

NOTE OF PUBLIC MEETING IN BRAGAR SCHOOL – THURSDAY 10 JUNE 2010 AT 7.30

Present

Mrs Catriona Stewart, Chairman

Mrs Morag Munro

Miss Joan Mackinnon

Mr Robert Emmott

Miss Lesley McDonald

25 parents and members of the public

4 local councillors - Agnes Rennie, Kenny Murray, John Mackay, Iain Morrison

In attendance

Mr Doug Marr of HMIE

Cllr Catriona Stewart Good evening everybody and welcome to this consultation meeting. My name is Catriona Stewart I am Vice Chair of Education and Children's Services and with me on my left I have Mrs Morag Munro who is Chair of Education and Children's Services Committee. Next to her is Ms Lesley McDonald who is the Head of Executive Office and beside her Mr Robert Emmott who is the Director of Finance and Corporate Services. To my right is Mrs Joan Mackinnon, Director of Education and Children's Services, next to her is Mr Bernard Chisholm who is Head of Education and Resources. Most importantly before we start proceedings this evening could you switch off your mobile phones - not on silent or on meeting please but actually switch them off - because it interferes with the tape. This meeting is being taped and a transcript will be available in about five days time for anybody who wishes but that will be covered in procedure.

Martin here will go round with the microphone so before you actually speak can you wait until he reaches you with the microphone and when you get the microphone if you speak clearly and give your name before you start. Thank you. Sitting at the front of the hall is Mr Doug Marr who is here representing the Inspectorate. So it's very easy in a community to know everybody so it's important so it's important that you know that this is Mr Marr. In August 2007 the Comhairle decided to undertake a review of education provision throughout the Western Isles. Since that time a number of informal conversations have been held with communities and as a result the Comhairle agreed to go to statutory consultation on the proposed closure and amalgamation of a number of schools. This meeting is part of the formal consultation process for Bragar School and your opportunity to ask questions and make comments. The aim of the authority is to provide our children with the best educational experience in outcomes, modern learning environments suitable for the 21st century needs within the resources available to us. The Comhairle as you all know are facing serious challenges. School rolls have fallen to 3,681 from 6,246 in 30 years and in the last five years alone the pupil roll has fallen by over 300. As education is resourced according to pupil numbers funding has inevitably decreased. We have 38 buildings, 18 of which are in poor condition. General tightening financial constraints dictate our finances like everyone else and there are pressures on other Council services and budgets such as community care, roads and transport and waste and we have the implementation of curriculum for excellence which is starting in August of this year. We are in the process of building 6 new schools which will mean that 44% of our pupils will be educated in new efficient learning environments in which to deliver the new curriculum. Our aim in line with the Scottish Government Schools Estates 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 Ms Lesley McDonald who will go over procedure. Thank you Lesley.

Lesley McDonald Can you hear me? Now does everyone have a copy of the consultation document because I have brought a good few spares if anyone would like one? My able assistant the Director of Finance would be delighted to circulate them.

Joan Mackinnon Your attractive assistant; I think you are supposed to say.

Lesley McDonald Thank you Chair and that's my first mistake of the evening. I think we were used under the old legislation to referring to the consultation documents and of course this isn't a consultation document in terms of the new legislation which is the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act of 2010 popularly known as the Rural Schools Legislation. Prior to this but not part of the Act but, notwithstanding that good practise according to Government, a conversation was held which does not form part of the formal process. The outcomes of that conversation were reported to the Council and the Council has determined to go to this stage to go to the proposal document stage and proceed to what's called Statutory Consultation. What then happens is we have to be out to consultation for at least 30 school days and it's slightly in excess of 30 school days from the 13 May to 30 June which is the close of the consultation.

At the end of that period of time a transcript of this meeting, a copy of every representation we receive and a summary of those representations if HMIE request it are sent to her Majesty's inspectors and they then have until the 20 August to prepare their report. In doing so they can speak to anyone they like, they can visit the school. When the council receives that it then has a duty to produce what's called a consultation document which takes into account any points made by HMIE and also responds to issues raised both in the transcript of the meeting and also in the representations received themselves. That document must be published at least 3 weeks and made widely available free of charge naturally at least 3 weeks before the Council make any decision. The decision would be on the basis of that report. A recommendation from the Education and Children's Services Committee which meets the last week of October to the Council on the 4th of November. There is then a 6 week period if the Council were to decide that it was appropriate to close Bragar School for ministerial call in and during the first 3 weeks of that period ministers may well, representations may be made to ministers during the first 3 weeks of that period.

As I mentioned earlier, well I didn't mention earlier, this is a rural school in terms of the legislation. The document at paragraph 2.10 refers to the procedure for correction and when the Director speaks I think that will be one of the first things she will be doing is actually correcting the definition. Bragar is not a rural accessible school as stated in the document - the definition of it is slightly different that does not impact on it's treatment in the proposal document or its treatment in terms of the law but that is not the correct category for statistical returns in respect of the school but Ms Mackinnon will address that.

I mentioned the transcript, I will be taking some notes but they are very much a back up. We hope to have a verbatim transcript of the meeting and to that end I would be really grateful if when Martin goes round with the microphone you could give your name when speaking and if there is a little gap in your speaking if you have a couple of questions to ask perhaps if you could even give your name twice because we now have the experience of people in the office who haven't been here transcribing the transcripts at it's, you know, was that the same lady that spoke 40 minutes ago, so it would be really useful for that purpose.

The main purpose in being here tonight is to record your points of view and critically to answer any questions that you may have. If we do not have an answer tonight we will tell you that and we will give you an undertaking to come back to a contact of your choice. In other schools its been the parent council with the responses to those questions which we undertake to do within

approximately a week and I think my penultimate point would be, it's very very important that we capture what you have to say, that we have all of your representations. We have a system in the office that we will acknowledge a representation within 3 working days, I think, as the Chair said my name's Lesley McDonald, if you haven't received an acknowledgement within say 4 working days please call me, chase me up and I will find out has happened to it to make sure that your representation is taken into account.

And finally, finally you can make representations in two ways, by email to the specific address in the proposal document - that's schools consultation at the Comhairle web address or by writing to Malcolm Burr, the Chief Executive. In both cases your representation should be submitted by 5pm on 30 June which I think is a Wednesday. I am happy to take any questions Chairman.

Cllr Catirona Stewart Thank you very much. My mobile phones hadn't been switched off so but can we all just check that we do have them switched off, I had forgotten I had left them behind me. So I will now hand over to the Director who will speak to the document.

Joan Mackinnon Thank you very much Chair. Good evening everybody, we are here tonight because of the main issues which Councillor Stewart has outlined for us in her opening remarks. The facts start as she said school rolls have been falling over the last 30 years. However, here at Bragar we do have a different picture because over the last 8 years we have seen the roll rising from 24 in 2003 to 35 at the beginning of this session and I think it might be settled at 33 at the point of time that we are at now. So rightly so you're probably saying well why are you in Bragar; well, as Councillor Stewart said, we do have more schools that we need and this is at a time when the Government has published a strategy which sets out its aspirations for schools in Scotland. Building better schools, investing in Scotland's future and, as Councillor Stewart also said, we are embarking on a programme that will see in two years time five new schools built in the Western Isles and within three years we hope that we will actually have six new schools which will mean that 44% of our pupils will be educated in Condition A, in very good buildings. Now the strategy has an aspiration that sets its target that well in excess of 90% of pupils should be educated in Condition A or Condition B Schools. Now we feel that we can do this only if we reduce the footprint within which we teach. Here we have Sgoil Shiabost about three miles away with spare capacity and the document says that maintaining too many surplus or underused areas is wasteful and dilutes the productive deployment of resources and at a time when we are having to be very careful and prudent with our resources we believe that if we had less schools that we could improve all of them with new heating systems that would be more eco friendly with more flexible learning spaces that would be more conducive to delivering the curriculum for the 21st century. We think that our young people would be educated in the best possible way and that we would be achieving the Education and Childrens' Services Committee motto which is "Quality Education in Quality Buildings".

We are at a very exciting time in Scottish Education in terms of the implementation of the new curriculum. Teachers and pupils at Bragar school have been engaging with the outcomes and experiences of the Curriculum for Excellence since they were first published and this has also been happening at Sgoil Shiabost. However, we believe that a larger staff, the two schools go together you have a larger staff and larger peer groupings for young people will bring advantages and we can look at that in the proposal document.

Maybe I can just draw your attention to the proposal document now and just outline for you that the first sections - you will I'm sure be very well aware that we are actually undertaking eleven of these consultations at the moment and each consultation has its own proposal document and the first part of these documents really are the same. They set out the procedure, they set out the

Comhairle's aspirations, the rationale behind where we are going and the key factors that have been the drivers for looking at the schools estate and then when we reach section 8 we reach the educational benefit statement. Now this is the bit that particularly relates to Bragar School in terms of our proposed amalgamation into Shawbost. I want to make it absolutely clear that this is not to say that the educational benefits that we've stated here that are relevant to the move to Shawbost don't to some degree and maybe, you know completely in some respects, are matched here because we actually believe that there are many educational benefits attached to Bragar School and I can personally say that I have had a long relationship with Bragar School and with its staff over many years and we are very delighted with the very good HMI report that the school has recently achieved. However in the terms of the legislation as Ms MacDonald has already laid out it is incumbent on us to have an educational benefit statement so we have looked at things like the learning environment, now we do know that Shawbost School is a much newer school for example than this one is and therefore we believe that the learning environment both outside the school in terms of the play areas and also within the school just the way the building is laid out has advantages and so on, so its not to say that there aren't advantages to being in Bragar School.

That is not what we are saying but just focusing on if the school were to amalgamate these would be advantages that we would see would be not lost to pupils and in some cases there would be some gains, so if I could just draw your attention to the summary that we have in 8.14 where really this is the focus of it. We believe that there would be great increased opportunities for pupils. We believe that there is greater flexibility in grouping children for learning and teaching, if you've got more children you have a greater peer group and therefore greater flexibility in grouping. Greater flexibility in the deployment of staff, if you have more staff you have more options and a larger staff will offer a wider range of expertise, more opportunities for team teaching, more opportunities for peer observation for reflective practice talking about your practice and sharing your thoughts especially as we come to fully develop the Curriculum for Excellence and more management support to promote school improvement although I have to say that school improvement here has been very very good over the last couple of years.

Section 9 is the Section that Ms MacDonald referred to in the first instance where considerations of factors affecting rural schools have to be dealt with in particular if your school is designated as a rural school and this is where I want to point out a correction if you like. In the first sentence there we have Bragar School as an accessible rural school. There are several definitions of rural schools and there's urban rural, accessible rural, remote rural and very remote rural and its all to do with centres of population and how far you are from a centre of population that is 10,000 or more so actually every school within the Western Isles because we're not within a short distance of a population centre that is 10,000. Every single school in the Western Isles is very remote rural but it does not affect the way that you deal with that within the consultation proposal document. You have to look at things like viable alternatives to closure, the likely effects on the local community and the likely effects caused by distance travelling arrangements and then we have a section at 10 which are just other factors that we have looked at, pupil costs and staffing and a short concluding paragraph. I don't think I will say much more, you will have read it yourselves. We are keen to hear what you have to say and happy to try and answer any questions that you may have and if we aren't able to do that tonight very happy to take your questions and try and get answers back to you as quickly as possible so that if you require that for your response which has to be in before the 30 June we will try and turn that around as soon as we can. Over to yourselves now.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you very much Director. I'll now open the floor to questions so if you will just wait. If you would put your hands up and Martin will come to you with the mike. This gentleman here. Remember to give your name.

Iain Hunter Not used to these things. My name is Iain Hunter. Now this is the consultation paper is a legal document, is it? Or is it part of the legal documentation for the supposed closure of the school? Well I find it very strange that Bragar School has a cost of £27,000 over £27,000 pounds for Gaelic teaching costs when it doesn't have it. Now if this is supposed to be your idea of a joke it's not very funny. Now this paper has already got a mistake in it, what else is there? Now the school up in Shawbost I have been hearing a lot of the people saying that the area or the class sizes of the school is too small. Now is the Council just gonna close this school, throw the kids up there and afterwards suddenly declare its too small? It's too late then. You've got all the kids there. Now what guidelines were used to find out if Shawbost School was feasible to house Bragar and Carloway? Does anybody know what guidelines and what year was the guidelines made?

Joan Mackinnon Every classroom has got a capacity and we know the capacity of all the rooms and we know the capacity of Shawbost School and we know that Shawbost School can accommodate the pupils in Bragar School.

Iain Hunter Yeah but what guidelines did you use? Is that modern day guidelines or an old guideline.

Joan Mackinnon No, well the most recent ones there are. Yes they are modern day guidelines.

Iain Hunter What year?

Joan Mackinnon We will get the year to you.

Iain Hunter Yes I would like to find out because things have changed. I saw a guideline for measurements of a classroom. It was 1975 and if you have already made a mistake on this paper already....

Joan Mackinnon Can you just clarify what mistake you are referring to?

Iain Hunter Well the 27,000.

Robert Emmott Will I answer that now? It's correct that some of the costs are against Gaelic teaching. The reason that's there is that's not a teaching cost. That's the allocation of a shared cost for non teaching time which is recorded against Gaelic because it's part funded by Gaelic grant. It's not intended to be misleading and I'm happy to clarify that. I need to be careful what I say so we are not identifying individual teachers but its not a teaching cost. We know there isn't a Gaelic function here. It's a share of costs which are coded against Gaelic because of the way they were historically funded.

Iain Hunter Yes, but see the thing is if you have a look at the other schools, say like Shawbost, say like the secondary school they are closing that. That doesn't have any. The papers are exactly the same, it's worded the same. Nobody has even decided to change it. Make it more user friendly to the parents and the Gaelic teaching there is zero and then the fact that say like printing paper. Now this school seems to have more paper being used for copying than Shawbost secondary school which has probably got more pupils. Now when you cross reference that how can that be? This is a primary school, it's got less pupils and its using more paper and then you've got a secondary school which has got higher education and they're using less paper. How can that be? See the thing is we are cross referencing all this and this is a piece of paper that is supposed to have been checked and done.

Robert Emmott I don't know the details of why the allocation between the schools are different. I'm happy to find that information and get back to you. Central printing and copying is a share of education costs for copying centrally I believe. I am happy to provide the breakdown of the figures. I don't have the Shawbost figures with me unfortunately but I'm happy to have a look and explain why that's different if that's the case.

Joan Mackinnon I can also confirm that the reason there isn't a Gaelic cost at Shawbost is because there's no – for Shawbost Secondary school there is no teaching cost coming out of the funding stream that Mr Emmott has referred to.

Iain Hunter Well this school hasn't got any Gaelic so....

Joan Mackinnon It's not to do with the delivery of Gaelic here. As the Director of Finance said it's to do with a shared cost.

Iain Hunter Why is it in the closure?

Joan Mackinnon Because it's a shared cost that this school has.

Iain Hunter And it doesn't have Gaelic in it.

Joan Mackinnon Gaelic teaching cost there is misleading that its just the way that accounting is done.

Iain Hunter This is supposed to be a paper to allow people to see what's going on and you're now saying that its misleading.

Joan Mackinnon Well no, sorry well I accept that I used the wrong word there.

Iain Hunter Well I don't like it at all.

Christina Macinnes Whether deliberate or otherwise there's a lack of transparency in the information being presented by the Comhairle in their review. Another error in that section about the cost per pupil is that you have divided the number of pupils by 33. At the beginning of the session we had 35 pupils. Now those pupils who have left, the two are brother and sister. They have left this year. In 2010. These figures I believe should be based on what was sent in the statistical return to the Scottish Office in September which actually gives several hundred pounds of a difference when you do divide it. Two pupils might not seem a lot in a small school, two pupils can be a lot.

Another area where the figures are lacking is in the area of the Disability Discrimination Act. We have not been given any information as to how our school fails to comply. We have a good idea with some things that it may be but there have been no costings given. My younger brother has cerebral palsy. When we are on the ferry he cannot get a straw to drink his juice, to drink his drink. The ferry is breaching the Disability Discrimination Act. It would not cost much for them to come up to speed. Do you get my point? You know we don't really know how much this would cost and if these costs would be exorbitant. Another point I would like to make is that, where am I sorry, the educational benefits referred to throughout the document have not clearly been defined or established nor has any criteria for assessing the likely effects of the proposal and I feel that this compromise is not just the consultation proceed but the criteria used for decision making.

In any event the educational benefits referred to are a secondary consideration. The main reason for this closure is because of your ambitious school building projects elsewhere. These educational benefits focus on a presumed rather than proven advantage of a larger establishment and it would have been especially useful to us as parents for these to have been evidenced based and

not merely speculative.

Another comment I'd like to make is just that there are a few people who couldn't be with us tonight who, quite a few people I should add who were at the previous meeting. Absolutely no mention of the previous meeting is given in this review. It was a very well attended meeting with very good points raised, yet nothing was mentioned. No mention of the unanimous support for the school and yet to manage to say that the effects of the closure of Bragar School in this community would be virtually nil.

- Cllr Catriona Stewart I have to say that a Report of the conversation that took place was actually presented to Education and Children's Services Committee and I can say that the rationalisation that we are embarking on is not as a result of the WISP project.
- Christina MacInnes Sorry
- Cllr Catriona Stewart You said that we were doing this because of our ambitious building project. It's the Western Isles Schools Project.
- Christina MacInnes No sorry I was not familiar with the jargon
- Cllr Catriona Stewart That's fine. I can tell you that it does not impact on the rationalisation programme that the Comhairle unanimously agreed to undertake, so I will pass onto the Director and Bernard. If you just wait for the answers and the mike will come to you. Thank you.
- Joan Mackinnon Christina do you mind. I would just quite like to respond to two little things. One is that the conversations were not part of the formal consultation. This is a formal process and the conversation was not part of it. It was what was led to a report coming before Committee that led the Comhairle to decide to formally consult.
- Christina MacInnes Why did we have the conversations then? Was it just to make the community run out of steam?
- Joan Mackinnon No not at all.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart It was to involve all the Communities. We embarked... we decided that we would embark on these conversations informally before the Committee or the Comhairle decided to go to the next phase should it so wished.
- Christina MacInnes But what was the purpose of them if they have not been referred to?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart It was to inform people of the difficulties the Comhairle were facing.
- Christina MacInnes So why did we have the workshops?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart To get your comments and that's what we did and that was reported back to Committee.
- Christina MacInnes But what did you do with our comments?
- Joan Mackinnon They're not part of this Christina. They were reported back to.... there was a report that went to the Comhairle in April and a summary of all of the conversations was there. If you would like a copy of the report, absolutely, your welcome to it.
- Christina MacInnes I think that the point I'm just trying to make is that the community. Am I speaking for most people or am I you know, that the community feel a little bit cheated. We went to the effort to come out, you know we were full of passion and yet nothing has been recorded.

Joan Mackinnon

Yes it has and I said we will send you a copy.

Christina Macinnes

We cannot see how our views have been taken into account and I think again this contributes to the feeling that this is just a foregone conclusion, were going through the motions and that our views really don't matter. What we want is for you to listen to what we want. If you had come and said look we've got a problem, you know what do you want? We actually don't mind being part of the 10% that isn't being educated in a Category A or B building. This building is 100 years old or whatever. It doesn't make it a bad building. When people go to buy a house more often than not they want a period home. This is wonderful. We love it, the children love it. The outdoor space is superior in many ways. You know please don't look at us and just think oh Bragar, we can close them. They are three miles away from Shawbost. There is nothing left in Bragar. I said to the HMI Inspector Mr Marr yesterday. He asked what there was in Bragar and I said a skip. Now that is all we have. You closed, well you didn't. Our post office closed after one of the best attended meetings out of all the community consultations on post offices. It got closed. We have no, the what was it the day centre was recently closed and moved up to Shawbost, not to Shawbost sorry to Carloway. The playgroup closed a number of years ago. There is nothing in Bragar. The school is the pulse that runs through Bragar and Arnol, - an ancient group of villages that have been closely connected for hundred and thousands of years. It doesn't matter how many out-of-school lets they are; Bragar school is something bigger than that in this community. It's the fact there is education here. It's something we are so proud of and we really really want to keep.

Bernard Chisholm

I just wanted to maybe respond to a couple of the points there. In terms of listening first, I do recognise people have a real concern whenever we have consultations for closure. But the fact is that legal requirements for us are on these types of consultations, not for the Conversations etc. With the decision that the Council made for officers and others to take forward was actually to do more than just what was legally required of us. The second point to that that I would make is listening. Listening obviously does not always mean that what we hear. The only way we demonstrate we listen is by doing what we hear. We expect that the listening process is a two way one and in that process out of it comes something that meets the needs of the area and right now we've heard from Miss McDonald the process that we have to go through. In many ways this is the start of that process. The consultation meeting and its report will be in parallel to one by HMIe. There will be further reports to committee.

Councillors are not in a position of.....well they have to speak to that but I can't think they are in a position to make a decision now. They'll have to consider all of the information including when we write the consultation report, a report on all of the elements that we hear, the recording of this meeting, the outcomes also of the Conversations which have already been presented but all of that information. All of the information, including transcript, reports, consultations with parents, pupils, staff, others will all be available (people will have access) the Government will then have the opportunity on the back of all of that so both the listening and the coming to a decision is a process which will take some time.

In relation to transparency, if we are guilty of anything, it's recording under every heading but here is something that we all need to understand in the Western Isles, right now in 2010 with 38 schools we could deliver education if we were doing it on the same basis as many other authorities in many fewer. The way we manage to deliver it with the very, the better staff to pupil ratios the more rural schools is that every budget heading and grant that we get coming in we use to maximise what we deliver in these rural schools. The situation we are at at the moment is that these schools, not through our choosing but through health and safety and others, DDA and others, require investment as does the resources of ICT as does the resources of teachers. You've asked in relation to the DDA, we are happy to make available the access assessment, DDA etc.

These get done not by the staff of the school or the staff of the department but they are done independently against standards.

The other comment I just want to make is that you did mention that you appreciated that it wasn't so much in the EBS but it was being driven by finance. What I would want to say is the EBS statement in terms of what have we got to deliver as.....okay well the education benefit statement sorry that had been previously referenced, when we are talking about that, as the Director mentioned, we do believe that as we move forward in the modern world our young people do require enhanced resources of which in terms of technology etc. I am very confident to say the access to technology the interactive whiteboard, the laptops etc. the work for teachers with the kids is outstripping, at the moment, both the speed at which the systems worked and the number of units that we can deliver. In terms of our classes, in many of our schools we are dealing with and remember we are doing a review from the But to Barra, we have groupings that have very small numbers in some of our composite classes with a very broad range of ages which provide genuine challenges in the interactive learning that can take place with young people. In relation to many of the other areas, making the extra curricular, the class groupings, the gaelic medium education not available in every school.

The situation is in that trying to deliver the best in all of that of course finance does become an issue. The Council has also prioritised education and the other major service on that services side is Social Work and there are increasing demands on both so we are in a position in this consultation to have gone further than the consultation requires but to enter a process which is going to take some considerable time and the decision on it or, sorry, the final consultation document which will go to Council with recommendations will be further to all of these meetings.

So I hope that answers some of it but the one thing we know in the Department is that every community that we are talking with we are very proud as a Department of the performance of all our schools. It is no idle boast that we meet well with the national comparator authorities that we are matched against we are very very positive in the fact that there is an analysis that HMI and the government do on quintile analysis which shows our young people. We have the lowest percentage of young people with additional support needs in the bottom 20%. We are very proud of all of these things. We are not suggesting that rural schools become city schools, we are suggesting that they remain in rural areas but that we pool resources together to make sure we can maintain those levels and standards and we can provide something that can last with a reasonable level of consistency for the next 20 years. Thank you.

Robert Emmott

I think just with a few comments on the finance side because the context I think is important and the scale is important. I accept entirely that the pupil costs will change as the pupil numbers change and it's not necessarily helpful just to look at the pupil cost. I think what's relevant to the authority to look at alongside the educational benefits if we make this change will it improve or make the position worse. Now the proposals which the Council's consulting on in two elements which is around Bragar and Carloway going into Shawbost potentially saves something around £340,000 in terms of the contribution it would make back. That's the material.....sorry the saving between the two schools going to Shawbost is round about £340,000 now that's a material consideration when you consider that we are, as I am sure you are all aware, going into a period of retrenchment in public finances. It's about, probably about a tenth of the savings the Council have to make in the next financial year and the year after that and we are in a difficult time so that's not the only argument, finance can only be one part of the process and that has to be weighed up against the educational advantage that I'm not clearly qualified to comment on but it is the distinction that I would draw is we are not talking about a very small sum of money if we make changes, we are talking about quite a considerable sum of money and it has to

be.....we can't entirely ignore it, it has to be considered.

I would argue that has to be looked at alongside the educational argument which the Director of Education and Mr Chisholm talked about. Hopefully that gives a bit of a.....

Blank (female) Just on that note you mentioned WISP, the Western Isles Schools Project, do you have a figure for what the.....how much it's going to cost.

Robert Emmott Capital construction.....do you mean the whole project?

Blank (female) The whole thing.

Robert Emmott The capital construction is, I'm not sure where we are in the process, round about £60million to actually build the schools.

Blank (female) Yeah, we are not going very far in helping you build it.

Joan Mackinnon The Scottish Government are funding the Western Isles Schools Project and the Comhairle have to find a proportion of that, but that funding has been awarded and has been awarded since 2004. So, in order to find the affordability gap, the Comhairle put part of its own capital programme towards it so that we have the money in place for the Western Isles Schools. We are able to build the six schools we are going to build within the envelope that we have and that is without reference to any of the conversations or the consultations we are having at the moment. We don't need any of the savings from the proposed school closures to finance the schools project. We already have the funding in place and a huge bulk of it came from Scottish Government.

Cathryn Graham I'd like to ask the question under 8.1 in your consultation document. It listed down here that the capacity in Bragar is 61 pupils currently. And we are 55% full. I just want to clarify I am assuming we have 25 in a room, this class room, the maximum and 18 in both rooms 2 and 3. Would that be right?

Joan Mackinnon Sorry could you just say that again?

Cathryn Graham It says that 61 is the maximum capacity for Bragar so I am assuming that's 25 in room 1, this room, a maximum and a maximum of 18 in room 2 and 3. Is that where you get the 61 from?

Joan Mackinnon Well the 61 didn't come from looking at how many are in each of the rooms that's a statistic that we have that's been calculated by folk who look after the estate.

Cathryn Graham But we've only got.....my problem is we only have 2 class rooms in Bragar School because room 3 is now being used as the school office which you probably know, so we only have 2 class rooms and as the maximum number in a composite class is 25 that would make a maximum of 50 would it not, not 61.

Joan Mackinnon You have 3 class rooms in Bragar School and if Bragar School needed to use the 3 class rooms then that's what we would use.

Cathryn Graham So where would the school office go then?

Joan Mackinnon Well the School office was up the stairs behind me here at one time and I suppose that's where it would still be if you required the classrooms.

Cathryn Graham But now we have a Head Teacher up there. We didn't have a separate Head Teacher before.

Joan Mackinnon The Head Teacher very often has to use the same room as the school office in many of our schools.

Cathryn Graham So you think we could fit 61 pupils in here?

Joan Mackinnon Yes, with 3 class rooms, absolutely.

Cathryn Graham Okay, because I would have said that with our.....we were more at 70% rather than 55 % full. If you know that I mean it makes a big difference. Currently we have only 2 rooms in operation.

Bernard Chisholm We have a number of schools where the rolls have fallen like that and we have grown into the other spaces that were formally classrooms. You could calculate on that basis but what we are required to do in terms of our returns and all these national requirements is to look at all actually the teaching spaces that do exist. Now you are right to say that many of our schools don't have adequate facilities and one of the issues that we are challenged with is how do we provide adequate facilities within all our schools. Now the way that we have come to deal with that now is to look at schools where there is capacity to bring things together to provide those effectively, efficiently and at the same time maintain the educational standards.

Cathryn Graham I would say that we do have adequate facilities here. We are happy with the facilities, we are happy with our two rooms but we're not 55% full, we're fuller than that.

Bernard Chisholm We can only take your comment in relation to the standards we've got

Cathryn Graham Based on that it also says in that same paragraph that Shawbost has got room for 104 pupils, so how many classrooms are there in Shawbost Primary School.

Joan Mackinnon Shawbost Primary School has got 4 primary classrooms.

Cathryn Graham So how can you fit 104 pupils then?

Joan Mackinnon 25 is a composite class

Cathryn Graham but there is a 104, so that would have to be at least five rooms

Joan Mackinnon There may be very well 5 classrooms, I mean..... Can I just say that the footprint of the school is available to the school to manage as it sees fit and if they had more than 100 pupils in the primary school they could manage the space that they have available to them by creating a fifth classroom. Currently they only use 3 classrooms for the primary school.

Christina MacInnes I apologise for speaking again so soon but just em, I think when children are transferred from one school to the other they should be transferred to schools, you know they shouldn't be going, it shouldn't be a backward step so if they, you know, if you had 2 Gaelic medium classes and however many English medium class if they were having to be pushed into rooms in the primary area, one of the classrooms that I think is being mentioned has no exterior windows, just maybe a skylight kind of window. It's also the computer room, the GP room, am I right? Yes and I would say that coming from this light airy classroom I would not be happy for my child to go to that class. I would if my child was in the Gaelic medium in Shawbost because it means they can have another teacher. You know I am making that point clear. I think it should be used in that regard, but we have space here, we have lovely light classrooms here and I think that would be a backward step and I also want to know, this is us talking about something that would happen if Shawbost School were called in, but the secondary school were called in by the Scottish Government and was given a reprieve but Bragar and Carloway weren't, what then for Bragar and Carloway? Would you still want to put us in to Shawbost School

Joan Mackinnon I think if that situation arose we would probably review the situation

Christine MacInnes You would

Joan Mackinnon Yes we would but we believe that if that the school would still be able to cope with the pupils that would be in the school then that we would review the situation.

Christine MacInnes I am happy to hear that you would review the situation, thank you.

George Graham Good evening to everybody. This is a question for the gentleman at the end of the table there. You made a comment there of one tenth of the saving of closure Bragar and Carloway would come to the sum of £340,000, is that correct?

Robert Emmott No. No sorry that's not what I meant. The saving from closing Carloway and Bragar would be around about £340,000. The savings the Council is faced with finding next year is £5m, of which there's round about £3.5m still to identify, so that's where my 10% came in.

George Graham Sure, that's okay but that sum that you are talking about, that £340,000, would you consider that to be a considerable sum of money?

Robert Emmott I think it's a material sum of money yes

George Graham Worth saving? Sorry to put you on the spot here but.....

Robert Emmott I think what I would say is that if you were talking of savings of £10,000/£15,000 from closing the school it wouldn't be a material factor. Once you get to £340,000 I think it is a material factor and it has to be considered along side the other educational and community aspects of the proposal.

George Graham Okay can I just add to that now. In the last two years you've spent in excess of £500,000 on the Nicolson and it's a Category C that's about to be replaced. That's a considerable sum of money.

Cllr Catriona Stewart There will be a brand new Nicolson Institute opening in August 2012. A brand new school.

George Graham You've just spent, just over half a million on a school that's going to be demolished.

Robert Emmott I am not disputing that..

George Graham You can't because I've got it here

Robert Emmott Can I maybe just comment though? The Nicolson Institute is a school which serves, I can't remember what the percentage is, certainly all the children in Lewis end up in that school eventually. There are works necessary to all of our schools which have to be done to keep them in a safe and operating condition. We spend approaching £1m I think a year on maintaining all of our schools and even those that are scheduled to close as part of the Schools Project we still have to maintain them and address health and safety matters as we go along, and I think it is regrettable, no one wants to be spending money on something that is going to be discontinued, but you know where there is, whether health and safety issues, whether important repairs to be done, we still believe it has to be done.

George Graham Okay that's fine. Just another question there, can anyone tell me how much money has been spent on Bragar School, even in the last ten years? Can anyone shed any light.

Robert Emmott I can't tell you here tonight but I can find out for you, it's not a problem

George Graham Because I couldn't find it anywhere.

Robert Emmott I can certainly find out what all of the revenue and capital expenditure is.

George Graham Capital expenditure on Bragar School

Robert Emmott Absolutely fine.

Cllr Catriona Stewart You don't want the revenue, just capital

George Graham Yeah, so I mean half a million pounds on the Nicolson Institute, that's money well spent, I would have said. Personally speaking and it's just gonna be just down to rubble.

Cllr Catriona Stewart We will get the figures you want back to you as soon as we can Mr Graham on the capital programme that you're wanting.

George Graham Sure because I couldn't honestly access it anywhere.

Cllr Catriona Stewart That's fine, the Director has undertaken to get that to you as soon as possible.

George Graham So I mean if you consider £340,000(laughter..... inaudible)

Unknown Female Right, sorry you just said there when George asked you the question that you had spent the £500,000 on the Nicolson because you had to for health and safety reasons, is that right. You had to spend the money, yes?

Robert Emmott I don't have the details of exactly what has been spent on but I know we will have continued to spend money at the Nicolson on disability access, maybe Mr Chisholm knows more about the detail of what it's been spent on

Unknown Female My question that would be then in the same timeframe, Daliburgh School was supposed to get access ramps and window replaced and things but it was put on hold until you had decided what you are doing with the primary school and things, so they still haven't got any and now it's on hold till they get their new school, so why did the Nicolson get it spent on it but Daliburgh not get is spent there.

Robert Emmott Mr Chisholm more familiar with the detail

Bernard Chisholm In order to give the detail of the spend on the capital we would have to come back but the response I would want to make to you on that, although there is a lot of our schools, including the Nicolson, I don't think there's any of our pupils going to the Nicolson would be able to describe it currently as a building that is fit for the education purposes as a building. It's certainly needs the budget that is going towards it. We have a lot of our schools that are in that condition and the idea that old is beautiful isn't always working for us best in terms of providing the education, the reality of the Nicolson as we go on is that the teaching areas, we've had to install security. We have installed teaching areas, we've installed teaching provision and that has been necessary, so very happy to show the capital spend but that capital spend or capital spends like that have also taken place in other schools that have required it. The issue for us with 38 we can't continue to service the demands that education make for appropriate learning and teaching environments for adaptations under disability for physical construction and repairs and maintenance.

George Graham It's George Graham again. Have you considered maybe then that you don't need to build six new schools? Honestly that's a serious question. Have you considered that?

Cllr Morag Munro That was considered over a long period of time and some of the schools that we are going to build have been waiting. Iain Morrison will tell you how long they have been waiting for a school, 15 years, that's what he keeps telling me. Sir E Scott in Tarbert as well has been waiting for the past 15 years as well. The Nicolson Institute has been a series of buildings which are apart, which are haphazard and for the one senior secondary school serving the whole of Lewis, I think our pupils and our children deserve better, so there has been serious considerations given and these have been on a programme for a long time but because of the way that funding is done now we are able to do them all in the one go which is fantastic, it is normally ten to fifteen years for each school and now we are managing to do them all together with is fantastic for us, and they were all needed I assure you.

George Graham Well its only this Comhairle that's ever going to build six schools in two years.

Bernard Chisholm Could I also say on that, as was mentioned before

Morag Munro I would have thought that was a good thing rather than a bad thing. Are you saying that it's a bad thing?

George Graham From one point yes, because you're putting all your money into basically one big project and who knows what you are going to come out with at the end of it.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Well we know exactly what we are going to come outwith, we have the drawings there to prove it.

George Graham Well if it's anything like the sports centre, did you have problems with that, Shawbost School, problems there, yeah. Leurbost. There you go. A new school, a new building doesn't come without its own problems.

Cllr Morag Munro Okay can I just say this was not a PPP Project but it is a variation if you like on PPP Project. We weren't able to do a PPP Project in the Western Isles because we didn't have the land values etc so what the Comhairle did is a hybrid model which means that the Comhairle set up an arms length company instead of the consortium, the private consortium that you have in normal private public partnerships but the good thing about this is that that project and that contract includes 30 years maintenance which the contractor is, the contractor takes over the maintenance is obliged to do so, at the end of the 30 years these schools are returned to the Comhairle in the same pristine situation/condition that they were when they were built. So this is the good thing about this kind of project. It means that the maintenance has got to be that is where we fell down over the years is cutting back on our maintenance...

George Graham I don't know about cutting back because.....

Cllr Morag Munro We were cutting back on our maintenance budget and that means that a lot of our schools are in a bad condition, that is why.

George Graham Okay but I mean your telling us tonight that the Comhairle are facing difficult financial times. I have here that in Tolsta School you spent £85,000 on a Head Teacher's office. How big is this office? That's pretty impressive.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Its actually extending part of a classroom because.....

George Graham It was an extension then

Cllr Catriona Stewart That the office that the Head Teacher used was actually the staff room and the school office so they are getting an extension of a classroom because it's a very healthily enrolled school.

George Graham And Bragar isn't...

Cllr Catriona Stewart I'm not saying that but I know the role is going up and the space was needed.

George Graham Our Head Teacher has to climb a flight of stairs, there's probably too many steps in that straight flight anyway. Its probably breaching health and safety. Sorry Bernard but I've got something else to say. Seilebost School has had a toilet upgrade £49,000 and I think it came in at £41,000, just under £42,000. Is Seilebost up for closure?

Cllr Catriona Stewart Its one of the schools. Its being looked at as part of this ...

George Graham Money well spent, savings, savings we were taught that in school

Cllr Morag Munro We have to provide sanitary facilities...

George Graham Bragar School sorry

Cllr Morag Munro We have to provide sanitary facilities for our children

George Graham How. Was there no toilets in Seilebost prior to this?

Cllr Morag Munro They were not toilets that were in keeping with health and safety-far far from it.

Joan Mackinnon I also think you have to recognise that this a consultation process, we've just said that already. We do not know if Seilebost School will close. This is part of a process.

George Graham I said it was up for closure, I said I asked.

Cllr Catriona Stewart We don't know if any of them will close, this is a consultation process that's what we are saying to you.

George Grahamvery good, okay

Bernard Chisholm I did want in that break just to mention one other thing to you Mr Graham. When we were talking about the capital building of these schools that you are concerned about I think it was mentioned that the monies in order to construct that largely through the government some affordability made with our own capital but not dependent on this current exercise, but I do know this and I've heard this on a number of consultations and I accept the really important rule of schools and education has served the Western Isles well. Were not taking them out of rural areas, there are still schools in rural areas but what we need in rural areas is employment and going into the situation that we're going in over the next couple of years I think that £68m of construction will be really welcome and it will be necessary and any of that work and none of that construction or the income for it is affecting this consultation but it is going to provide work.

George Graham No but hold on. You're telling us that you are facing you know difficult times financially here and yet you're squandering money.

Cllr Morag Munro I wouldn't agree that we are squandering money either

George Graham No I disagree with you then...

Cllr Morag Munro I would dispute that absolutely. We are being very careful.

George Graham You've been careful?

Cllr Morag Munro If you ever attend a meeting of Education Committee you will know how much discussion there is about financial

- George Graham It honestly looks as if you are playing with somebody else's money, because if it was your own money I don't think you would be spending that kind of money on something you are gonna knock down.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Mr Graham. Would anyone else....the gentleman in front of you
- Murdo MacInnes Just before I make my point I'm afraid I'm gonna have to disagree with my wife's point earlier on. We do have more than a skip in the village. We've got a few lampposts that the Council in their eternal wisdom seem to think its necessary to leave them on until 11 o'clock or midnight on the week in the run-up to the summer solstice. Anyway that's just a little point about how you could save a little bit more money.
- I went over this proposal document and I wasn't very happy with the answer we got about the Gaelic teaching costs. I think it's just, it doesn't make any sense to me. Now another thing I find questionable is £18,729 for school transport. Where on earth are they going? You know I'm here every day of my life and there's not that many buses serving the school. Another thing is, as Catherine Graham pointed out, the Section 8.8 with the capacity. It seems to me that anything that anybody's really looked into in this proposal isn't at all accurate. Now you can't close a school by putting a pile of lies in a proposal form and think we're gonna be happy with it. Now maybe you don't want to call it lies but inaccuracies and as a guy that sells used cars for a living I can fairly spot of dodgy people when I see them, so I would rather that we really got some accuracies in here and another thing I'd like to say is that there is some stuff we could find out here through the Freedom of Information Act if we really wanted to go into it, because you're not gonna close this school on the back of a pile of lies and just one other thing is that the reason I'm here (not at this meeting but in Bragar) is because in 1967 my mother took myself, my mother and father took myself and my three brothers back from Glasgow to get a decent education in Bragar School which we did and there's Seonaid just along from here came back from Glasgow with her son Kenneth who is going on to primary 3 for the same reason, there's Katie MacFarlane and her husband up the road who couldn't be here because their child is ill tonight, took their daughter home to get an education in Bragar School, not just any school but Bragar School That's just three examples and there's many many more through the years, because I'm talking about half a century here. This gentleman in front of me here who came up from down south as we call it, and he liked the system of education we have here, so there is numerous examples. We would be here all night if we start going into all of them so I'm just going back to my own case personally which goes back nearly half a century, so what I'd just like to say is that it is flawed. We are not happy with this at all.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you for your comments Mr MacInnes, I will pass you over to the Director who will address (inaudible due to applause)
- Robert Emmott Perhaps it's worth just briefly going back to Gaelic teaching costs because I think you have to, there isn't a Gaelic teacher here teaching Gaelic and I think you have to think of that as part of the costs of the teaching establishment in that school and that's where it should properly be shown. I think it is difficult because we clearly cannot list all of the teachers in the school and what the costs are associated within them but that's part of the cost of the teaching establishment of this school and it is only listed under Gaelic because that's part of how it's funded. If we look at transport, I think it worth, transport and the allocation of transport costs are difficult they are based on a historic allocation and I would accept that any allocation of costs there's gonna be potentially a different way of doing it. The Council spends about £4m on transport, about half of that is allocated to education, except for where there are dedicated education transport runs, the costs are shared between the public sector, between public transport which is accessible to everyone and between school transport, Now you could

take a different view on how you do it, you could argue if you didn't have the school there wouldn't be the service at all or the only additional cost of having, there's no additional cost of having school pupils on the public transport run. So that's the estimated allocation of costs. I'm happy to share with you the details of how its actually calculated. It's not something we expect to save, there will be no savings in education transport if we make a change , there will be probably some be marginal additional costs of transporting children slightly further to Shawbost. It's not something that we will save the Council will still be spending pretty much the same amount of money on transportation if there was a change in if Bragar School closed. So it's not a fixed ...thing but I am happy to provide a bit more detail on how the figure is actually calculated.

- Murdo MacInnes If the present system of using the public transport to get the children to school isn't really costing us anything, its not gonna make any savings so all we have here is the odd children's outing and the minibus that comes from South Bragar to the school and back every day and the odd time they go to Shawbost School so you know its £18,729, are we able to get a breakdown of that figure?
- Robert Emmott I can let you know how's is been calculated. It's not something we expect to save, its not part of £340,000...
- Murdo MacInnes Yeah but I would like to know this is a, it's, there's no pennies showing but it ends in £729 not it costs about £18,000 to take these kids around. Why is, its an accurate figure, so somebody must have sat down and added around to Bragar, around to Shawbost , so and so's contract such and such contract. This figure must have come from somewhere, along with all these other figures that we might have to start really looking into like I said with Freedom of Information we should be able to get....
- Cllr Catriona Stewart The Director did actually cover that
- Murdo MacInnes He didn't well, maybe I'm a bit silly
- Robert Emmott I'll come back to you with how's it calculated. I'm quite happy to do that
- Cathryn Graham Catherine Graham again, I'd like to ask a couple of questions on the educational benefit statement. 8.14 - it says in this document that attending a school with a larger roll will have educational benefits for pupils currently at Bragar and then further down it says 'learning opportunities and experiences will be significantly widened'. If I can just quote from our recent HMI report on 18 May this year, it says on page 2 of that document under Learning and Achievement, children enjoy learning in this stimulating environment, children achieve well in a broad range of areas and overall children are making good progress. On page 4 of the HMI Report, under curriculum and meeting learning needs it says, "The school is improving the curriculum well taking account of Curriculum for Excellence and staff meet children's learning needs well". So my question would be how are you going to significantly widen their opportunities in Shawbost?
- Joan Mackinnon I think you can always widen children's opportunities absolutely. I believe that children here get a good experience but for example if I could just explain just one thing. For example just now here the classes have to be arranged P1 -P4 and P5 - P7, or P1 - P3 and P4 -P7, so you've got three class groups or four class groups. If there was an amalgamation with Shawbost you would have two class groups, three classgroups, two classgroups and two classgroups and therefore you would have more pupils at the same age so that you could have more opportunities for discussing learning, for explaining learning for sharing the learning, for problem solving, for active learning and it's to do with opportunities like that really that we're saying that would be an enhancement becausemore pupils of the same age, therefore there are more opportunities for that kind of interaction, if you like, to deepen the learning and to make pupils more able to solve problems, to use the learning in a different context etc etc.

Iain Hunter Class sizes. I like.. I was educated on the mainland and I'm seeing the Scottish Education, Edinburgh, I've seen it in England as well and I've seen it just outside Glasgow and the thing I like about these small schools is because the school sizes are small. They get better education that way and the children are brought forward with a better education and quality of life. Now the education system has failed me throughout my entire life and it was big class sizes that you are talking about.

Cllr Catriona Stewart I think the reality is here is we have very small class sizes.

Iain Hunter A child can easily be put to one side and left and at least with the small class sizes they stand a better chance of getting on with their lives.

Joan Mackinnon If you don't mind I'd like to respond to that because I was looking at the roll of Bragar School in August when pupils would be in Bragar School and the role at Shawbost and if it were to happen which it won't but just hypothetically if the two schools were coming together this August there would be three classes of seventeen, a P1 – P3 of seventeen, a P4/P5 of seventeen and a P6/7 of seventeen. Whichever way you look at that these are not big classes but they are good class groups in terms of opportunities for interactive learning.

Cllr Catriona Stewart If you could just wait till the mike comes otherwise the recording won't pick it up.

April Maclean Sorry again. Just to clarify is that including Carloway, these three

Joan Mackinnon That would be if Bragar and Shawbost went together. If Carloway, Bragar and Shawbost were to go together this is what the sizes would be. You would have P1 –P3 of nineteen, a P4/5 of twenty four and P6/7 of twenty two. Again not big class sizes. I would say good size classes for good learning.

Christine Maclean And I'm not from Bragar Joan.

Joan Mackinnon I thought I recognised you from somewhere else

Christine Maclean You're going on about these class sizes in Shawbost which is quite a concern to me. You've got three classes there and I'm assuming they're all English mainstream.

Joan Mackinnon That's rights, these are English

Christine Maclean Three classrooms out of the four classrooms in the primary. At the moment the Gaelic medium is taking up two classrooms with the two classrooms combined which it is on two days a week it is crammed. The door has to be opened and the windows have to be opened because its so hot in there. It can't be done.

Joan Mackinnon Well we accept that if the children were going to move into Shawbost School in 2012 we would be looking at the space in Shawbost School and making alterations that would be necessary so that the class sizes and the flexibility of the space that's available would be conducive to good learning.

Christine Maclean So that will be spending more money?

Joan Mackinnon Possibly. We have made a commitment that every building.... that we will have in the optimum footprint to deliver education in the Western Isles will be enhanced and improved if our strategy is implemented.

- Bernard Chisholm Just one further comment to Mr Hunter. I think that as the Director has mentioned in relation to class sizes. You are right, we are really proud of how we meet the needs of all children across the whole range and I think as we look through the Islands all our schools are remote rural and none of them are really big schools in the context of the situations you have mentioned and the significant thing that we look to deliver that quality education throughout the Islands, is teachers and the context they learn in and we are confident that is the situation throughout and whether that's in Gaelic or English and one of the other things we would be pleased with, as we are moving forward on this type of approach, is that all our schools we would hope would have Gaelic provision in them and we would continue to see the consistent rise in the uptake of the language and culture as well. I think to aspire to these things in these rural areas is something we are positive about.
- Joan Mackinnon This is an observation and not anything really tied to the consultation process tonight but just about good learning and I think that the critical factor and good learning for children is good teaching and you are very right to be proud of your school here because you have got good teachers. I know places where there are big classes and parents still want to send their children to that school because the school has a good reputation for good teaching and I think good teachers make a difference to children's learning rather than the size of the class. You could have a class of whatever you think would be the optimum number and if the teacher wasn't effective I guess you wouldn't be too pleased.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Okay Anna
- Anna MacPhail I think we can conclude that we have a basic difference, the Comhairle and the Community, your aims are to provide education in new or nearly new schools and our desire is for our children's welfare and wellbeing and of course their education. I just want to state that we are happy with our accommodation, resources and teaching quality and as parents we have been very involved in improving the outside environment here and for a five to eleven year old I think trees such as they are, a garden shelter, sandpit are far more appealing than a cage and a playing field. -the environment which you describe as superior. While I've got the microphone I've been in the office up there and I would hate to see our tall school assistant trying to work in that environment. She would be taking you to court and suing you for backache and all sorts and the last point. On the Gaelic issue, I don't want to step on anyone's toes. I think we should encourage the Gaelic language but I know that some people have chosen to send their children here, these are Gaelic speaking with a Gaelic background, chosen to send their children here to avoid the two tier system that you get in schools with Gaelic medium and English. There is a, I don't know how to describe it, it's a two tier system, the Gaelic have more resources, more money and I'll not say anymore than that but I know that some people have chosen to send pupils to a fully English school to avoid that upset.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Well I have to say Anna that whatever school our children are in we are extremely concerned about their welfare along with parents and their communities. I would take issue with that Anna that we don't do that.
- Anna MacPhail It's just your stated aims are to provide accommodation in new or nearly new schools but to us, yes quality education, but I just want to state that we would prefer to have our children here in this community because we think it's better for them because they don't have the secondary pupils there, there is a real air of innocence about the school. So many people have commented on that and we don't want to lose that.

Joan Mackinnon Can I just comment because of the comments you made about Gaelic I feel I want to respond to that. I take it that is your perception and I accept that, however I have worked in a school, this is recently. I worked for a few months as an acting Head in a school that had a Gaelic Unit, Gaelic Medium education on offer as well as English Medium education. Many more English Medium pupils and Gaelic Medium pupils although it has a very healthy Gaelic Medium stream and I can categorically say that there is no two tier system, neither do pupils feel it. They play together, their parents.....well I'm sorry Anna that's your perception, I'm just saying that I don't see it like that. (Inaudible)..... That may be because there is no Gaelic Medium provision here and you are not therefore part of what would be a school that had the two options.

Anna MacPhail Sorry I don't have the microphone but inaudible

Cllr Catriona Stewart Anna you need to speak into the mike please, otherwise the tape does not pick it up and its not a true reflection, please Anna

Anna MacPhail Yes I don't have children at Gaelic Medium but my sister did and there are many others who do and they have commented on that. I was gonna say something better than that but I can't remember what it was. Put me off giving me the microphone....

Cllr Catriona Stewart I think Mr Hunter wanted to speak

Iain Hunter May be a way out of all your problems, probably just shut down Shawbost School.

Cllr Catriona Stewart (over noise) Thank you for all your comments

Christine Macinnes I've got another very specific questions again. Under 8.5 in your documents under the ICT Resources, It says that in Shawbost there is a more extensive range of ICT Resources and that each classroom in Shawbost has in fact a whiteboard. So I've got two questions really. We said there was four classrooms in Shawbost Primary, so does that mean they have got four interactive whiteboards? Yes

Joan Mackinnon I'm sorry, I couldn't say for sure.

Christine Macinnes Because my question then, would be why would you give four to Shawbost and one to Bragar? Doesn't seem very fair, but anyway so what is this more expensive range of ICT in Shawbost that we don't have here?

Bernard Chisholm We are very happy to create a list of it.....if you wish, however they do have interactive and I don't have the numbers. They do have a good distribution of IT laptops etc, we are very happy to provide the details of them both.

Christine Macinnes You see we have here two.... our parent council have recently bought two laptops for the schools and we have got another four in a classroom in a box plus three stand alone pcs in each room, so...

Bernard Chisholm Very happy to give you the breakdown

Christine Maclean It's just when you say there is more extensive...we wonder what it is that's all.

Bernard Chisholm That's fine. We're very happy to give you that.

- Christine Macinnes Right, on the same kind of point, under section 8.9 you say if schools are combined there will be more opportunity for pupils at Bragar to participate in competitive sports alongside pupils of similar ages. Now Bragar currently enter teams in every sporting event under the sun as far as I am aware of. We have football girls, football tag, rugby touch, rugby union, uni-hoc, rowing, basketball, swimming they are in everything. In fact last night they came third in the touch rugby competition competing against Stornoway and Laxdale.
- Joan Mackinnon Good, very good.
- Christine Macinnes So my question then is - what more opportunities? Will it not be less opportunities because there are less schools taking part?
- Joan Mackinnon No, I think you'll always find competition where there are children and if you've got more children of the same age therefore you've got more opportunities to have team games.
- Christine Maclean But you cant tell me Shawbost School will put in 4 teams into the touch rugby competition whereas you could have one from Shawbost and Carloway and Bragar and we often put two teams in because we seem to have to because they all want to take part.
- Joan Mackinnon Well I think if you can put two teams in if the two schools went together it would be very easy to put four in.
- Christine Maclean And that would happen?
- Joan Mackinnon I'm sure it would, why not.
- Bernard Chisholm And in addition in relation to extra curricular activities you'd have to accept that with more staff then a lot of the extra curricular that follow in those reflect some of the skills and interests of staff and I think it does share across a broader range of staff and I think it does share across a broader range of staff and would create maybe potentially other opportunities.
- Murdo MacInnes Just to follow up what Catherine was saying, what I think is what would probably happen then is that the ones that would normally make a team but weren't quite so good would just get left out and I'm almost sure that's what would happen.
- Joan Mackinnon I think you'd find that there might be more teams.
- Murdo MacInnes No, I don't go with that at all because when I was in school I've always been interested in football but I wasn't very good at football so I always tended, to if there were another few guys better than me, get left out so you know putting all these guys like being in Shawbost School with all these people I wouldn't have even got a kick of the ball never mind got in the team as often as I did.
- Bernard Chisholm What I'd have to say is what were you good at because maybe with a greater number of young people they'd be a fair group of them that had the same interest. I think one of the things...
- Murdo MacInnes Can I just interrupt you there, I think most people in this community regard me as being very good at my job which was the people at the Education Committee is pretty questionable. So I take exception to that comment you made there.

- Bernard Chisholm Sorry, it was about the in relation to the sport as an activity. What I'm saying is one of the difficulties we've got in our small rural schools is children have a wide range of interests but they don't always have enough children to be able to share in that and there have clearly situations where the predominance of football and that has not met the needs of all young people so the issue with the extra curricular is a statement I think of fact where we have more young children and more staff together, there is a greater potential for a wider range of activities and more children who can share in these interests and I think that has to be positive thing.
- Murdo MacInnes Mr Chisholm are you taking the comments we're making on board because you just seem to be bombarding us back with a load of rubbish. Just , you're on the offensive all the time. You don't seem to be saying to yourself well fair point Mr so and so We'll really have to look at that and maybe put it towards the saving of Bragar School. It always seems to be oh no no no no what your saying there we've got this covered by doing that at Shawbost and this idea we've got is so great. We're not happy with this at all; this isn't very professional at all.
- Cathryn Graham I'd like to pick up a point on the extra curricular activities. Currently in Bragar they're all open to anybody over primary 2. so anybody over primary 2 could go to most of these activities. Now the ICT one I can speak for personally because I actually take it and I couldn't possible take it up in Shawbost School because there would be too many children under that age group. I couldn't do it. At the moment it takes me two afternoons a week for half the term to do it so.....there would be less children taking part.
- Joan Mackinnon Well there might be somebody else there who could do it with you. You see this is the thing about more people, more people would be able to do more things.
- Cathryn Graham But it might not even be convenient for me to go to Shawbost where I can nip down to Bragar so there are lots of you know.....specifically we cant. And children coming home from extra curricular activities, just now they can walk home. If we are after school there is no bus for them. If they are up in Shawbost they wait for public transport to get home. How are we going to get them home from extra curricular activities up in Shawbost?
- Joan Mackinnon Well schools are very good at getting round problems that present themselves and I know of schools where children travel a long distance to go to school and yet they are able to offer after school activities and find a way round getting the children home whether it's by hiring a bus to take them home especially after it or whatever.
- Murdo MacInnes You say schools are good at good at getting round problems that present themselves, well, we are sitting here in a school that doesn't really have any problems so why are we going to start trying to get round problems that aren't even there?
- Joan Mackinnon Would anybody else like to ask some questions?
- Richard Frogart I'm not very good at public speaking, one of the things that struck me about the document that's been put out to us first of all is section 9.2 – Alternatives to Closure. The statement is that the only alternative option for future provision of education for pupils at Bragar School is to upgrade the building to at least condition B and make it Disability Discrimination Act compliant. Can I ask, first of all, what part of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 are you referring to?
- Joan Mackinnon We said that we would offer you the survey, the DDA survey.....
- Richard Frogart I'm not interested in the survey. I want to know what part of the Disability Discrimination Act you are referring to?

Joan Mackinnon We can get that back to you tomorrow.

Richard Frogart Can I suggest to you that it is in fact Section 21 (e) paragraph 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. And I'll just read it out here. That basically it's saying that the Education Department, would be, has a duty to take such steps as is reasonable in all the circumstances of the case to alter...make reasonable adjustment and things like that. I'm just paraphrasing what's in the note. Now, a reasonable adjustment is not major works. We are talking about a few hundred pounds at most, adjustments to a building at this sort of stage to bring it up to that particular requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act and yet it's being touted as a major factor for it not.....

Joan Mackinnon No, no I think you would need to complete the paragraph to say that you are saying that the option would not mean an increase in the roll.

Richard Frogart You think that you'd need to make it.....this is the Disability Discrimination Act compliant you've only got to spend a few hundred pounds.

Joan Mackinnon Not necessarily, it would not make it viable. It wouldn't be a viable option to the closure. It was tied up with upgrading to condition B and we've told you that we will get you the survey details.....

Richard Frogart Why does the school have to be upgraded to a B?

Joan Mackinnon We told you at the beginning that that was our aspiration. All our schools at A and B by 2018.....

Richard Frogart What's the meaning of the word.....

Joan Mackinnon .. in accordance with Government Regulation

Richard Frogart I beg your pardon?

Joan Mackinnon It's Scottish Government Schools Estate strategy requires that all local authorities should have in excess of 90% of their children in condition B schools by 2008.

Richard Frogart You described that. That document was described to us at the beginning of this meeting as an aspiration document.

Joan Mackinnon This one is not an aspiration document.

Blank (female) It's strategy.

Richard Frogart So basically you have to bring up all your schools to at least a B and that's in legislation is it?

Joan Mackinnon It's a strategy.

Richard Frogart It's a strategy.

Joan Mackinnon It's not a law.

Richard Frogart It's not a law. So you don't have to do it.

Joan Mackinnon The Government would like us to do it by 2018.

Richard Frogart They would like to aspire to that I think is the words that have been used previously.

Joan Mackinnon At the moment the Community Planning Partnership which brings in the Comhairle, the Health Board, Police and all the other public bodies have a Concordat with the Scottish Government. They each have a single outcome agreement and as part of getting our funding from Government we have to achieve certain outcomes that we put into that document is based on the Government's national priorities.

Richard Frogart Yeah, I still don't think I have had my question answered properly. You are making a point in Section 9.2 that, in the way that it reads to me because you've got to comply with the DDA 2005 that it's not a viable alternative. Now in one way one might argue that that reference in itself is contrary to the Disability Discrimination Act in that you are using the Disability Discrimination Act as an excuse not to provide a service.

Joan Mackinnon We believe that we would have to upgrade the school building considerably.

Richard Frogart To bring this school up to DDA compliance.....

Joan Mackinnon No no not.....

Richard Frogart You are only going to have to spend a couple of hundred pounds.

Joan Mackinnon No. not just about DDA compliance.....

Richard Frogart I'm not talking about anything else, just the DDA. We are talking a couple of hundred pounds.

Bernard Chisholm Well you may not be talking a couple of hundred pounds but the sentence actually reads to bring it to condition B and make it a Disability Discrimination.....sorry.....when our buildings are done we have condition surveys and we have accessible building audits and it's the combination of all of them.

Richard Frogart The Discrimination Act says it's the duty of the authority, so that's fair enough you've got a duty, to take such steps as it is reasonable in all the circumstances of the case. As is reasonable. Doesn't mean you have to knock down walls, it doesn't mean you have to build an extra class room, you don't have to put in extra playing field or anything like that or huge hallways and lift and escalators and things for disabled people. What is reasonable? A little ramp over the doorway, that's it. Some little tape on the stairs.

Joan Mackinnon Well we will get back to you with the information that Mr Bernard Chisholm outlined earlier on, by tomorrow Bernard?

Murdo MacInnes Just about that disability thing there. He said that the aim for all of Scottish Councils by 2018 should be to have at least 90% of their pupils in A or B listed schools. Well Bragar with the current roll makes less than 0.1% so you know you can't really put that disability thing against us at all at all because there is another 99% to go into A and B listed schools and if I'm right in thinking, I think this legislation's been out for 5 years, you why are we in such a hurry all of a sudden?

Joan Mackinnon I would accept that you as parents are quite happy for your children to stay at Bragar School regardless of the condition of the building....

Murdo MacInnes No you're not wrong.....you're not right there. This school went on fire on the 28 October 1983, I remember the night very well and this school was extensively repaired through the insurance company after that and you very rarely see a works van or even after the big storm we had 5 years ago there wasn't much work needing done to this school and to say that we just want to throw our kids into a shack just because the shack's in Bragar is very inaccurate. This school to us is in very good condition so that's not what I'm trying to say at all. I also have a friend that has worked on these PPP schools somewhere in the Highlands, I think one was in Dingwall, he said..he was telling me that these schools are just soul-less buildings. They are buildings with young children getting bullied in, there's no teachers anywhere near to see them, that's what's going to happen when you chuck all our kids in Shawbost School.....

Joan Mackinnon I don't believe you are saying that about Shawbost School.....

Murdo MacInnes No no.....if you will just wait.....let me just finish. You are going to throw all the children from 11 years old over to Stornoway. We all know that there are drug dealers in the Higher classes in the Nicolson. You don't have to go far in Stornoway to know that the place is awash with drugs. We want that of our 11 year olds going over to a school like that? So getting back to these big schools, there's just like this fellow that's worked in them he's told they're just soul-less places with nothing going for them at all and just there's so many places where children get bullied, feel left out and there is no-one to take them to one side and sort out.

Joan Mackinnon Thank you very much Mr MacInnes, you've said that to us but we don't accept that the schools on our Island are soul-less.....

Murdo MacInnes You don't seem to want to accept any points we're making tonight! This is really frustrating! There is nothing like "well that's a fair point Mr MacInnes or Mr Gray or whatever" but its just like you don't agree with anything we are saying. Are you just wanting to.... You are really wanting to close this school.

Christina Macinness Firstly can I apologise for speaking so often but.....

Shona Maclean Christina is our spokesperson.

Christina Macinnes We have discussed all these things at meetings at length and a lot of people just aren't happy speaking in public. I'm a wee bit nervous myself but I'm going to do it. You know. I'm also prone to verbosity but apologies for that. I've got a document here by children in Scotland. It was part of their submission to the Scottish Government's Rural School closure in 2008 and I'd like to read a little bit from it. It says "Given the historical propensity in (presumption) but local education and government leaders to view rural school closures as desirable it seems necessary to impose a legislative presumption against, rural school closures for a period of time in order to level the playing field. Ironically, even this Scottish Government proposal in favour of a presumption against rural school closures reflects the old mindset in such statements as the Educational benefits of the change, very often to move to a new or better building are usually clear. Although good facilities are welcome, the notion that quality of education is primarily a function of the school facility is unsupported on research on learning. Woefully inadequate education can occur in beautiful, well equipped schools just as excellent education can take place within very modest buildings. This point is being made simply as an example of how pervasive the biases toward policy makers towards the alleged, but often illusory benefits of rural school closures. Children in Scotland would support a time-limited, perhaps 10 year presumption against rural schools closures as a corrective to the historical over-enthusiasm for such closures. The intent of a time-limit is to arrive at a time when rural school closures are not routinely seen by education and Government leaders out of habit, professional socialisation or the primacy of narrowly defined

cost savings as the easy or obvious option. Eventually each potential rural school closure should be judged fairly on the basis of well informed case by case analysis of the merits of the evidence. This degree of fairness cannot be counted on today.”

Joan Mackinnon

I agree with the sentiment of what you said and I think I have already said that the critical thing in children’s learning is the quality of the teaching and I said that already and I agree with that and I totally agree that very good learning can go on in very modest buildings. However, we are also charged with not maintaining too many surplus or under-used areas which are wasteful and dilutes the productive deployment of resources and all our schools are rural schools so, you know, presumption against closure, we will always have rural schools because that’s all we have.

Christina Macinnes

I very much appreciate that, Joan, but what I’m trying to say is that Bragar and Arnol should be look at in a more holistic way. The document, the rural schools document talks a lot about the community. Your review mentioned it briefly. Basically saying it would have no impact on our rural community. That is not true. Bragar School has been going from strength to strength and in the past few years it has come on in leaps and bounds. It’s the pulse of this community. It’s all we have left. The children can be heard. You are walking down the street, you can hear them. I remember the day I really decided it was Bragar they were going to. I was walking with my pram and the children were outside, in an outside class room effectively, like you say they have I Shawbost. It was a sunny day like its been recently and the sound of them through the village. The loch in the background. It was absolutely beautiful and I thought I want a piece of that. You know if you take this..... if you close this school we should know well in advance and have time to prepare for what this building is then going to be. I was given a very poor response to this question at the last meeting. It was like “oh we’ll sell it”. Community would get first dibs kind of thing. But that is not good enough what should be happening in Bragar, is, if a day comes when the roll really gets to a critical level where it isn’t a viable option and none of us here would want our children educated here if the roll was not viable, or what we believe to be viable.

You mentioned a school Bernard at the last meeting, I think it was in Harris and there were maybe nine or ten pupils. We wouldn’t want Bragar School to continue if that’s the kind of roll we had but if it was to come to that and if we knew that that was going to happen, why not then start a community conversation to discuss how we could use this wonderful old building so that it wouldn’t lie empty to be vandalised, to just become a soulless centre of our community and this community is verging on the unique. There are parts of the island where the number of locals are probably akin to the number of non-locals in this school and I don’t mean this is a xenophobic way at all. People from outwith this area are more than welcome and they benefit from the family ties that we have here because they become part of this family. I think at present there are three pupils our of that thirty three, which gives us thirty who have a parent or grandparent who came to this school, or both or all and that goes through to great grand parent, great, great grand parent in some cases. People’s lines have come down since their forebears started getting a formal education and that is part - I mean you know – here we have somebody who was here a number of years ago. Somebody found a Mod certificate – was it Bragar won the Mod about forty years ago – fifty – it was in the 1940s – my mother was in the Mod that time they won. We have that connection.

Peter Macphail, who is not here tonight, he mentioned at the Parent Council meeting how in many schools they have buddy system. They engineer a buddy system so that children coming in – you know- have a way of feeling safe – well that buddy system happens naturally here. The children who come in P1 they are still friends with the people in P7 years afterwards – long after their school days are done. What is important in a community like this is that those are solid

friendships and relationships that ground the community and bring people back. It's not just about bringing employment although that's important, its about keeping people in the villages as opposed to alienating them and they might just think – well I might just as well live in town or in a city. Bragar and Arnol, we have very little concrete. We don't even have pavements out of concrete in much of the village but what we do have is something that you can't put a figure on – something intangible – a quality experience here that you're not going to replicate and I am by no means knocking Shawbost School, I love Shawbost School and I just think that Bragar School is right for Bragar and Arnol. Look at the badge, they are so proud of it – the whalebone arch and the blackhouse.

- Joan Mackinnon I know that you are very passionate about it Christina
- Christina Macinnes I'm not the only one
- Joan Mackinnon All of you and that's admirable and we hear what you're saying and totally understand it and thank you for that.
- Christina Macinnes Are you listening though?
- Joan Mackinnon Yes
- Murdo MacInnes Just that we are a community who realise the value of things rather than the cost of things.
- George Graham My own feelings are that Bragar School as it is, is operating to its full potential and we as parents are very proud to have our children here and I think it's by no means is it an underused school and if you were to go ahead and close it, it would be the wrong thing to do.
- Joan Mackinnon Thank you for that
- George Graham If I could just ask one more question. I would really like to know the views or the feelings from one or any of the councillors because they have been far too quiet for my liking.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart This is a public consultation – there are other fora for them to express their views. This is for you to give your views
- Cllr Morag Munro We are out here on behalf of the Comhairle consulting with you and they are part of the Comhairle so they are consulting and listening as well.
- ???????????????? I just asked if our councillors are not here to support us and represent us.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart That's a different thing altogether but it's a - it's a consultation meeting to hear your views for you to ask questions and to make statements. That's what this evening is about. If there are no more questions I'm going to hand over to Miss McDonald to list the questions that have been asked and require an answer. Just to make sure that we have a list of the questions that require an answer.
- Lesley McDonald Thank you Chair. We have undertaken to provide the year of the guidelines and the guidelines themselves that relate to classroom capacity. Mr Emmott is going to come back on the breakdown of costs with particular reference to central printing. In relation to the Disability Discrimination Act, we are going to provide a copy of the Access Audit and information and the costings identified in that to make Bragar School DDA compliant. We are going to provide a copy of the Committee Report which outlined the outcome of the community conversation. We are going to provide details of capital expenditure on Bragar School – now I'm not certain about this – I wrote down in the last ten years – did you actually specify a timescale? Ten years, that's great.

I can spare you the trouble if you want – you asked for the last occasion on which capital expenditure was incurred on Bragar School.

- Christina Macinnes How much it was and what it was for.
- Lesley McDonald Mr Emmott again undertook to provide details of how the school transport costs were calculated in relation to Shawbost School and ICT in particular; you've asked for confirmation that each classroom does have an interactive white board and what is meant in more detail by the more extensive IT provision at Shawbost and the other thing that I have noted down – there was some discussion about what would happen to the building in the event that the school were to close. We do have a disposal of Comhairle property policy that I would be happy to send on it that were to be of interest. The only other thing would be, have I missed anything and who would be the best person for me to send the information to.
- Christina Macinnes One thing I think you might have missed. What the accommodation is at Stornoway Primary – our children would be moving to – how many classrooms – sorry Shawbost School. What the accommodation would be – how many rooms there are – how many children can fit in each room?
- Joan Mackinnon I can tell you that if your children were moving there just now we would require three rooms for English medium education and one for Gaidhlig medium education – that's what we would require.
- Christina Macinnes Does that exist?
- Joan Mackinnon Even for Shawbost, Bragar and Carloway it would still be three class groups for English and one for Gaidhlig.
- Christina Macinnes Are the room sizes there – sufficient sizes
- Joan Mackinnon As I said to you before, we would look at the floor space and we may have to reorganise it – I said that already but yes there is definitely the capacity to have the children there.
- Christine Graham 104 what it actually meant – where they were all going – that's what I wanted clarified.
- Lesley McDonald I really want to get this right. You're asking where the figure of 104 came from as the capacity of Shawbost School and how that could be delivered.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Who would you want the information sent to – this is very important. Who on the Parent Council?
- Joan Mackinnon There would be two ways of doing it. We could send it to the school for the attention of the parent council – would that be ok?
- Lesley McDonald Finally Chair if I could crave your indulgence, I know that Mr MacInnes mentioned a couple of times about seeking information under Freedom of Information. Obviously you can do so; similarly if you want to tell me what you want to know tonight I can process that and get the information for you.
- Murdo MacInnes The reason I did say that is that we found so many inaccuracies in some of the things we looked into that we simply don't believe it so we would maybe further on look at just how inaccurate everything else is through the Freedom of Information. There is nothing specific I want to be told about that at the minute.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Mr MacInnes. The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to the HMIE Report, written representations that it has received and oral representations made by anyone at the public meeting. A consultation report will then be prepared. This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be published in local newspapers. The report will be available on the Comhairle website and from Comhairle offices as well as at the 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 by approval by the Comhairle. Should the Comhairle decide to close the school at this stage, it is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of the decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and 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 that final decision to decide if they will call in the proposal. Until the outcome of the six week call-in process has been notified to the Comhairle, the Comhairle will not proceed with the implementation of the proposal. The deadline date for the receipt of written submissions is 5.00pm on 30 June 2010. These should be sent to Mr Malcolm Burr, Chief Executive, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Sandwick Road, Stornoway or electronically at schoolconsultations@cne-siar.gov.uk – and that address is within the proposal document and I would urge anybody who didn't feel comfortable in speaking tonight to put written representation in and anybody who was unable to attend that you know of for various reasons, if they would get their written proposal submissions in by that date. I thank you all for your attendance here tonight.