeatedly for a breakdown of the annual costs of running the new primary department in Tarbert. We've asked for the total figure, we've asked for a breakdown and we've asked for the cost per pupil.

Can I just finish?

The answer we've been given is it's not available. The school hasn't been build but if the Comhairle are telling me that a multi million pound project which is a build and - I can't remember the exact word for it – the contract is managed for thirty years – how the Comhairle can tell me that they don't know how much it is going to cost to run that school?

Robert Emmott I can answer that. The answer is that we do know. We know how much - we know that the costs for the new school or the construction and cost and the operation of the cost for the thirty year period and we do have a breakdown of the costs. I have got a question in my mind – we are still going through a tendering process so as to what extent we can share all of the detail of that I would have to check but certainly I will have the detail of what its going to cost to run the new school. That's the cost of the facilities management of the school, the cleaning of the school, the janitor of the school and the maintenance of the school. That's not the same as the running costs in terms of staff which are certainly something that we can provide for the new school because that would be the staffing cost and the cleaning costs – well not the cleaning costs – I beg your pardon. The staffing costs and the additional support costs will be according to formula. There's no problem – there shouldn't be any problem getting that for you and I can certainly provide that for you by the end of the week and if I can provide anything on the tender prices for the new schools, I will but I have a reservation because we're in a period before – we haven't signed a contract that sharing that information might not be appropriate but if it's just a wee bit of it, it might be OK so I'll be guided on that.

Neil Campbell Thanks Robert that's appreciated. We're not looking for the cost of building the school, it's just the running costs.

Robert Emmott Certainly the operating costs from a teaching side you can have. The bit I'm a little bit cautious about is the stuff that is subject to tender at the moment.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Just keep the Mike Neil

Neil Campbell Effectively we want to be able to compare the cost per pupil or the total cost as

in this document here. You're showing the Seilebost primary school cost per pupil of £12,339 – we would like a similar cost for the new school.

Robert Emmott There is going to be no problem providing that Neil and we'll get that to you by the end of the week.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Just wait until the mike comes to you because we're recording it.

Richard Maclennan I'm assuming the £12,339 for Seilebost school doesn't include cleaning costs or anything like that. The £12,339 – that's purely teaching - not cleaning or support as is going to be the same for the new Tarbert school.

Robert Emmott The cost per pupil includes catering costs and cleaning costs

Richard Maclennan It's not going to include it for the new Tarbert school...

Robert Emmott I think to make a reasonable comparison we need to include those. I'll provide as much as I possibly can.

Richard Maclennan But you just said it wasn't going to be included.

Robert Emmott I beg your pardon – it will be included

Richard Maclennan I'm a wee bit deaf right enough but I actually thought – I can be righted by some more people in here but as far as I can make out you said that these costs were not going to be included in the new Tarbert school.

Robert Emmott What I was trying to say and I'm sorry if I wasn't clear is that there'll be, under the new school the cleaning and the maintenance of the school will be provided by a separate contractor. That will be somebody providing that to the council for a thirty year period. All the other costs, the teaching costs and the additional support costs will be provided by the Education department in the same way.

Richard Maclennan Surely you have to add these costs on. I don't think you were going to add them on.

Robert Emmott I was, I'm sorry if I wasn't very clear.

Richard Maclennan I think it was quite clear.

Cllr Catriona Stewart We do have a difficulty and I'm sure you'll appreciate that we are in a tender process. It is a separate contract for and we have to be very careful what we say as the Director has said. By the end of July we would be in a position to be able to share the absolute costs with you but we are still in a critical period as far as tendering is concerned and it would be foolish of us to go into specifics that could be challenged.

Robert Emmott I think what I can do is I can show a comparison without the costs so you can see where the differences are.

Richard Maclennan Could we ask – taken the costs of cleaning at Seilebost school and extras off at Seilebost school, what the costs would come down to?

Robert Emmott I'll do that as part of it. I'll give you a comparison of the different elements and what I can for the new schools. I can probably give you the estimates for the new schools but not the tender prices and I don't think they're a long way apart so that will perhaps make up the gap so you've got a comparative figure which I think is what you were looking for.

Richard Maclennan I'm only going to speak once tonight so I've got another couple of issues. In Joan's talk there was a lot of "we reckon" and "we can probably supply" – now that doesn't seem to me as if the calculations have been done and these words

were used “reckoning” and “probably” – “we can probably supply” - so I mean there doesn't seem to be much confidence there as far as I'm concerned.

Cllr Catriona Stewart

I think what we have to realise is that no decisions have been made at all about any closure so far. We are in a consultation period so we would have to wait to the end to be absolutely sure of everything but I'll pass over to the Director.

Richard Maclennan

The other thing – I mean – I see a lot of people from North Harris here tonight so I'm assuming – I mean don't get me wrong – this new school in Tarbert is going to be fantastic but I'm assuming that when the school in Tarbert – we'll probably get a show of hands actually - when the School in Tarbert is built the people from North Harris who are here obviously, with children here or are going to want to put children here, will be putting them to the Tarbert school – if they had a choice between Seilebost and Tarbert – so we can have a show of hands - anybody who would put their children to the new school in Tarbert instead of Seilebost (show of hands indicated unanimous support for Seilebost) - and then finally. I came to this school and I mean – what's happened to this school? – a long time ago since I was there but I mean what they've got in IT and even looking around this classroom tonight – I mean – what's in IT and everything in this school – what the teaching and the care that the pupils get, I cannot see how you could get that in any other school in Britain.

Cllr Catriona Stewart

Thank you. Its very disconcerting speaking to somebody who is half way out of the room.

Alastair Mackay

My name is Alastair Mackay. I'd like to ask you what would happen if the roll in Tarbert exceeded seventy five pupils for the primary?

Joan Mackinnon

I think it would be happy days for Harris if that were the case and that would be.....

Alastair Mackay

Yes it certainly would be a good sign but it might be too late then to save some schools.

Joan Mackinnon

We still have a school in Leverburgh. We've no intention of closing Leverburgh school at the moment.

Alastair Mackay

At the moment – yes. Have you taken into account in your figures the new developments in Bunavoneader for example – there are eight houses there with two children per house hopefully – gives you sixteen pupils.

Joan Mackinnon

We have actually done some research on that and we know that for every hundred houses you'd get about twenty eight primary school pupils and about twenty secondary school pupils – so you would do the calculation and work it out. A hundred houses.

Cllr Catriona Stewart

It really is depressing when you look at the pupil population all round our islands.

Rhoda Campbell

I don't think - inaudible – in the school rolls and I'm fed up of hearing of the downturn of the rolls. We should try and think positive and try and have a vision and try and change it around. Brian Wilson's piece in the Free Press this week was a great inspiration to me and hopefully to others. If you haven't read it, I would read it - no – somebody else can if they want to.

One bit that I've highlighted “I would rarely advocate the holding of conferences of which there are already rather a lot but surely this slide of population in the Western Isles with all the implications that flow from it merits a very high level of comprehensive attempt to confront reality and sum up with some positive strategy where none at present exists. The running is made by people who are against whatever is a possible means of turning the tide but the ability to look outwards seeks inspiration from good examples and set about implementing

them seems to have disappeared. Yet it should not be beyond the wit of man to turn this great place to live in to a great place in which a few more thousand people are able to live” - and I just think that the constant closure of schools and Harris has had more than its fare share over the years, as a result, there are no schools on the east side and I’m concerned if you’re saying that Leverburgh is not closing now because

Joan Mackinnon No, there is no intention to close Leverburgh.....

Female?????? I hope never because the south of Harris is down to its last two schools and Harris is down to its last four and by 2012 there’ll only be two left and that saddens me and I just feel that we should be trying to encourage and that is what west Harris is doing, that is what north Harris is doing, trying to reverse the trend and I think the council should have more vision. I know that for those who are biblically minded there’s a phrase that says “where is there is no vision the people perish” and I really believe that.

Patricia Martin Patricia Martin again. I’m sure most people here are aware that we adopted three children in 2002 and before we adopted the children, when we knew we were approved to adopt, I had a chat with Rhoda and I said to her “we’ve been approved to adopt three children and we don’t know anything about them, I don’t know whether they’ll be school age or anything at all” and I said “what do you want to do”. At that time the school had four pupils and she said “please say you’ll send them to Seilebost school”, and we did and it was the best decision that we ever made. We had a meeting at Leverburgh school because we live equidistant between the two schools and this thing here about increased opportunities for pupils in a larger school and all the rest of it. We decided that that really was not relevant to our children and it was fantastic. They came to the little school and the year after they came it went up to twelve pupils, the year after that it went up to sixteen. It just takes one or two families, that’s all it takes and I think its very short-sighted of the council to think – well, we’re going to close Seilebost because there aren’t any children going to school. I mean that’s a tragic situation but it could change. It was down before, it could go back up and the fact that the West Harris Trust is building new houses, is planning new houses – there are loads of families who want to come and live here – there are people who have moved up; who like ourselves – maybe somebody else will adopt, maybe we’ll adopt again, I don’t know – I mean – that’s a bit flippant but its just – I agree with Rhoda, it’s terribly negative and we do need to start being a little bit positive and start thinking – well actually what can we do to prevent population decline – not what can we do to save money – oh we’ll close a few more schools – and that exacerbates the population decline because without Seilebost school people won’t want to live in the west coast of Harris.

Lucy Toor Lucy Toor again. Just to reiterate that, we only moved here to the island last year and the school was an enormous draw for us settling here in west Harris. We came from a bigger school, it wasn’t a big primary school but it was bigger. Similar size to what we’re talking about at Tarbert. Our boys have absolutely thrived since moving here. The difference in them academically is marked. They are not missing out socially or because of smaller groups at all, they are absolutely thriving here. They get to meet other friends outside of school, school isn’t just about friendship and having - it’s very beneficial them having to discuss and work in groups here because they have to take account of other aged children. They have to be respectful of other ages. I just don’t buy that them being in a bigger school with more children gives them any - I’m sure we could think of a few benefits - but we’ve done it, we’ve been there, it just doesn’t fit. We’ve got the experience of both and they’re absolutely thriving here, far more than they were before and as an incomer, having a small school like this in this area, is an absolute plus point and I know in your document it says it isn’t, but it is – it just is.

Joan Mackinnon I accept everything you say is your reality and that’s the way you found it and it’s worked for you. However, there are issues about classes that are very very small and there are socialisation issues as well and where it might suit one it

would maybe not be the best for another and young people need to have choices when they are wanting to make friends and that is still a fact and we have to say that Tarbert school is still a very small school. We're not talking about a very large school at all, we're just meaning that if the children come together there will be more of a peer group to enable them to work together at the same level.

- Lucy Toor The more children you have the more likely they are to slip through the net. We didn't come from a big primary school. It may have been a mainland school but it wasn't big, it was a similar size to what we're talking about. There's far greater opportunity for them to be missed in that peer group in - I just don't see how we're going to keep the same – I'd like to hear what the staff to pupil ratio will actually be because I can't believe it's going to be as good as we've got now. Their needs are met individually here and they socialise as you say. They need to be used to and around other children – they do that but on another point you talk about - in the document – about the great after school activities that there are at Sir E Scott. Our children access those already and unless you are talking about providing childcare provision for them as soon as school finishes to hold onto them until they go to school clubs after school which aren't funded or provided by the school and unless you're saying that actually the council will be providing childcare for them to keep them there until they go to those after school clubs, I don't see how you can actually have the front to say that by them going to Sir E Scott, that gives them an extra - a kind of extra, extra curricular benefits because they're going to them already. All the children here already go to all of those clubs and in fact it'll be worse because they'll have to come all the way back home for us to take them all the way back again, when actually they'll be doing more travelling – so I don't see that's a benefit at all.
- Joan Mackinnon Something we could look at is offering after school care to hold them until - I think it is something that we could do.
- Lucy Toor I think the overall point.....
- Joan Mackinnon Well Rhoda, there are cost implications but this isn't all about cost. It is about looking at the experience that young people have – it is
- Rhoda Campbell With regard to cost, I know that one of the biggest costs with Seilebost school and most schools is the staffing and from what my understanding is that there's not going to be redundancies and that the staff are going to be re-employed within – fair enough it might not be within Harris but within the Outer Hebrides which is still the local authority which would still indicate that that's not going to be a saving which then reduces the cost of the school to a very small amount.
- Robert Emmott Do you want me to comment on that?
- Rhoda Campbell Yes please
- Robert Emmott I think you're right that we do manage staff across the authority and where we have – there is a turnover, not a particularly high turnover but there is a turnover in the teaching profession. We've just gone through an exercise in the last few weeks which has seen a number of teachers retire and I think that across the school estate we've always managed down the unabsorbed if you like – the excess teachers from changes in schools – that's the reality of where we've been. There would have to be – I don't want to enter – it's important that we don't look at individual cases if you like but the authority would save money by not reducing the establishment across the piece rather than - you're absolutely right – the savings really come from the fact that you don't have so much teaching staff. There are small savings around property costs and obviously there'll be a question about what happened with the property as it stands but we would achieve those savings – we would have to – we couldn't be in a position where we're employing more teachers than we really needed and the number of teachers obviously does change – it's on a formula basis over time and one of the things the Education department does is manage that

process and because its not – teachers aren't employed by individual schools but the authority, it can do that.

Joan Mackinnon The age profile of the teachers in the Western Isles is very much weighted towards the mid to late fifties – that's where we're at.

Caroline Chaffer I'd just like to comment on the fact that this formula – I'm certainly not making this a platform of Leverburgh school at all but this formula is actually in process for the Gaidhlig Medium in Leverburgh school. It concerns me that it is across the board within all schools. I think you should be looking surely at the standard of education that the children receive rather than maintenance costs and cleaning bills. It concerns me a great deal that the teaching staff are under fire at the end of the day and you're trying to reduce that. When it does come down to people, bodies teaching our children, and it might be a great new school in Tarbert but it's the children that are within the school now and how its going to affect them that concerns me and I think the community as a whole.

Seonag to Check

Murdo Mackay Hi, I'm Murdo Mackay speaking on behalf of West Harris Trust tonight. I would just like to draw your attention to item 9.5 in the consultation document where it mentions the Outer Hebrides Migration Study 2008 had identified key factors of sustainable communities which included sustainable employment, private sector led economic diversity, housing provision, self determination clean energy. I would just like to make the point that on all of these points, West Harris Trust has shown in recent months that it is doing its best to try and tackle both economic activity, housing – we've just this week had a meeting with colleagues in housing identifying some sites. We've got a hydro project that's been approved and obviously self determination, we've gone ahead and we've purchased the estate and I would say that the one brick that's going to be missing from the wall for the west of Harris is the school if it closes and I really think it will pull the rug from under us, just at the wrong time and I would suggest at the very least that a period of grace of a minimum of five years be given to see if what West Harris are planning will work.

Cllr Catherine Macdonald Chair, I'm not about to start a debate but I would just like to introduce myself. My name is Catherine Macdonald and I'm a councillor for Harris and South Lochs and I'm sitting here tonight facing members from the council of which I am a Member. I have no intention of starting a debate with them tonight. This is a night for the parents and the community to express their views. I am taking a note of the questions that are being asked and my opportunity will come in the Council Chamber when the matter is being debated.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Catherine – yes – I should make it clear that that is where councillors will have the opportunity - that is the proper forum for them.

Robert Macleod Can I just grab the mike for a second – Robert, just one point we wanted to clarify – sorry Robert Macleod to another Robert. The figure for Seilebost school, one point that hasn't really come out is the learning support aspect - is pro rata in Seilebost school's figure and we haven't really ever got to the bottom of the fact that there's a lot of special support that goes on in Seilebost school and the cost is made up of long-term sick leave of certain itinerant teachers – so what would be really good when you do the breakdown for like-for-like comparisons would be a bit of a delve into that figure as well – it would be useful and like Murdo I am speaking with a West Harris Trust hat on but would the panel consider that any mitigation of costs through mechanisms such as the West Harris Trust strengthen the case for retaining the school or is it purely about the other factors given the fact that we are hoping to expand the roll of the school and mitigate the problems of class sizes?

Cllr Catriona Stewart Certainly all views that have been aired here tonight will be considered.

Allan Ross Allan Ross speaking for South Harris Community Council. Could I firstly say that this came before the community council and we have backed it 100%. Two other points – definitely not the closure

Cllr Catriona Stewart I just about fell off my chair there

Allan Ross I think I would have got lynched. Two other points – the community council are at the moment involved in hopefully a successful windfarm development which will be done in conjunction with West Harris Trust and the Bays of Harris Association. That could produce up to £200,000 profit per annum which would be reinvested directly into the community. That could have a very very significant part to play. Added to the developments of the West Harris Trust, that has not come to the surface at all – nobody has asked us.

Cllr Catriona Stewart You are very welcome to put that in a submission – nobody is actually stopping you putting that on written record and submitting it.

Allan Ross We will be. One other thing, when I received, as clerk to the community council the documents relating to this school and to Scalpay I actually thought that reading it that they were researched figures. From what has been said tonight, the pupil cost for Sir E Scott of £10,926, is a past figure, clearly it is not a figure that represents what it would be for the new school so how on earth can any body make a decision on figures that you know are not accurate? Thank you

Joan Mackinnon We were given the figures because we make an annual submission to the Scottish Government every September on pupil costs and we were just sharing that information with people. We weren't trying to make out that that was the new school was going to cost. We're just giving you figures that we submit annually in September.

Allan Ross But surely the appropriate thing to have done would - was to estimate.....

Cllr Catriona Stewart Excuse me Mr Ross – wait for the mike – thank you

Allan Ross Surely the correct thing to have done would be to estimate the costs for the new school and put those in so that at least the parents and for that matter the councillors who are going to decide upon this actually know the true facts. There is another point actually at 9.6, when you are dealing with carbon footprints – did that take any account of the additional travelling that will be involved for parent teacher nights, meetings with teachers, it doesn't relate just to heating costs and lastly perhaps the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources could in his reply give the actual costs that will be involved in the contracts for the thirty year period and particularly what upgrade there will be on an annual basis on those costs. As I understand it, all these thirty year contracts have got annual increases built into them.

Robert Emmott I'm happy to provide that information. You're absolutely right – the contracts for the facilities management for the school do have a provision for an inflationary uplift each year and a review every five years - there is a provision for that in the contract. I don't think I can provide the actual tender prices – I can provide the cost estimates which I think will be close enough to give you a good idea.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Yes Mr Campbell

Neil Campbell Yes, its me again. We've already had an admission from the Director of Education and Children's Services tonight of one error in this document. I think I'm going to point out a second one. On page - section 9.2 there's a reference to maintaining the building at condition B – if we look at section 8.1 we in fact are told that the condition is C - and if I think back to the conversation meeting in March we were assured that the condition was B and in fact substantial work has been carried out to the school since that date so perhaps we could just clarify what the condition of the school is now?

Joan Mackinnon Seilebost school was surveyed in 2007 as were all the schools in the island and Seilebost school was surveyed and the condition is B – that is a correction that we shall make.

Mumbling in audience – inaudible - Male says wonder how many more errors there are.

Lucy Toor I've got another one Neil – 8.1 it says our school roll is eleven, actually it's a school roll of thirteen. There's a difference twice in the document as well....

Joan Mackinnon I can correct that – that is not an error, the eleven is the census number in September 2009 – census number is eleven – it went up to thirteen and we were just taking account of the fact that there is thirteen in another part of the document. The eleven was the September census roll.

Lucy Toor And as of the 2nd November which is a couple of weeks later it was thirteen – I just think it needs clarifying. For the majority of the school year it has been a pupil roll of thirteen and that is as it stands now so I think that needs clarifying.

Joan Mackinnon I think that's perfectly ok

Male ?????????? Just for the record if we could ask for clarification on the cost per pupil figures whether that's based on eleven or thirteen.

Joan Mackinnon Its thirteen but it doesn't refer to this year but I'll allow the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources to explain that.

Robert Emmott The cost per pupil is based actually on the census the previous year with a budget for the current – it's a snapshot taken in a moment in time and it's done in a consistent way. I think we all recognise that the costs in a school will change from time to time and the number of pupils in the school will change from time to time so the cost per pupil will move about and you have to look at it in that context going from eleven pupils to thirteen in a small school will have a big input on the cost per pupil – if it goes up further it will have an effect – if it goes down and we've already discussed that numbers can change quickly in a smaller school and so can the figures so I think they have to be treated in that context and cautiously as part of the picture and not the whole picture.

Cllr Catriona Stewart The formula is one that is used across the country.

Mrs Campbell I don't know if this is useful information – it's maybe worth noting when we're think of numbers and rolls and population. There are twenty four houses for sale in Harris at the moment which I am led to believe by the three estate agents that there is still a very good demand for houses in Harris and predominantly from families and twenty one house sites over and above what sites North Harris are making available and the sites that West Harris are making available.

Joan Mackinnon Just so that I note it Rhoda – how many?

Rhoda Campbell Twenty four houses and twenty one house sites are advertised for sale in Harris this moment. I suppose if 10% of these were purchased with families with two children that would be ten extra children – we live in hope.

Cllr Catriona Stewart That would be good

Rhoda Campbell Going back to Gaidhlig medium and English medium. You mentioned earlier that there was going to be one classroom for Gaidhlig medium – I'm not fully versed with the Gaidhlig medium system but I'm led to believe that P1-3 is total immersion and the rest is not – so how do you split that and if there's more going into that – is there enough capacity for? – plus also there's by 2012 there's only going to be one child in English medium in Leverburgh which I

think will have an effect on anyone wanting to move back or move into the west side – and if Seilebost is not here then that is basically the option – one child in English medium in Leverburgh and either that or Gaidhlig medium and these children cannot slip into the Gaidhlig medium.

Joan Mackinnon No not when they're that far into the school. There's a couple of things there Rhoda – I just want to take them as I can remember them.

We provide Gaidhlig medium education where we say that all the pupils' learning for P1 and P2 is done through Gaidhlig. All their literacy and their numeracy and the curriculum is delivered through Gaidhlig. On primary 3 we introduce English by 10% and by primary 4 we introduce more English, they do 20% of the curriculum through English by P4, 30% by P5, 40% by P6 and 50% by P7. By P7 we're saying – equal – its totally bi-lingual – the delivery of the curriculum. In Sir E Scott we're envisaging that. Again it just depends on the class - the way the classes are split but if there were two class groups in Gaidhlig in Sir E Scott school and I hope that there will be, the area which would be if you like, an open plan teaching area for Gaidhlig would be big enough for two class groups and have an activity area.

Rhoda Campbell That would mean that the P1/P2 would be fully immersed in Gaidhlig. Will that work in open plan?

Joan Mackinnon Yes it does.

Rhoda Campbell I don't know, I would find it strange. If it was total immersion that you would still be hearing English – I don't know

Joan Mackinnon The thing is that you can't not actually hear English, that's the reality

Rhoda Campbell No, no but if its being taught and its supposed to be total immersion. Is there room for two classes in the new school because the way the trend is there is more and more going into Gaidhlig Medium – so is there room for two English Medium....?

Joan Mackinnon We would like to see more and more children going into Gaidhlig medium and I suppose if the amalgamations were to happen we would be hoping that there would be more opportunity for more parents to access Gaidhlig medium education at Sir E Scott.

Rhoda Campbell But if there's people moving in, it's very difficult – you can't force them to – well you can't so where's their provision? I'm talking more in South Harris

Joan Mackinnon Without wanting to be too personal, I think if the situation at Leverburgh was that there was only one child in English medium education, I would not myself feel that that was a good provision for that pupil and I would want to speak to their parents and say "what might we do" so that your child would have a better experience.

Rhoda Campbell Ok, so what happens to the people who are thinking about moving in and are considering English medium in - at the moment, Seilebost is that school – that's what I'm trying to say to you – what happens?

Joan Mackinnon If I can explain the law that we're just now applying here. We would not be ceasing to offer English medium education in Leverhulme, you would have to go through a consultation process in order to cease English medium education at Leverhulme – we wouldn't be anticipating not offering English medium education in Leverhulme, that would not be our intention. I could give you the reverse of that if you like if you find it difficult to follow.

In Uig in Lewis there was Gaidhlig medium education on offer and English medium education. The Gaidhlig medium got so small that in the end there was one pupil in the Gaidhlig medium classes – a family moved away and it meant that there was just one boy left and the parents decided themselves that

that was not what they wanted for their child so they moved their child. Therefore there was no longer Gaidhlig medium education on offer in Uig simply because there were no children in the classes but if, next year when it comes to enrolment, three or four children wanted Gaidhlig medium education in Uig we would simply reinstate that provision because we have not if you like ceased to offer Gaidhlig medium education at Uig – Leverhulme would be the reverse of that – we would not be ceasing to offer English medium education in Leverburgh.

- Rhoda Campbell Would it not be easier if you left Seilebost open because that would be the option and the choice for English medium?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart It occurred to me that South of Harris could be a leader in island terms. They could have a Gaidhlig school which is what some people would like to see in the Western Isles.
- Rhoda Campbell I don't think this is the platform for that either.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Just an observation.
- Lucy Toor Can I just ask – 8.7.2 talks about additional support needs and it says that the new facilities will help to enhance learning and teaching for children of Seilebost primary school who may have additional support needs. Can you just tell us a bit more about why Tarbert will be able to offer more to children with additional support needs than here?
- Joan Mackinnon I don't think the document is saying that it would offer more
- Lucy Toor Well the quote is “these facilities will also help to enhance the learning and teaching for children of Seilebost primary school who may have additional support needs” – enhance means better.
- Joan Mackinnon The Additional Support Needs Act will be fully invoked at Sir E Scott as it is here. We will meet the needs of pupils, we have a very good record of meeting needs.
- Lucy Toor It will be the same – and also at the moment, is there going to be a provision within the new school for a quiet dedicated area where those children can go to have their one-to-one learning. At the moment within this school our children with support needs....
- Joan Mackinnon There is a base in the new school.
- Lucy Toor That'll just be one child able to go into that with their one support worker to have that quiet time which they get there at the moment.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart It's new facilities. These new facilities will also help to enhance learning – there are brand new facilities which will enhance the learning experience of the children.
- Joan Mackinnon If we, at your request, come down to share the plans with you, you will see that there is a dedicated place.
- Lucy Toor There won't just be a group of children in. I'm just trying to clarify just how many children there will be. At the moment our children with additional support needs are able to go to one room where there's nobody else with them for one-to-one working in peace and quiet – for it to be enhanced, or at least the bare minimum matched there has to be available to Sir E Scott to my mind and you're talking about it being enhanced.
- Joan Mackinnon The provision for additional support needs will be exactly what the child needs. If a pupil needs one-to-one for any particular reason, that will be offered. If they need to work in a smaller group, that will also be on offer.

to try and second guess.

Neil Campbell Surely, that's what your officials are paid for is to make assumptions and eight new houses, four of which are family houses, surely must anticipate some children.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Yes but we can't give you exact figures, that would quite wrong.

Neil Campbell Based on the figures you've given us tonight, you're assuming no additional children.

Cllr Catriona Stewart The figures are based on what the department actually has. The statistics for – they're not trying to second guess – it's the numbers that they have.

Neil Campbell Far be it for me to say that the Education department should perhaps speak to the housing department – but nevertheless, I think we should move on from that. I did have one final point and I'm sorry I've lost it so I'll come back.

Alexandra Mackay Hi, my name is Alexandra Mackay and I do teach at this school but I'm actually going to put my parent hat on at the moment. I have two pre-school children; I don't live in this area but probably have a lot of the same concerns as a lot of the young parents have that live within the Western Isles. As Rhoda stated, we do feel as if we're living in a dying community and it's a very depressing situation to be in. I only wish that I did live in this catchment area because believe you me, I would be sending my children here. This is a fantastic school, fantastic environment and it's just a wonderful place to be. There are lots of issues and issues not just for parents who send their children here but also one issue that hasn't been brought up is the transportation and its an issue for parents – it's an issue for me sending my children to Sir E Scott school. I've travelled on the bus, public transport and I am concerned about sending my child to Sir E Scott school as I'm sure children – parents sorry would be concerned sending their children to Sir E Scott on a bus that has secondary pupils on it as well. In an environment that can often be rowdy, there can often be bad language and it is unmonitored apart from the bus driver, who I really don't feel is his responsibility to speak to children who are misbehaving on the bus while he is trying to concentrate on driving. I'm sure – well I would hope that there are other people in here who might agree with me on those points.

Joan Mackinnon If I could just respond to that Alex. You've raised a concern that we've heard quite a number of times during the consultation meetings and just to say that we are going to have a full review of school transport including issues around unsupervised transport etc. that will be part of the review that we will carry out.

Patricia Martin Patricia Martin again I was going to make a similar point about transport is that on the likely effect caused. It doesn't mention the effect of a five year old child having to travel in the morning from twenty to nine as it would be from Scarista, all the way to Sir E Scott to start school at nine thirty and then returning on the bus at five past four which doesn't get back to Scarista until twenty to five in the evening and in the winter time they leave – and it's just getting light and when they come home it's dark and that is not a very good school day for any young child and it was bad enough when our youngest went – well when all our children went to Sir E Scott – as eleven/twelve year olds it was bad enough for them in the winter coming back in the dark never mind tiny little children as well and I don't think that has been really taken into account and I think that would have a very negative impact on their quality of live when they can't come home and go outside and play.

Joan Mackinnon As I said, we are going to review school transport and we will be looking at the time that pupils are travelling and see if there are any ways that we can minimise that.

Graham Maclennan My name is Graham Maclennan. As somebody who may in the future – I'm not too sure but may need this school, I know Neil and Rhoda are trying to

persuade me but my mother thinks it'll never work. I'd just like to ask the gentleman at the end of the board just so I can get the right term – are you the Director of Finance for Education or - for the council?

(Robert Emmott confirmed that he was the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources for the Comhairle)

One of the questions I was going to ask you then from a council point of view. You'll obviously have an economic development hat on and part of your economic development will obviously be stopping depopulation in the islands and obviously bringing economic growth to the island. We have a situation here in West Harris where you have the West Harris Trust who are dealing with a number of other bodies – actually the North Harris Trust and dealing with the council and a lot of innovative ideas in terms of trying to bring economic development into West Harris. If you have a lot of young families potentially coming in or you have new business potentially coming in or you have development work such as the hydro that the West Harris Trust are potentially bringing in which can bring money in, you have the possibilities of developing a better economy for the local community but one of the building blocks for any community I think is a school and I think this is not just a school but is a fundamental meeting place for the whole community also and I think that if you take a school away from an area such as this, then you effectively rip the heart out of the community as well. I think what you are doing is an extreme disservice to the community when it's beginning to get itself off its knees and create something locally and potentially bring to the table and offering that perhaps could be a local community partnership with the council. I'm not trying to speak for the West Harris Trust but could be something that could be in partnership with the council, provide costs towards the running of a facility such as this. I think this is disingenuous to say it's not just about costs – I think we all know we live in a time at the moment of economic depravity where we're going to be really constrained over the next few years in terms of costs so I think everybody knows there's a fundamental issue with costs but I think that if a local community could contribute towards a school such as this and the council can listen to them and perhaps use it as a kind of shining project and I think that would be of benefit to both.

Nikolei Globe

Nikolai Glove from Finsbay. Can I just ask the panel to respond to that please.

Robert Emmott

I'm happy to say a little bit. The economic development side is not my area of expertise, particularly but I think one of the things - I suppose there's a number of factors that have to be weighed up by the Education department in reaching its conclusion. The principal one to start with would have to be the educational benefit - I'm not going to go over what the Director's view is in terms of where we are in terms of educational benefit. The other things that have to be weighed up are finance because there are savings by having less schools and as you say it is not something that you have to ignore and has to be factored up and the community impact. The council has put a lot of effort into assisting the North Harris Trust and the work that is going on with a number of areas of economic regeneration and I don't think it would want to be doing something which sets back its other areas of investment that it has been doing and I think one of the areas that we will be reflecting on when the consultation report comes back together is the view of our development department on what it thinks about the impact of making a change like this would be on the community and on the economics about it. I'm not going to give you a direct answer, it's not my area but that's something which the legislation requires us to actively examine – I think we mentioned earlier, transportation and the impact on the community is something that we have to weigh up alongside the educational aspects for all the schools. That information will come back and your views will be recorded in the consultation report.

Nikolai Globe

I don't think two weeks is very long for that consultation process to be fulfilled.

Lesley McDonald

Its not proposed that that process would be fulfilled within two weeks. You have two weeks to provide us with your points of view which will then to go to

HMIE who will then prepare a report and thereafter between the 20th August and probably the end of September, we will prepare that consultation report which will be published early October to be considered by the Education Committee the last week in October.

Richard Maclennan Richard Maclennan again – I'm the man from behind and I'm a liar because I did say I was only going to speak once tonight but as – do we hope or reckon or think there is a possibility that the cost for the new Tarbert school per pupil will be lower than the cost just now?

Robert Emmott I think rather than speculating, I'll give you the figures and then you'll see.

Richard Maclennan So going back to Iain's questions – it's very nice to have an estimate for this proposal but I might like to differ because it think it would be a guesstimate by the figures that are being quoted tonight and it would certainly not be in favour of Seilebost school.

Joan Mackinnon Not that its relevant to this proposal but to be honest with you we've been consulting as you probably know with eleven communities all in all and we have produced papers which show that the school that we are proposing to amalgamate is cheaper to run per pupil than the school we are proposing they move into. To say that we are engineering the papers so that it looks like the school that we are trying to close is expensive and therefore that's why we're doing it is really simply not true. I'm sure you're not interested in that view but that's just the honest truth.

Richard Maclennan There's a lot of people in the room that have obviously done a lot of voluntary research and looking at the debate tonight the community seem to have a lot more answers, seem to have a lot more data than the council who are - who have probably got a lot more out of it in their wages than the voluntary sector here tonight.

Kate Langley Hi Kate Langley, Rehenigadale. I'm recently moved to the Western Isles six months ago and I've got two pre-school children. What worries me about the particular closure of this school is what we've seen across the Western Isles I think is that once a school closes it doesn't re-open. Now the Chair has said that if it came to 2012 and there were suddenly too many children for Sir E Scott the pupils for Seilebost wouldn't be moved. I wonder if that could be the same in reverse if you would say that if it came to 2012 and there are more pupils in Seilebost because of these new people moving in that Seilebost wouldn't close or if once you've started on the slope to closing it – its finished and it will close whatever happens – because that will discourage people from coming and the West Harris Trust will suffer from that. The whole community will suffer – personally I would love it if there was a school in Rehenigadale but obviously there isn't any more but there are now six children whereas there were no children in Rhenigadale and now there are six kids. I just wonder if the five year grace period would seem to me to be a good starting point and if that's the middle ground where the council and the community can come together, why not go for the five year thing. The economic recovery is going to take a lot longer than five years for everybody so its probably a little drop in the ocean, so let's give it five years and see what happens.

Cllr Catriona Stewart As I've said, everybody should have their submissions in by the date and if that's what they wish to say – that's fine. The school for Rhenigadale is Tarbert I understand.

Gordon Cumming I just wanted to go back to the point Nikolai made about the consultation period. Consultation to me means information going backwards and forwards during that period from – I think I understood from what Lesley said, we've got until 30th June and after that we don't get a chance to say any more. Is that correct?

Cllr Catriona Stewart Lesley remind me when the proposal document was issued.

Lesley McDonald To answer the second question first. The proposal document was issued on 13th May

Cllr Catriona Stewart I do appreciate that you have until that time but the document has been in the public domain for some time.

Lesley McDonald The process that will be followed to prepare the consultation report is outlined in 2.7 of the document and does not provide a specific opportunity for consultees to provide more representations. There is, however, the first three weeks of the six week potential ministerial call in period that I mentioned and the legislation states that within the first three weeks of the six week period (that would be if the council were to make a decision on 4th November that the school should close) the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person.

Gordon Cumming Bearing in mind the problems we've had in getting information today and in the past. Is there any chance to get that deadline extended – 30th June?

Lesley McDonald That's not a decision for me but that is certainly a point that could be made in any representation that is submitted.

Joan Mackinnon By law we have to have thirty school days of open consultation after the publication of the document. In actual fact ours will be thirty four school days. That's why 30th June is the end of that thirty four school day period – it's the last day of term so that will be the end of this consultation period but as Miss McDonald said, at the very end of the process if there was a decision to close - and by the way that is not clear – and we will be looking at all of the information that comes in and presenting to elected Members who will make the decisions in October.

Neil Campbell Sorry – Neil Campbell again. Just taking up on Gordon's point there and Lesley thanks for that response. Could I just get clarification from you though Lesley – the first advertisement in the papers actually had the receiving school as Leverburgh. There was a second advertisement the following week which corrected that and put the receiving school as Tarbert. Could I ask this date of 13th May, is that the first advert or the second advert and if it's the second advert, the statutory period of consultation is not being met?

Lesley McDonald It runs from the date of the first advert. In the placing of the second advert the council was dealing with an inaccuracy in the document and one of the things that can be done when publishing a notice, correcting an inaccuracy is to grant an extension of time. My understanding is that the decision was made not to do that for the reason for the document that had been issued to parents was correct. That is also something that is stated in paragraph 2.7 that we have to detail in that consultation report that will go up in October/November exactly how we have dealt with inaccuracies.

Alan Ross Can I ask who made that decision?

Lesley McDonald That decision was made on the Comhairle's behalf by the Director of Education and Children's Services taking advice from colleagues.

Alan Ross So is that a decision that you could reverse. If you've made it presumably you could add another fortnight. As I understand it, it's a minimum of thirty four days.

Joan Mackinnon We could look at that actually and we would be not averse to considering extending the consultation by some dates. I will talk to my legal colleagues after this meeting and let you know if that's appropriate, tomorrow.

Neil Campbell Thanks for that, I think that would be appreciated given the delay in getting the formal responses from the Conversation and the number of inaccuracies that have been pointed out tonight. There is a very minimum that the council

should give us an extension beyond 30th June.

- Joan Mackinnon Can I just point out Neil that we were under no obligation to have that Conversation with you and it did not necessarily need to form any part of the form of consultation. However, that's not to say that we would want to keep any information from you.
- Allan Ross Being an ex lawyer I find that comment to be particularly bad to say that after the event you didn't have to have a Conversation, you did have the conversation, you were asked questions and it reflects very badly that (a) you are not saying straight off that you'll grant an extension and then, here you are at a meeting and the questions which were asked, you accepted, haven't been answered.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart I think I said earlier on in the meeting that I promised to have a look and to get the answers back to you as soon as possible. The conversation we had did not form part of the formal statutory consultation. We had them with all the areas just – they were conversations – we are now in a different consultation period. We take on board what you say and I said I would act on what Mr Campbell had said earlier on in the meeting.
- If there are no more questions. Could somebody open some windows because its awfully warm in here – thank you. A bheil an dorus duinte – oh muirt mhor, no wonder we're hot. Tha e cho teath – as long as we don't have midgies.
- Jane Porteous I am Jane Porteous, I have two sons here who have almost completed – I'm sorry, I'm really nervous
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Don't be nervous at all – please don't be nervous, take your time. The heat is getting to us all in here. I didn't realise that they'd closed the door outside and I'm thinking – is it my age or am I just going to pass out here.
- Jane Porteous I've got two sons who have almost completed their whole primary education here. I don't live within the catchment area
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Presumably you're not travelling from Ness.
- Jane Porteous No, no not Ness – Diraclete, almost as far. When there's been no transport, I drive the boys here.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Would you like a drink of water? Please take your time.
- Jane Porteous I keep hearing the phrase "we take on board what you say" but some faces on the panel look like the face is there but the ears aren't listening. No one seemed to have any reaction to the lady in Rhenigadale saying there's no children there one minute and six the next. When the boys first came to the island, there were four children at this school and there are now thirteen and now it seems is the time to close the school to go to a much prettier school, maybe, its going to have lots of glass – I heard that which is very lovely but I just don't think you're listening. If a school roll here can go from four to thirteen – in what would that be – seven years or something – with all this stuff, enterprise and everything else going on in the area, how can you not take that on board, and I don't think you are taking that on board quite frankly.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart We are listening.
- Jane Porteous There's a silence – Joan particularly seems to not have any – there's no feedback from you. When positive points are being aired, you're not giving any feedback – I can't help thinking decisions have been made.
- Joan Mackinnon I'm very sorry, I cannot help the way I look. I am not the decision maker either.

I will not be the person making any decisions.

Jane Porteous Just a little feedback, that's all I'm saying and can I just ask also with this cost per capita? I still haven't got it clear in my head. This – what is it - £12,000 something or other

Cllr Catriona Stewart Cost per pupil

Jane Porteous Cost per pupil. What I'd like to know is – like some a few people have already said – there's a lot that goes into special needs provision here. How is that reflected in the figures? I think that does reflect badly on the school – I mean it's bound to look like a huge amount – you know in difference between here and another school. If there's more special needs teaching going on here, how do you sort of take that into account with your figures?

Joan Mackinnon It is the cost per pupil to run the school, that's just what we're looking at. I'll ask Robert to..

Robert Emmott The cost of pupil is done on a standard way of looking at the cost devolved to the school. Some things aren't included. I know that not all – there are some costs if you like – there are specialist costs that aren't actually included in the cost per pupil I'd rather provide you with the details of that then speculate on that but I know the work we've been doing to provide – to answer this question for other schools has highlighted that there are some schools costed out with the cost per pupil and to a certain extent you couldn't make a meaningful comparison if you had a high level of additional support in one school and not in another. That wouldn't give you a relative comparative. We can identify separately what is the additional support that is provided to schools. The one thing we have to be careful of is that it doesn't relate to particular individuals. We have to be careful how we provide it but I can make sure that we address that in the figures we get back to you.

Jane Porteous The last thing I want to say is the point has been made several times that they may well indeed be more pupils than you are perhaps expecting at Tarbert. Are you giving us the guarantee that all of a sudden there won't be portacabins going up here, there and everywhere to house unexpected pupils with these three classrooms?

Cllr Catriona Stewart Not from 2012. There will be portacabins in the run up to the new build

Jane Porteous There will be plenty of provision for.....ok

Philip Maclean Hello, I'm Philip Maclean, I'm the third councillor for Harris and South Lochs and like Catherine I'm not going to enter the debate tonight. That will take place in the Chamber. I just wanted to know if anybody on the panel could say something about whether all of the schools potentially under threat would be called in by the Scottish Ministers or whether this school is unique in that respect? If so, or explain a bit why the Scottish Ministers actually call in potential school closures.

Cllr Catriona Stewart I couldn't possibly second guess Scottish Ministers?

Philip Maclean Are all the schools where consultations are taking place at the moment.....

Cllr Catriona Stewart I'll pass over to Lesley, Philip.

Philip Maclean Will all of them be potentially called in by Scottish Ministers.

Lesley McDonald Yes, the provision is now that any proposal to close a school or to carry out various other things such as discontinue secondary education, discontinue an

English medium or a Gaidhlig medium unit. It used to be the legislation was related to distance in that with a primary school, if you were moving a school five miles or a secondary ten that there was a referral to Scottish Ministers but now it's a far more iterative process. There is very much the enhanced role of HMIE and that HMIE Report is now being prepared in relation to every proposal and I think the other thing that I think having been to a few of these meetings is probably just about to be mentioned by the Chair is, there is actually an obligation on the Comhairle if it makes a decision to close within six days of that decision to send all of the documentation to Scottish Ministers so that they can have look at it at that stage – yes every – if there is a decision made to close a school or to discontinue a stage of education that is referred to Scottish Ministers, they have to make up their mind whether or not they want to call it in within six weeks. They may want to call it in, they want to have a further look. They will take account of any relevant representations made by any person within the first three weeks of that six weeks. The timescale from thereon in is very much guided by Scottish Ministers and the information that they require.

- Rhoda Campbell Just a point. Going by what my daughter said today, there were no council Members down today with regard to the consultation with pupils and staff. Is that correct?
- Joan Mackinnon That is correct. There had been an arrangement for somebody to come down to consult with pupils and staff. Something unforeseen happened and we'll reschedule that.
- Rhoda Campbell How soon will that be?
- Joan Mackinnon We have a couple of dates from the school and we'll see which of these will be suitable for diaries tomorrow.
- Rhoda Campbell Will that not affect the 30th of June deadline?
- Joan Mackinnon No, not at all. This is a consultation which should take place during the thirty days; at any point during the thirty days.
- Neil Campbell I've remembered my final point.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart It's Neil Campbell again for the record.
- Neil Campbell For the record. Like Richard I promised I was only going to speak once as well. One thing that hasn't – this is not my final point – this is an additional one I've remembered. There's a lot being said tonight about what a fantastic school the new school in Tarbert will be and I'm sure it will be but I think we all just have to look out the windows to the right and to the left and see what a fantastic physical environment we have for our kids here – that hasn't been mentioned so I think its worth putting it on the record. My point that I meant to make earlier on is that I understand that the Tarbert Parent Council have made a number of submissions to the Comhairle suggesting that the school with a potential roll of – the school being built for a potential roll of seventy five was not large enough.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you
- Nikolai Gove Nikolai Globe again. This big £150M chunk of cash is a great pile of money to put into the schools and what it appears to me is that the decisions are being made on statistics and following what looks very much like an urban model – big trophy school all the (inaudible) and everything else. Has there been any sort of deep insight into what that £150M could do to all the existing schools in the Hebrides and is that information available?
- Robert Emmott I suppose there are two things. One is that the schools project which is the replacement of five schools in the Western Isles is part funded by the Scottish

Government and something like £52M of the money that is coming for the schools and for the capital expenditure is funded from them. Now the funding was only available for projects to replace or renew schools, not for projects to refurbish a whole range of schools and the Comhairle did a lot of work on this. The work started I think in 2002 – Mrs Munro will put me right – to actually start this project and the schools that are being replaced are the Nicolson Institute as the school which is the biggest school on the island and Sir E Scott as I'm sure you all know. The West Side School on Barvas which is the amalgamation of two schools and the Point Community School which has been a fifteen year ambition to actually develop that project. Later on in the day the Balivanich School was added after the storm did quite a lot of damage to that school there and the government provided additional funding to enable that to be included in the project. The Comhairle took advantage of the available government funding to do what could be done with available government funding. It obviously had to put some of its own resources in to make that happen but the decision was taken that the benefit that could be gained from that was greater than the benefit of just doing the bits that we could do outwith that. I think the last new school we had before that was Sgoil na Loch and that was some time previously so we are getting a new number of schools.

We've also had an announcement of funding towards one further school which will be Daliburgh in South Uist. That was selected as the school that was in worst condition from the condition surveys and that's why that particular school was included so I hope that helps with your question.

George Macleod

I live in Scarista and I just wanted to address – I think there's a bigger issue which the council have to look at regarding rural areas - the closing down of Seilebost school is a major part of these issues. I mean there's been a community in the South of Harris, it's got the longest dated community anywhere in the Outer Hebrides and over the last few years, the council seem to be taking away various services including now the schools. It seems to be a very short sighted view that everything has to go either to Tarbert or to Stornoway or to the major towns which is happening all over Scotland, I know but it would be quite enlightening if the council could maybe reverse this view.

They say that – it is all to do with funding and as I say south Harris has over the last couple of years lost its public bus service in the evenings. You have to phone to try and get a bus down in South Harris. I work in a hotel down in South Harris, Scarista House and before now some of our workers would travel in on buses to work and now things like that have been – and they're affecting the economy of south Harris. I believe also in Leverburgh in the Home of Rest there the provision for elderly folk from south Harris has been withdrawn and that anyone now who needs provision, elderly provision like that in south Harris either have to go to Tarbert or to Stornoway. This just seems to be another additional thing which the council are just enforcing on rural communities instead of helping them grow and helping them survive, they're actually wanting people to move into Tarbert, move into Stornoway.

The last council houses which were built, were built in Bunavoneader as was mentioned previously. That area has had huge problems with water supply over the last few year so they built eight new council houses which is going to increase the problems with the water supply. Why don't they build them in south Harris which would have increased the population in south Harris? It seems to be sheer short-sightedness by the council, on their views of rural areas and its about time change because you know it's a – its almost a second wave of clearances that are happening at the moment. It's much more subtle than Donald Stewart ploughing the fields in the graveyards in the west side in the 1850s but its happening again and its about time the council did something about it.

Cllr Catriona Stewart

The housing initiative at Bunavoneader is one that has been undertaken by North Harris Trust in conjunction with HHP and my understanding is that as well as the houses that are being build there, there are some private sites too. The council no longer builds houses.

Kate Langley Kate Langley again from Rhenigadale. Just a quick thing – as a parent of a child whose potential first day of school is going to be the 16th August 2012 – can you guarantee that the Sir E Scott school is going to be up and ready in all its double glazed glory by that date or are we likely to have them in portacabins?

Cllr Catriona Stewart The school will be built in time as has been stated publicly on a number of occasions.

Patricia Martin Its Patricia Martin again – it sort of links into that point again. Actually the primary school children will be in the old primary school because - and the only reason that there is a brand new primary school being built – which is something that sort of slightly slipped off the radars is because there was a fire in the original primary school and for the last two or three years all the primary school children have been in portacabins at Sir E Scott secondary school and it took a lot of fighting by parent council members, secondary and primary to get the original primary school building refurbished for the primary school children to go back into it while the new school is being built. There would not be a new school if there hadn't been a fire so its all a bit sort of – dodgy to be quite honest – and I just think that if there hadn't been a fire and if there wasn't going to be a new school what would then the council be saying about Seilebost?

This document seems to be saying – oh its fantastic – send the children to this brilliant new school - yes it is going to be a brilliant school but we don't really want them to go there and we want to keep this school and I think that really needs to go on the record that the people of this community, whether they've got children at the school now, in the past, went to the school themselves and the future and are maybe are hoping they will have children – we want to keep this school open – we do not want this school to close.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Could I just go back to what you said initially, that there would be no new schools. Sir E Scott was included in the Western Isles School Project from the beginning. There was going to be a refurbishment – the primary was as well and I can assure you that that was true and it was the subject of a number of years of consultation with parents in the school as to what exactly would happen and the plans that are in place for the new build which will start this summer, was approved by the parent council, the parent body which is the parent forum and the staff. It is not true to say that it was as a result of the fire that there is a new provision going to be in Tarbert.

Gentleman at the back please. The gentleman at the back has been waiting for some time. If you could just wait – this gentleman, I'm sorry has been waiting for some time.

Richard Maclennan I just wanted to pick up on - it's just adding to a point I made earlier, its picking up on what George said and what Patricia said earlier. There's two points here there seems to be – there's one of cost and one of education and whether - you're telling us that cost is not the main issue, you're telling us that education is the main issue but what I'd like to kind of understand from the figures you've got here. You've got an average costs of people based on Sir E Scott and also Seilebost. Obviously there are running cost for Seilebost and various additional costs from an administration point of view but from my point of view, it would be interesting to see what you see as the additional cost for running Seilebost for say the next five years because I think that the least that you owe this community is the ability to let itself get on its feet through the initiatives that it's got at the moment and put a moratorium in place and allow the community to regenerate itself and provide children for this school.

Coming back to what George said, its sadly lacking – you can tell by my accent that I'm a Weege-herach so – my folks are from here and I've been coming up here since I was a kid - since I was a kid I've seen the population decline and I've seen the opportunities in Harris decline and ok, across the island there's been a bit of a population decrease but I think from a Harris point of

view there's a slight bias in the sense that there's a feeling that Harris is just looked upon as an outcrop of the general population here and I think you owe it pretty much to this community to listen to them. They would prefer their children to be educated here and I think that's a valuable opinion. Whatever tables you've got and whatever models you look at or whatever cost models you look at or whatever – psychologists have said – somebody should sit beside and open window and talk to somebody else – I think its pretty valuable when you listen to parents.

- Cllr Catriona Stewart I have to say that Harris unfortunately is not the only area in the Western Isles where there is severe population decline. Believe you me, it saddens us all when we go round the communities and we see where we have communities where there are no children going into school this year – some didn't even go last year – it really is desperate.
- Richard MacIennan My other question that wasn't answered. Would the council be open to the local community becoming involved in some sort of project because that hasn't been answered. Is there any previous example of that having happened?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart What I'm saying is that we will take note of all that has been said tonight. The reason this meeting is being recorded is that a transcript will be prepared that will go to all the council Members and will be considered as part of the submission to the Comhairle at the relevant time. Nobody is ignoring what you are saying – I want you to be assured of that.
- Jane Porteous It was just a wee observation – the gentleman just then was talking about listening to people. I just observed when Patricia Martin was speaking two of the panel talked through half of the point she was making so its probably important to listen to that.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart I was listening – I was questioning in my own mind dates but I was listening I assure you
- Jane Porteous And talking at the same – ok – that's listening!!
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Like most women in here I can multi task too.
- Jane Porteous No, that's not the point I don't think – just politeness more than anything.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Thanks for that observation
- Joan Mackinnon I would just like to make one point. I would like to set the record straight. I replied to the letter that I got, as soon as I got it and I want that recorded tonight.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Director. I'm going to ask ...
- Christine Sommers Hello, I'm Christine Sommers. I've got a son who has additional learning needs and after spending three years struggling in a school in Glasgow, coming here and thriving, I wonder how you can base your statement here saying it would enhance his learning in this brand new spangly school – I can't see it at all.
- Joan Mackinnon I accept your point.
- Christine Sommers What are you basing it on?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart I think the Director actually answered that question earlier on.
- Christine Sommers I don't think she did – did you think – I don't think you did.

Joan Mackinnon Sorry, I thought I had. I do believe that we will fully fulfil the requirements of the Additional Support Needs Act. We have a very very good record of looking after pupils who have special needs in all our schools and that includes Sir E Scott school, Tarbert. That is my firm belief.

Christine Sommers I'm just wondering how it'll be enhanced.

Cllr Catriona Stewart I answered that one earlier

Christine Sommers It doesn't mean it will be enhanced

Cllr Catriona Stewart It will because you will be in a school that is purpose built for – with new facilities. That is what the document says with staffing as the Director said. We look at the needs of every child and that will be addressed and we do that – that was explained to you.

Jane Porteous Can I just say as a related point that the new primary school is underneath the secondary school so the primary pupils are going to have the secondary pupils above them and obviously the secondary pupils move around an awful lot more each time that they have to go to a new room so they are going to have that added disruption. Not only are they going to have this glass building – and I just don't see that that has any relevance to children who are coming from this fantastic environment but they are actually going to have so much more noise around them – so much more activity around them so I don't see how that enhances anybody's learning experience.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Can I just ask the Chair of the parent council when the next parent council meeting is going to be. Have you got one before the end of term?

(Neil Campbell confirmed Monday 21 June)

Cllr Catriona Stewart I just wondered if at that meeting it would be worth while to have a look at the plans so that people would actually see what is proposed for the new school.

Jane Porteous I've seen them and I know that

Cllr Catriona Stewart No everybody has, not everybody has

Jane Porteous Just on that point how does having secondary pupils around and making so much extra noise enhance anybody's learning potential.

Cllr Catriona Stewart I would contend that primary children make just as much noise at times as secondary

Jane Porteous Yes but they're not on the roof above – that's what I mean – its an added, they've already got that - you're right they do make a lot so then we're adding in extra noise. I don't see how that enhances anybody's learning potential.

Cllr Catriona Stewart So next Tuesday – did you say that - who said that they were – Neil – Monday – so would you like to have a sight of the plans on Monday because it would help probably to inform part of your submission – yes – ok then – thank you.

Neil Campbell Neil Campbell again. Sorry to come back Joan on your clarification there that you responded to the letter as soon as you got it. Is that what you said?

Joan Mackinnon That is exactly what I said.

Neil Campbell Can I just for the record then confirm; as you if you were at the conversation meeting in March in the school here?

Joan Mackinnon Yes

Neil Campbell Did you not promise at that meeting that you would respond to these questions?

Joan Mackinnon Yes we agreed that we would respond to questions that you have given us that night. I did not get the letter that you were talking about. As soon as I got it, I responded.

Neil Campbell Can I just reiterate, at the meeting on 11 March you promised to respond to these questions. We waited until 20th April. There was no response. We followed that up with a letter. Again there was no response. The only response came was when the Chair of Education asked me in an e-mail on 3 June if we had got a response. There was no response until 5 June and at that a partial response. We are still waiting for a full response to two of the questions and a partial response to a third question.

Cllr Catriona Stewart I'm very sorry Neil. You got some answers from the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources tonight and we will get back to you with the answers to the questions that you have asked.

Neil Campbell I think that it was important that that was put on the record.

Cllr Catriona Stewart I'm now going to ask Lesley McDonald to go through.....

Robin Reid I'm Robin Reed and I'm just going to say a few words because I don't think enough have been said tonight about how good this school is. I have recently moved to the community and I work for the North Harris Trust as a Ranger and have recently started contributing to the environmental education here and I heard quite a lot being talked quite early on in this meeting about – fit for purpose, meeting the challenges for the curriculum for excellence and I know that one of the four main aims for the curriculum for excellence is to promote responsible citizens and the environment is going to be a huge part of that in the future and obviously then for children to have a healthy interaction with the environment is exceptionally important and I can't imagine a school where people could have a more positive interaction with the environment. I also picked up on the fantastic lighting that the new school is going to have. Well if we need good lighting there's fantastic opportunities for outdoor learning here and also we're expecting our first baby in the next couple of months and just from the visits that I've made here we would strongly consider sending our child here if the school was still open and also I'd just like to finish by saying that we are reiterating what other people are saying here tonight that with all the efforts that the North Harris Trust and the West Harris Trust are going to rejuvenate the community here – I think this is a very untimely proposal.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you.

Cllr Catherine Macdonald Can I just say something?

Cllr Catriona Stewart Can you just wait until the microphone comes Catherine – ok.

Cllr Catherine Macdonald I would just like to say that I'm confident that your views will be conveyed to all Members of Council and I'm sure there will be a very strong debate in the Council Chamber with certainly the views of everybody here tonight. I have taken a note of the views and not only will they have the views from this side of the table which you have sent to them but they will also have my views and the views of other people in the council so you can rest assured that your views will be strongly put to the Council before any decision is taken.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Catherine. I'm going to call on Miss Lesley McDonald to make sure that she has taken a note of some of the questions that have been asked so

that we will get a response back to you. Thank you, Miss McDonald.

Lesley McDonald Thank you Chairman. I have a note of five points. The first is to provide the plans for Sir E Scott Primary showing detail as to classrooms. The next three points come under the heading of finance and that is that Mr Emmott has undertaken to provide a breakdown of the annual running costs of running the new primary department in Tarbert insofar as he can from actual costs and in the event that he is not able to disclose detailed costs prior to financial close that the estimated costs of running certain elements of the new school would be provided; that in those costs the learning support element is clearly separately identified so that parents can look at that. Again details of the full costs for the thirty year period together with the annual increases of the lifecycle contract, again if actual tender prices cannot be provided the estimates and finally the Director of Education and Children's Services has undertaken to come back in relation to the possibility of an extension to the consultation period.

Have I missed anything and to whom should we send this information?

Neil Campbell Just for the record, can I add in the two questions on which I am not being responded to in the letter following the conversation meeting. First question was a breakdown of the annual savings from closing Seilebost – we were quoted a figure at that meeting and if we could have a breakdown of that figure. The second question which was partly answered - the question was, could we have a breakdown of the figure of the £233,954 one-off saving – that was partially answered and the third question which was already covered was the budget cost per pupil of a new school in Tarbert as compared to Seilebost.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Neil

Lesley McDonald Where should I send the information?

(confirmed Gordon Cumming, Chair of Parent Council)

Cllr Catriona Stewart So you're the Chair – ok

The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to the HMIE report, written representations that it has received and oral representations made to it by anyone at the public meeting. A consultation report will then be produced. This report will be published in electronic and printed formats and its availability will be published in local newspapers. The report will be available on the Comhairle's web site and from Comhairle offices as well as the school free of charge. The consultation report together with any other relevant documentation will be considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee who will make a recommendation 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 Scottish Ministers of the decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and the consultation report in accordance with the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 within six working days of the decision being made. Scottish Ministers have a six week period from the date of the final decision to decide if they will call in the proposal. Until the outcome of the six week call in process has been notified to the Comhairle the Comhairle will not proceed with the implementation of the proposal.

We have to talk about the deadline date for the receipt but written submissions should be sent to Mr Malcolm Burr the Chief Executive of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar at Sandwick Road, Stornoway or electronically to schoolconsultation@cne-siar.gov.uk – the address in the proposal document and thank you all very much and I hope you enjoy what's left of a lovely evening in South Harris – thank you.

