



Minute of Meeting held in
Breasclete School on
Wednesday 27 November
2013 at 5.30pm.

PRESENT Councillor Catriona Stewart
 Mr Peter Carpenter
 Mr Iain G Smith
 Mr Allan Smithyman
 Councillor Angus Morrison
 Councillor Donald N Macleod
 Ms Lesley McDonald
 5 parents and members of the public

APOLOGIES Councillor Norman A MacDonald

CATCHMENT AREA CONSULTATION MEETING – BREASCLETE SCHOOL

Catriona Stewart: Good evening everybody and welcome to this evening's meeting which has been called to look at the boundaries or the catchment boundaries for Breasclete and Shawbost Schools, Isle of Lewis. First of all we will do introductions, I am Catriona Stewart, I am Chair of Education and Children's Services Committee, with me I have Iain Smith who deals with transport within the department, Mr Peter Carpenter the Director, Ms Lesley McDonald Head of Executive Office and we have Cllr Angus Morrison and then we have Mr Allan Smithyman who is the Learning Community Principal for this area and then we have Cllr Donald Macleod down there and to make sure that all the recording goes smoothly, we have with us Mr Martin Macleod and Mr Alex Matheson. It is very important at this stage that you switch off your mobile phones because its not just about putting them on silent or meeting, switch them off because it actually interferes with the recording equipment and we want to make sure that everything is as it should be. I have been caught out before myself, I have said the spiel and my phone has gone off. So let's make sure that we have everything right.

Catriona Stewart: I am sure many people here are aware that the Council made a decision in August 2007 to review its school estate and as a consequence of that we have had various school closures and we have had amalgamations of schools which meant that there were various anomalies within catchment areas for schools and to address this problem we are now reviewing catchments throughout the Western Isles and that is the purpose of this evening's meeting. It is to talk through what we have proposed, what we have agreed and proposed to do. I am not going to say very much more at this stage. I am going to ask Ms McDonald to go through procedure and then I will ask the Director, Mr Carpenter, to speak to the Report and then I will open the floor to questions. Ms McDonald.

Lesley McDonald: Thank you chair. Before I say my piece could I record the apologies of the Convener who is at the Gaelic Debate on the Mainland this evening.

This is a formal process in terms of the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act to amend the catchment areas of Breasclete and Shawbost Schools following the closure of Carloway School, to identify any anomalies so that a child isn't left with their allocated school being further away from their home perhaps

than another school. We also try to recognise natural communities but Mr Carpenter will address that more when he speaks. We are out to consultation for at least 30 school days. We are out to consultation for 32 in this case so any comments you have on the proposals should be made to the Chief Executive by Wednesday 11 December of this year. What then happens is Education Scotland will come and have a look at the proposals; they may meet with certain people in the school. They then report back to us by a date in early January, the 17th January, and we then prepare what's called a Consultation Report which will be prepared at least three weeks before it is considered by the Council. I think in this case it might be a bit more than three weeks because this isn't scheduled to go back to the Council until next April to the Education and Children's Services Committee on the 15th of the month and then to Comhairle on the 24th April. The purpose of tonight is to listen to what you have to say, answer any questions that we can answer, any questions that we can't answer we will try to take away and get you an answer before the end of the period and you should either write to Mr Malcolm Burr, the Chief Executive or there is an e-mail address schoolsconsultation@cne-siar.gov.uk, which is in the consultation document. I am happy to take any questions as to procedure Chair.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you Ms McDonald. Seeing as there are no questions on procedure, I will pass over to Mr Carpenter who will speak to the proposal document.

Peter Carpenter: Thank you Chair. The proposal document is clear and explains the proposed revision of the catchment area for the two schools. In Appendix 1 of the document, the boundaries are indicated but because it is quite a small map and a little difficult to see, the text in Section 8.1 clarifies how the proposed change would affect the different communities. In essence, the proposal will move the village of Tolsta Chaolais into the Breasclate catchment area. So the consultation here and also at Lionel and Westside School and Leverhulme, Sir E Scott in Harris has come about because there are a small number of cases where the catchment area of a school results in pupils travelling some distance from their home when there is a closer school available. So, we want to make sure that the proposed changes help those families but we also need to look ahead and ensure that in making any changes we don't adversely affect the arrangements for other current children or future pupils of either school. So this Consultation process is to help us understand that and we are also very keen to listen to your views and perhaps answer any questions as my colleagues have indicated. Thank you.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you Mr Carpenter. I am now going to open to questions and if you take the mike from Alex who is going round and please give your name so that we have a true record of the meeting. So whoever wishes to ask questions...

John Ferguson: I'm John Ferguson and I am currently the Chair of the Breasclate Parent Council and I think the first point I would like to make is perhaps about the way that the Carloway children have already been moved to Shawbost and that there was no consultation about boundaries prior to that happening. There was a mention in the introduction about a factor which has to do with communities, can't remember the wording of it, but certainly there is quite a strong feeling in the local communities here that it might have made more sense for Carloway children to have been linked up with Breasclate and there are historical and traditional links between the two communities, parish links and other links. So that would be the first point, I mean in a sense is this a consultation after the event? I know we are, for us in Breasclate, we are permanently nervous about the possibility that we'll at some point in the future go the same way that Carloway went and we are told repeatedly that the way to avoid that is to keep up the school roll. Our school roll is currently about 35, if the 15 Carloway children had come here, we would now have a school roll of about 50 which would be about the same as the Shawbost School roll. So, I wonder if, I guess it is too late to address that problem, but it is just the feeling that perhaps the consultation process is in some sense coming after the event?

Catriona Stewart: Thank you for your comments.

John Ferguson: Sorry, are we all to give our comments?

Catriona Stewart: No, no you're welcome to ask questions or make comments. We are here to listen to the comments that you are making.

John Ferguson: I felt that was a question, I thought maybe there would have been a response.

Catriona Stewart: Well I felt it was a statement, sorry I felt that was a statement that you were making.

John Ferguson: It was a bit long winded and rambling but I felt there was a question in there about possibly why there wasn't a consultation process. Sorry, in question form it would be why was there not a consultation process at the time that the Carloway children were moved to Shawbost and the other part of that question is does that make this consultation process a consultation after the event?

Lesley McDonald: I don't know if I can help, Chair, the process, the proposal a few years ago was that Carloway Primary School close and the children transfer to Shawbost School. I think the focus of the community quite understandably at that time was on keeping Carloway School open but parents would have been at liberty to say, if we are going to close we would prefer to go to Breascleite School and that is something that the Council would have taken into account at the time. That was the proposal that was put out for consultation, had people come back and said, we would rather go to Breascleite, I think we can understand why they didn't say that, then that is something that the Council could have looked at at that time. The purpose of this exercise is these major decisions having been made, you then look and think well are there things around about the edges of the catchment area that would mean that children would be more appropriately placed in another school and that is the purpose of this exercise.

John Ferguson: I don't know if, I wasn't aware that parents were given an option in Carloway about being able to come here. Was that an option that was, I mean were parents in Carloway aware of that option, was it something they were encouraged to consider? Or was it just something that was there in the background? I know the parents in Carloway were very pre-occupied with the attempt to keep the school open right up until the last day, they thought they might have succeeded, so I am sure they weren't in a position to look at alternatives. So, was that a very real possibility for them or was it just something that was there in the background on paper?

Lesley McDonald: I'll pass on to Mr Smithyman. I would stress this was not the proposal. The proposal was that Carloway School close and the children go to Shawbost School. There was nothing explicit in the documentation that referred to Breascleite School because the Comhairle's proposal was that the children go to Shawbost. All I was trying to say a few moments ago is that it is always open for parents to say, well actually, we have a better idea, we can think of a better way of doing things, and that is the kind of thing that would have been taken into account in the consultation report. But I think we both agree that the focus of the Carloway Parents was clearly on making the case to keep their school open.

Allan Smithyman: Just to reiterate that. The option in the consultation document for the closure of Carloway School, all the options were available, all the proposals rather were available for comment or suggestion by not just parents but any member of the community, or anybody in fact. I don't recall anybody suggesting that Carloway children should move to Breascleite but, as Ms McDonald said, perhaps the focus of the parents was that they wanted to keep Carloway School open but anybody else could have made a comment. As far as being an explicit option, I can give you one example in the past about when Eriskay Secondary School closed, the idea was then that the Eriskay Secondary School closed the option was that, or the proposal was that children should go to Daliburgh School. The parents asked if they could by-pass Daliburgh

School and go to Sgoil Lionacleit and that option was granted, so the opportunity was there to suggest that, nobody suggested that Carloway children should come to Breascleite at the time. So that consultation has gone and this consultation is about addressing some of the anomalies as a result of Carloway School closing and also, a historical placing request scenario with regards to parents from Tolsta Chaolais requesting their children to come here. So that is what we are here today to discuss but there was certainly the opportunity not just from parents but from other members of the community to say that Carloway Children should come here. But nobody suggested that to us.

John Ferguson: But there wasn't a meeting, there wasn't a process went on after Carloway School closed similar to the process that is going on tonight. There wasn't a meeting called at that stage to say to the Carloway people, ok sorry your school has closed here is an option, you can go to Shawbost or you can go to Breascleite. That didn't happen.

Lesley McDonald: No that did not happen, and just to be very legalistic about it, the proposal which went through the Court of Session was that Carloway School close and the children continue their education at Shawbost School. So that was the only proposal that the Comhairle had authority to implement at that time.

John Ferguson: Could I just hog it slightly a little bit longer and ask, could you remind us of the two criteria that you introduced the talk with, Chair. That there were two sets of criteria that were important in making these decisions. I think that one might have been distance and the other might have been traditional connections of the communities?

Lesley McDonald: I think I may have made a reference to that we would seek to reflect natural communities in the drawing of boundaries.

John Ferguson: Yes, I would just like to emphasise then that Carloway's natural connection is more with Breascleite than it is with Shawbost and that is a long tradition.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you. It will be noted and be recorded and it will appear in the transcript of the meeting. Thank you.

Mairi Maclean: I currently live in Tolsta Chaolais. My children attend Breascleite school. They were both placing requests. So I am quite happy that the boundary is going down as far as Tolsta Chaolais. I would be quite happy now that transport costs will be covered and I won't have to cough up for that. I think that there is only one other parent currently who has a pre-school child who was, I presume will be happy for the boundary to be accepted in Tolsta Chaolais as well. They currently attend the Croileagan here. I don't have anything else to add. So I am quite happy.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you.

Donna Morrison: What happens with kids that are in Carloway just now? Do they, or pre-school kids in Carloway just now, are they going to have the choice of where they go? Because it is going to affect the numbers here quite a bit because my wee boy starts school in two years time or a year and a half, but without Carloway there is only two of them in the class. With Carloway there will probably be four.

Peter Carpenter: Just to clarify and to make sure I understand. Are you asking about the placement for primary one and when the children get to that age?

Donna Morrison: Yes.

Peter Carpenter: At the moment Carloway is in the catchment area for Shawbost School so Carloway village would feed into Shawbost School. That would be the natural step.

Donna Morrison: And can parents request their kids to come to here, just the way Mairi did with her kids?

Peter Carpenter: Yes, they can make a request but they would be out of the catchment area.

Donna Morrison: Right ok.

Jackie Ferguson : It's not really a question it is a statement. Really, that is part of the issue that I have with this. That there is a lot of Carloway parents who would probably send their children here but, the option is now really taken away from them because they didn't have the choice. I know you are saying it was in the original consultation when you closed the school but really who was going to be saying, oh I'm really fighting for my school to stay open but I will send my children to Breascleate or Shawbost if we don't win. Those parents were fighting up to the very last day to keep their school open and it was not really on their minds. I feel it is a bit unfair. I mean possibly, I mean it is obviously legalistically correct but unfair that the Comhairle has taken that line and not then looked again at catchment areas after the school closed. Parents at Carloway that I know were involved in the fight, they were totally exhausted once the final verdict came through and they had lost their fight and the last thing that they would be wanting to do was to start another fight to go to a different school. They just threw in the towel at that point and let it go on. I think really, you should have looked again at catchment areas at that point.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you. Could you give us your name for the record.

Jackie Ferguson: Sorry it is Jackie Ferguson.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you very much. Well I think the purpose of this evening is to extend the catchment area for Breascleate School. That is the purpose of being here.

Cllr Donald Macleod: To carry on with what Donna said, with just now pre-school children in Carloway, when they come to school age and they are given the choice could they take their children to Tolsta Chaolais road end and get the transport that would be provided free from there to take them to Breascleate School or would they have to transport them themselves at their own costs all the way from Carloway to Breascleate?

Peter Carpenter: I will start with a bit of an answer to that and Iain who looks after the transport. Considering that the children are out of catchment strictly speaking, then they are not entitled to the transport. That's the case. We are looking at the contracts for the transport and there have been cases in the past where what you are suggesting has been possible and has happened. Depending on the bus and the number of seats, but that is depending on the bus that is going to be provided for the journey and the existing children already travelling. I will pass to Iain who will say something.

Iain Smith: Iain Smith Education Department. If the children want to go to Breascleate school from outwith the catchment area then they would have to pay for any transport that they got onto home to school travel. Also it would depend on if there was a space available on the buses that we have in place. I know the vehicle doing the Tolsta Chaolais area is actually quite a small vehicle so it might be limited spaces available anyway for them to pay onto. But the option is always there for them to put in a placing request and pay to use the bus.

Catriona Stewart: Thank you.

Catriona Stewart: Well if there are no more questions I will bring the meeting to a close. When the proposal document was produced a copy was sent to Education Scotland by the Comhairle. Education Scotland will also receive a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Comhairle from any person during the consultation period or, if Education Scotland agree, a summary of them. Education Scotland will further receive a summary of any oral representations made to the Comhairle at the public meeting that is being

held and as available or so far as otherwise practical, a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal not later than 17 January 2014 after the Comhairle has sent them all representations and documents as I have mentioned. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the school and I believe they actually have done so, but I could be incorrect there, and make such reasonable enquiries of such people there as they consider appropriate and may make such reasonable enquiries of such other people as they consider appropriate.

The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received and oral representations made to it by any person at the public meeting. It will then prepare a consultation report. This report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be advertised in local newspapers. It will also be available on the Comhairle website and from Comhairle offices as well as the affected schools free of charge. Anyone who has made written representations during the consultation period will also be informed about the Report. The Report will include a record of the total number of written representations made during the consultation period, a summary of the written representations, a summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting, the authority's response to the Education Scotland Report as well as any other written or oral representations it has received together with a copy of the Education Scotland Report and any other relevant information including details of any alleged inaccuracies and how these have been handled. The Report will also contain a statement explaining how it complied with the requirement to review the proposal in light of the Education Scotland Report and representations both written and oral that it received.

The consultation report will be published at least three weeks prior to the Comhairle making a decision. This consultation report together with any other relevant documentation will be considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee on 15 April 2014 which will make a recommendation. This recommendation will then be subject to the approval of the Comhairle on 24 April 2014.

The date that is important for you to remember is that the consultation period will run until 5pm on Wednesday 11 December 2013 and representations should be made as Ms McDonald said earlier to Mr Burr, the Chief Executive at the Comhairle Offices on Sandwick Road or in electronic form at the address that is within the document but I think it is schoolsconsultation@cne-siar.gov.uk. Thank you very much for your attendance at this evening's meeting. Thank you everyone.