

NOTE OF PUBLIC MEETING IN DALIBURGH SCHOOL – MONDAY 21 JUNE 2010

Present: Mrs Catriona Stewart (Chair)
Ms Joan Mackinnon
Mr Bernard Chisholm
Mr Robert Emmott
Ms Lesley McDonald
Ms Joan Esson HMIe
4 Councillors – Gerry Macleod, David Blaney, Peter Carlin and Angus Campbell
22 Parents and members of public

Catriona Stewart Feasgar math agus failte gu coinneamh co-chomhairleachaidh a nochd
Good evening everyone and welcome to this evening's meeting. My name is Catriona Stewart and I'm Vice Chair of Education and Children's Services Committee and with me this evening I have to my right Ms Joan Mackinnon, The Director of Education and Children's Services and to her right Mr Bernard Chisholm who is Head of Education and Resources, to my left we have Mr Robert Emmott who is the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and to his left is Ms Lesley McDonald who is Head of Executive Office and at the back we have Ms Joan Easson who is a Member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education.

Could I ask if everybody switches off their mobile phones, not just put them on silent or meeting but switch them off because it interferes with the recording. This meeting is being recorded and a transcript will be available very shortly for anyone who wishes. You will hear a funny noise if you don't put them off, I've been caught out before. In August 2007 the Comhairle decided to undertake a review of educational provision throughout the Western Isles. Since that time a number of informal conversations have taken place within Communities. As a result the Comhairle agreed to go to statutory consultation on the proposed amalgamation of a number of schools and the discontinuation of the S1/S2 Stage of education. Tonight's meeting is part of the formal consultation process for S1/S2 in Daliburgh School and the purpose of this evening's meeting is to give you an opportunity to hear more about the proposal to ask questions and to give your views.

The aim of the Authority is to provide our children with the best educational experiences and outcomes in modern learning environments suitable for 21st century needs within the resources available to us. The Comhairle as most of you here present will know face 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 also decreased. We have 38 buildings, 18 of which are in poor condition.

If you just come and sit down, there are plenty seats gentlemen down here, they're more comfortable for you probably.

We are facing a general tightening all round and the pressure on other council services, such as transport, community care, roads and waste services obviously have impact on us as well and from August this year we have the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence. We are in the process of building six 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 Scottish Government Schools Estate Strategy is for all our pupils to be educated in new or refurbished buildings by 2018. In order to achieve this we have to reduce the spare capacity in our school estate. I will now pass over to Ms Lesley McDonald who will go over procedure following which the Director of Education and Children's Services will speak to the proposal document. And then I will open the meeting. for questions. Thank you.

Lesley McDonald

Thank you Chair, can you hear me?. As the Chair mentioned this is the first stage of the formal process in terms of the Act. There has been an informal process where Officers and Members of the Council have come out and talked to you about the future of education within your communities. This document which we have before us tonight is the proposal document and that details the Council's proposal which in this instance is to discontinue S1/S2 provision within this School from 30 June of next year. The legislation we are now working under is called the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 which replaces the previous legislation and has specific provision in respect of rural schools and Daliburgh is a rural school, and I will speak more about that in a moment.

The process has become more complex to allow representations to be taken account of at more stages of the process and you have 30 days from the date of the issue of the proposal document, you must have 30 days rather and in this case you have 34 days up until 30 June 2010. That's fairly similar to what happened before you previously had at least 28 days but what happens next is different. HMIE have an involvement and every representation that the Council receives together with the transcript of this meeting and if HMIE request a summary of the representations are submitted to HMIE who then have until 20 August to prepare a report. That report together with all of the written representations received must be taken into account in what's called the Consultation Report. This is a proposal document, its not a consultation report as yet.

It is intended that officers would work on the consultation report during the month of September with a view to that being published either late in September or very early in October to be considered by the Education and Childrens' Services Committee in the last week of October which would then make a recommendation to the meeting of the full Council on 4 November.

What happens then is there's a 6 week period from 4 November in which no proposal can be implemented to allow for the Scottish Ministers to determine whether they wish to call in the proposal and during the first 3 weeks of that 6 weeks Scottish Ministers may take account of any relevant representations that are made to them so there would not be a definite decision prior to approximately Christmas of this year. If the Ministers do decide to call in the proposal then the timescale from then on in would be a matter for Scottish Ministers.

The other thing that the Council is doing in parallel to this consultation exercise is carrying out an Equalities Impact Assessment on the impact of the proposals.

If I could just refer you to paragraph 2.10 of the report which refers to a note on corrections and as I mentioned earlier there are additional points that must be given consideration where a school is a rural school (and I think that this is slightly different from the other ones and) in fact it's part 10 of your report and its just to advise you of what is a correction to this document. Daliburgh School is referred to here as being an accessible rural school which is one of the categories for statistical purposes which governs reporting back to Government, Daliburgh in common with all of the other schools which are currently the subject of statutory consultation is not an accessible rural school. It is a very remote rural school. That correction has been published by advertisement in the newspaper and it is considered that no further action is necessary because the terms of the Act referred to rural schools generally and the terms of the Act have been fully complied with in our opinion in the preparation of this document.

An administrative point is that we would hope to issue acknowledgements to any representation that's received within 3 working days. If for any reason you put in a representation and you don't receive an acknowledgement to it, please get in touch with me. My name is Lesley McDonald as the Chair said and we will track your representation down because it is absolutely crucial that all of these representations go both to HMIE and are also taken into account in the preparation of the Consultation Report so the main purpose of this evening is to explain a little bit more about the document and I'm sure you have all read it and to hear what you have to say, what points of view you wish to be recorded to go to HMIE and to the Council, to answer any questions that we can answer on the night and to respond as quickly as we possibly can to any question that we cannot answer on the night. We are conscious of how this is our last consultation meeting. We are conscious of how close it is to the end of representations on 30 June so we will do our very very best to give you a quick turnaround on responses to questions because you need the response to that question to finalise your own representation. I am happy to take any questions.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you. Does anyone have any questions for Ms McDonald at this stage? No. Thank you. Ms Mackinnon

Joan Mackinnon Good evening everybody. Can you hear? Yes. Councillor Stewart has outlined the context within which we are here discussing this proposal tonight. We the Officers at the Comhairle recognise that we have falling rolls. more schools than we require for the number of pupils we have got and we have an aspiration to have the optimum number of schools which are in the best condition possible to provide our young people with the best environments in which to learn. This is at a time when we are moving to the full implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence in August 2010.

Since the late 80s, 1986/87 we have had in Scotland a programme called The 5-14 Programme which has defined for us the Curriculum which is taught between the age of 5 and the end of 2nd year. That programme was introduced in order to define the Curriculum better to provide better reporting to parents and to provide also a better assessment framework. However from August 2010 we will no longer have a common course for S1/S2 as has been the case with the 5-14 Programme. Wherever you were in Scotland basically the course for S1/S2 were similar. You would not find much difference. No matter how happy we may have been with the S1/S2 provision there has been a recognition nationally that S1 and S2 has been problematic. In a report written by HMIE on 2001 on Standards and Quality in Education they say S1 and S2 remains a problem of long standing which HMI have raised consistently in reports over the last 15 years. Assessment and meeting pupils needs are weaker in S1 and S2 than elsewhere in secondary education. Schools must ask themselves why it is that many pupils who perform well at P7 mark time and even regress in S1 and S2.

At the Nicolson Institute the guidance staff there have been asking their 6th year pupils about their experience in school asking them to reflect over the 6 years and they have used the results of these results to improve provision at the school. When asked about S1 and S2 pupils regardless of whether they were in an S1/S2 setting or whether they were in the Nicolson from S1 right though said S1 and S2 it was okay but we didn't need 2 years of it and another prevalent view was that S1 was too much like a repeat of primary 7. The other strong message coming out from pupils was that 5th year was far too pressured. They moved to S3 started their standard grade courses and had 2 years to prepare for sitting their standard grades. They went back to school in August and they basically had about 9 months in which to prepare and sit their higher diet.

Here at Daliburgh as in all out schools the staff have been engaging with the outcomes and experiences set out in Curriculum for Excellence in order to fully implement the new Curriculum. Pupils should have opportunities to engage in rich tasks and interdisciplinary learning. A rich task is a kind of project based approach where students display their understanding, knowledge and skills through performance on trans-disciplinary activities that have an obvious connection with the wide world. This inter disciplinary learning helps pupils to make links across learning and therefore making the learning a deeper experience. However, the fact that schools such as Sgoil Dhalabroig here have to be staffed by a number of itinerant staff creates an inflexibility for the Head Teacher that limits the timetabling options available and the HMI Report which was written after the previous consultation that happened here said, timetabling constraints limits the opportunities for staff to plan and review the Curriculum. Within the Uist context some of the staff that teach at both Sgoil Dhalabroig and Sgoil Cheann a' Phaigh are shared with Lionacleite so it actually impacts on all young people in secondary education in Uist, the fact that there are these timetabling constraints. It's much much more pronounced in schools like Paible and Daliburgh but it does have an impact on Sgoil Lionacleite as well.

Recently in the Times Educational Supplement a very experienced ex Head Teacher who was the Head Teacher at St Ninian's High in Kirkintilloch, a very successful school and he now works as a consultant. He was warning in this article, he was warning school timetablers that HMI would be looking for evidence that pupils were making progress in S1 and S2 and that they were being offered personalisation and choice under Curriculum for Excellence. He said that the best way to do this was to timetable S1 to S3 classes in blocks for all subjects which made it easier to group pupils by ability and allow them to work at an appropriate level. This is a challenge when you try to construct a timetable which will allow you to teach in blocks when you share teachers between schools and that's just a fact, there is a limit on what you can do if you are having to work around itinerant staff.

Could I now take you to the Proposal Document and just to set it within its context. The first 7 or so pages really set out the process for consultation and also the general background to the need for a school estate review. It outlines the Comhairle's aspirations and the keys factors that have driven us to bring forward this strategy but in particular I want to draw your attention to page 8 where we have the Educational Benefit Statement in the sections that are numbered 9.1 through to 9.13. This is a requirement of the Act where we have to think about what benefits will accrue to young people if our proposal is implemented. You may feel that its being written, focusing completely on Sgoil Lionacleite that is in fact what we have done, because that is what we are required to do within the Act. That's not to say that there aren't educational benefits for pupils who are at Sgoil Dhalabroig, but we are just highlighting what we perceive to be the benefits for the proposed discontinuation of S1/S2 here for pupils to have their full secondary experience at Sgoil Lionacleite. So it is dealt with under the headings that you see there. - The learning environment and resources and we believe that they will be enhanced for pupils if they move. It outlines the provision that would be there for Gaelic medium education, refers to ICT, additional support needs, capacity. Sgoil Lionacleite was built 22 years ago now, has a capacity for 500 pupils but unfortunately the current role is under 300, that is just a reflection of what is happening across the whole authority, so obviously there is capacity in Sgoil Lionacleite for all secondary pupils in Uist. Extra Curricular activities you see there that Sgoil Lionacleite run a wide range of activities some of which take place at lunchtime which would make it easy for all pupils to access. We do acknowledge that when you are travelling to schools some distance accessing after school clubs become more problematic, but I would have to say that young people who travel for example from beyond here from Eriskay are able to remain behind

and take part in the after school activities albeit that lengthens the length of their school day. Young people get bus passes or they arrange lifts and we know that's a challenge and we will continue to look at ways to make that as easy as possible if the discontinuation of S1 and S2 here takes place.

Travel we realise has been an issue for parents. We totally accept that the distance is a concern for some people. Unfortunately we cannot shorten the number of miles but what we can do is look at the ways in which we transport pupils and try and have the routes as direct as possible and continue to improve the roads. Just to sum up in 9.12 we have a summary as we see it of the education benefits and they are really around increased opportunities for pupils around the greater flexibility that there is in grouping children for learning and teaching where you have a greater teaching number. Also the greater flexibility in the deployment of staff in meeting learning needs and we also believe that a larger staff has in itself a dynamic which is good for learning and teaching where more staff are able to discuss best practice and review and reflect on their work and develop their teaching styles to suit the Curriculum for Excellence and then to move onto just the last section there, the Section 10 which Ms MacDonald has already alluded to. The consideration of factors affecting rural schools. As Ms McDonald said there is an error in the document here where Daliburgh School is described as accessible rural, in fact in terms of Scottish Government classification it is a very remote rural school as are all our schools because they are not within close proximity to a population centre that is 10,000 people or more, so in fact even in our biggest schools they are still classified as that because we don't have that population mass. Under the considerations of factors affecting rural schools, however, they are dealt with all the same regardless of the classification; you have to deal with them in the same way in terms of thinking about viable alternatives to closure, thinking about the likely effects on the local community and the likely effect caused by any difference travelling arrangements, so these have been considered and are outlined there, you are well able to read them for yourselves and I'm sure you have done that. I don't think I will say anything more but I would like to give yourselves an opportunity now.

- Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Ms Mackinnon. Could I say that when the mic comes to you that we give your name first before you speak so its clear for the transcript of the meeting which will be produced very shortly. So I will now open the floor to questions from anyone.
- Ronald Mackinnon If Lionacleite is struggling already, they have teachers in place in Lionacleite. I mean that people that teach in Lionacleite weren't teachers and if there are 6 or 7 going this year where on earth are you going to get the teachers for Lionacleite school in the future?
- Joan Mackinnon Sorry could you repeat that because I didn't quite understand.
- Ronald Mackinnon You were struggling to get proper teachers in Lionacleite already just now and I believe today the Head's going and another 6 I think I am hearing is going to, where are all the teachers going to come from to keep our children in this famous education that you are promising to give them?
- Joan Mackinnon Actually we aren't struggling to find teachers for Lionacleite and unfortunately I suppose for teachers who are waiting and looking for jobs there are many many teachers in Scotland who are unable to secure employment at the moment and for example we recently advertised 2 posts in Barra and we had respectively 17 and 21 applicants.
- Ronald Mackinnon Well my information is that there was somebody teaching in Lionacleite not so long ago and he wasn't even a teacher.
- Joan Mackinnon That simply cannot be true because we cannot employ anybody who is not registered with the GTC so whatever your information anybody who is teaching a class in Lionacleite would have been GTC registered.

Ronald Mackinnon You've got your side of the story. This school. I'm not going to go into the past. This school has suffered for years because they did not have proper teachers in place and I think that is what has happened to our school now, that's why all the children are probably going to go straight to Lionaclete, but the problem is that we didn't have the teachers in place to educate our children.

Joan Mackinnon I would just have to say that Lionaclete school offers a very very good education and in fact out of our 4 senior secondary schools year on year the SQA results at Lionaclete out perform the other schools.

Ronald Mackinnon It's just the promises that you are making just now for the benefits we are going to get at Lionaclete we had the same promises years ago when you shut our primary schools at this end of the Island. We were promised you would have everything in place in Daliburgh school and I'm afraid that didn't happen.

Donald Campbell I just wonder what is going to happen to the primary school here, is it going to be retained or are we going to have a new school, as it seems (inaudible)?

Joan Mackinnon The proposal is that we would proceed to build a new school in Daliburgh and the primary school will indeed be retained here. There will always be primary provision here.

Donald Campbell Primary provision is the school that's in situ going to remain as a primary school or are you building a new school?

Joan Mackinnon We are proposing to build a new school

Donald Campbell Why?

Joan Mackinnon Because that is the express wish of the Parent Body and it is our aspiration.

Donald Campbell Have we had a Public Meeting to this effect?

Joan Mackinnon We have met with parents yes and there have been public meetings as well.

Donald Campbell Fine. Now you give me a good reason why a perfectly adequate primary school should be demolished at considerable cost and a new school be built at considerable cost. We are in an age of financial difficulties as we all know.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Mr Campbell, the purpose of this evening's meeting is to consider the discontinuation of S1/S2 in Daliburgh School. That is the purpose of this evening's meeting.

Donald Campbell Yes I appreciate that and I accept that. I do agree with you that S1/S2 should be closed.

Cllr Catriona Stewart We are proposing, we haven't agreed anything, that is what we are talking about this evening. But as the Director said there have been a number of public meetings in respect of primary education and it is the decision of the parent body that they wish to go ahead with a new school in Daliburgh and that is also the advice that was received from our Technical Services Department, that it was better to built new rather than to refurbish and that is what the parents who currently have children in this school wish to see happen.

Donald Campbell I appreciate what you are saying but I think financially it would be a bit of a disaster.

Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you for your comments Mr Campbell.

- Angus MacDonald My name is Angus MacDonald and as you have said that you are going to try and speed up transport and try and get the kids to Lionacleite in a more direct way. If you are driving a bus up and down these roads with kids and you have got to stop 3 or 4 times with kids not being well in the bus it's not a very pleasant sight as I can assure you and with the way the road is single track you can't compare it to the length of the Nicolson to Ness or to Shawbost or any of these which is first class two way roads. When are we going to expect our roads to be upgraded to a standard as same as the rest of the Islands?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart There are works ongoing throughout Uist and there will be some new roads due by the end, well certainly will be started by next year.
- Angus MacDonald And how much is going to be done? How many miles are still to be done? And how many of them are going to be done?
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Well I don't have the technical figures in front of me at the moment but that can be got to you..
- Ronald Mackinnon Just a wee point, is that that Daliburgh School was actually built in 1954 not 1960s, that's another mistake in your document.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Thank you Mr Mackinnon. Does anybody else wish to ask a question or make a comment. No. Well thank you very much everybody. The Comhairle will review the proposal having regard to the HMIE Report. Written representations that it has received and oral representations made to it by anyone at the public meeting. A Consultation Report will then be prepared. This report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be published in the local newspapers. The report will be available on the Comhairle's website and from Comhairle offices as well as the school free of charge. The Consultation report together with any other relevant documentation will be considered by the Education and Children's Services Committee who will make a recommendation which will then be considered for approval by the Comhairle. Should the Comhairle decide to close the S1/S2 Stage at this stage of the Consultation it is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of the decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and Consultation report in accordance with the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 within 6 working days of the decision being made. Scottish Ministers have a 6 week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call in the proposal. Until the outcome of the 6 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 5pm on 30th June 2010. These should be sent to Mr Malcolm Burr, Chief Executive of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Sandwick Road, Stornoway or electronically to schoolconsultation@cne-siar.gov.uk. That address is also within the proposal document and I just have to, I don't think there us any issues bar the roads that we have to take note of, but I will pass over to Ms McDonald.
- Lesley McDonald It was just to confirm that we would provide details of the length of the scheme I understand which is slightly north of Kildonan but it was just to request to whom we should provide that information, what's the best way to get that information to people. Perhaps if Mr MacDonald wants to give me an email address and I could also send it to the Parent Council, Lochboisdale Community Council, thank you.
- Joan Mackinnon We have an email address for the Parent Council and we can send to them.
- Lesley McDonald I am confident I will be able to get that information tomorrow morning.
- Cllr Catriona Stewart Well thank you very much everybody for turning out to what is such a beautiful evening in South Uist. Thank you for your attendance. Good night.

