

Agenda Item	12.
Report No	CLH 26/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing

Date: 22 August 2018

Report Title: **Statutory Consultation – Altnaharra Primary School**

Report By: Director of Care and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' agreement to conduct a statutory consultation on a proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Altnaharra Primary School.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to agree to proceed to statutory consultation on the proposal attached to this Report.

3. Background

- 3.1 Altnaharra Primary School has been mothballed since February 2017. There are no prospective pupils in the foreseeable future, and no long term prospect of the school having a viable roll.

4. The Proposal

- 4.1 The Council proposes to proceed to statutory consultation for formal closure of Altnaharra Primary School. If approved, the Altnaharra PS catchment area would be divided three ways. The bulk of the catchment would be re-allocated to either Tongue Primary School or Farr Primary School, with a small area being reassigned to the catchment of Lairg Primary.
- 4.2 This proposal is being brought forward following informal consultation with local stakeholders and local Elected Members, and having examined viable alternatives that could be considered.
- 4.3 The Proposal Paper (Appendix A) and other appendices attached to this Report set out the basis of the proposal, including the educational, community and transport implications associated with it.
- 4.4 Subject to a Committee decision to proceed to statutory consultation, a public meeting will be held in Altnaharra to discuss the Council's proposal, and there will be considerable opportunity for stakeholders to submit views to the Council in advance of any final decision being made. At this stage, it is expected the statutory consultation timeline would see a final recommendation being considered by this Committee in May or June of 2019, though this may be subject to change to ensure the Council has sufficient time to consider and respond to matters arising from the consultation.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Resources - These are set out in the table at Appendix D of the attached Proposal Paper.
- 5.2 Legal - the statutory consultation will be taken forward as per the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 5.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - The Equalities impact is assessed at Paragraph 18 of Appendix A. The Proposal is not anticipated as having any effect on poverty issues. The Proposal Paper at Appendix A also gives full consideration to the rural school and community issues.
- 5.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever - The attached report details the implications in relation to school buildings and school transport. It is estimated that in terms of the Council's carbon emissions, the proposal will see a net reduction.
- 5.5 Risk - This will be assessed as part of the statutory consultation process.
- 5.6 Gaelic – None.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 31 July 2018

Authors: Jacquelyn Jennett, Area Care and Learning Manager (North)
Ian Jackson, Education Officer

Background Papers: Proposal Paper and Appendices

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

CARE, LEARNING AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

The proposal is to discontinue the provision of education at Altnaharra Primary School, dividing its catchment area between those of Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

THIS IS A PROPOSAL PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S AGREED PROCEDURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process:

- To discontinue education provision at Altnaharra Primary School. For the avoidance of doubt, it should be assumed that the related Pre-School provision is included within any reference below to a Primary School. In particular, any reference to Altnaharra Primary School should be taken as a reference to both the primary and nursery classes.
- To divide the catchment area between the catchments of Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School. A map of the current Altnaharra Primary School catchment is at **Appendix B**. A map of the proposed new catchments is at **Appendix C**.
- The proposed allocation of part of the Altnaharra PS catchment to the Lairg PS catchment will produce a consequential alteration to the catchment boundary between Farr High School and Golspie High School (in favour of Golspie High).
- The proposed changes, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

The Schools affected by this proposal are therefore:

Altnaharra Primary School

Tongue Primary School

Farr Primary School

Lairg Primary School

Farr High School

Golspie High School

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

This proposal paper will be available for inspection, free of charge, at:

- Tongue Primary School
- Farr High School/Primary School Campus
- Lairg Primary School
- Golspie High School
- The Far North Mobile Library

and published on the Highland Council website:

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

Copies of this Proposal Paper are also available on request from:

Business Support Team
Highland Council
Drummuie
Golspie
KW10 6TA

E-mail: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please also contact the Business Support Team, Highland Council, Drummuie, Golspie, KW10 6TA

Formal notice of the Proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- (i) Parents of pupils attending Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School, Lairg Primary School, Farr High School, and Golspie High School, including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) Staff of each of the schools listed above;
- (iii) The Parent Councils of each of the schools listed above.
- (iv) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
- (v) Trade union representatives;
- (vi) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal;
- (vii) Bòrd na Gàidhlig;
- (viii) Education Scotland;
- (ix) Highland Youth Convener
- (x) Members of the Sutherland Community Planning Partnership

Advertisement in Local Media

A notice announcing the public meeting will be placed in the *Northern Times* and on the Highland Council's Facebook page.

Consultation Period

The consultation for this Proposal will run from Monday 27 August 2018 and will end on Friday 26 October 2018. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held, the details of which are set out below:

Altnaharra Primary School, 6.30pm on 10 October 2018

Anyone wishing to attend the public meeting is invited to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Council, will be chaired by a senior elected councillor, and will be addressed by officers of the Care and Learning Service.

The meeting will be an opportunity for the public to hear more about the proposal; to ask questions about the proposal; and to have the views of all stakeholders recorded so that they can be taken into account. A note will be taken at the meeting of questions asked and views expressed. This note will be published on the Council's website. The meeting will also be recorded.

The note will be forwarded to Education Scotland, along with other submissions and comments received by the Council during the consultation process.

Meetings with Pupils and Staff

School staff will arrange to discuss the proposal with pupils (who are considered to be of a suitable age and maturity) in the affected schools. A record of questions, responses and views will be taken and this will be published in the Consultation Report.

Responses to the Proposals

Interested parties are invited to respond to the Proposal by making written or electronic submissions to:

Jacquelyn Jennett
Area Care and Learning Manager (North)
Drummuie
Golspie
KW10 6TA
Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

Or via an online form, a link to which can be found on:

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

When responding, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “pupil”, “parent”, “carer”, “relative”, “former pupil”, “teacher in school”, “member of the community” etc. However it is not compulsory to do so.

Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically should know that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may have to be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish their response to be made publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: “I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Councillors and Council Officers of Highland Council”. Otherwise, it will be assumed that the person making the response agrees to it being made publicly available. All written responses must be received by the last day of the consultation period, Friday 26 October 2018 at 5.00pm.

Involvement of Education Scotland

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will also be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 12 November 2018, a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period. Education Scotland will also receive the summary note of the public meeting that will be held and so far as is practicable a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal not later than 30 November 2018. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries of people there as they consider appropriate.

Review of Consultation Exercise

Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meeting. It will then prepare a Consultation Report. This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website as well as at the affected school and local library, free of charge. The Report will include a summary of the written and oral representations made during consultation and a copy of the Education Scotland Report, together with the Council’s considered response to the issues raised. The Report will include details of details of any alleged inaccuracies and/or omissions and how these have been handled. The Consultation Report will be published at least 3 weeks prior to being submitted to the Council’s Care, Learning and Housing Committee, who will make a recommendation to the full Highland Council.

In publishing the report the Council will invite any person or party to make further representations to the Committee prior to its meeting. A notice to this effect will also be published on the Highland Council website.

At the present time the Council intends to publish its Report in January 2019, prior to submission to the Council’s Care, Learning and Housing Committee in the spring of 2019. However, this timescale may change depending on the nature of issues

raised during consultation, and the need to give full consideration to those issues. In the latter event, the Report may not be submitted until a later Committee meeting.

Any proposal approved by the Care, Learning and Housing Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

Note on Corrections

If any inaccuracy or omission is discovered in this Proposal paper, either by the Council or any other person, the Council will determine if relevant information has been omitted or, if the paper contains an inaccuracy. The Council will then take appropriate action, which may include the issue of a correction or the reissuing of the Proposal or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period, if appropriate. In that event, relevant consultees and HMI will be advised.

PROPOSAL

Legislative Background

- 1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (S.3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).
- 1.2 Altnaharra Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the special regard required for rural school closures. The Council has considered the school roll projections for Altnaharra Primary (see Section 4 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 5 and 6 below); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 16 below) and to the impact of differing travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Altnaharra catchment (Section 14 below). The single pupil currently within the catchment attends Tongue Primary.

Reason for the Proposal

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
 - No children have attended Altnaharra Primary School since the school was mothballed in February 2017;
 - There is currently one child in the catchment who is within the P1-7 age group, who presently attends Tongue Primary School;
 - Current population figures within the school catchment indicate there are no pupils in the pre-school age group;
 - Based on the above, there will be no pupils in the school until at least August 2023, and possibly beyond;
 - The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below.

Examination of Alternatives

- 3.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternatives to closure. The alternatives to closure would be:
 - to re-open Altnaharra Primary School, either with its current catchment area or an extended catchment area, or;
 - to continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement.
- 3.2 In considering the re-opening of the school, the Council has investigated the long-term roll projections (see Section 4 below).

- 3.3 Were Altnaharra Primary to be re-opened, it would be under an arrangement where the school was managed as part of a “cluster” with other schools within the ASG. However, alternative management arrangements would not address the wider population issues within the Altnaharra catchment.
- 3.4 There has been no rise to the school age population of Altnaharra since the school was mothballed in 2017, and no rise is projected. Present indications are that there will be no pupils for the school until at least August 2023, with no guarantee of any pupils thereafter.
- 3.5 The current proposal follows informal discussions between Highland Council officials; local elected members and local parents and residents. A meeting with local parents and residents was held in Altnaharra Primary on 23 May. The proposal has also been discussed by Bettyhill, Altnaharra and Strathnaver Community Council.
- 3.6 In the event of a school closure being approved, consideration is required on the most appropriate way to re-zone the Altnaharra catchment. Further discussion on this can be found at Section 13 below.
- 3.7 The detail of the Council’s consideration of the alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and its appendices.

Re-Opening of Altnaharra Primary School with Current Catchment Area

- 4.1 For the 2018-19 school session, there is a single pupil of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school, with no pupils of nursery age. At present there are no children of pre-nursery age within the catchment.
- 4.2 Discussions that took place during the pre-consultation exercise suggest that the single current pupil would not return to Altnaharra PS even were the school to re-open.
- 4.3 We do not anticipate any pupils for the school in the foreseeable future. Even if a family did arrive in future years, it is very unlikely Altnaharra Primary would ever be anything other than a single teacher school with a total roll in single figures. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching, particularly in terms of the requirements of the current curriculum. Further detail is provided at Section 12 below.
- 4.4 If the school were to re-open, any potential pupils would have shorter journey times to school than they do at present. Further details on travel journeys to school are provided at Sections 13 and 14 below.

Re-Opening of Altnaharra Primary School with Expanded Catchment Area

- 5.1 The catchment area for Altnaharra PS abuts those of five other schools although the local road links connect directly to only 3 of these – Farr PS, Tongue PS and Lairg PS. All three are themselves rural schools. Farr

Primary is expected to have a P1-7 roll of 27 in August 2018, and to see a rising roll thereafter. The roll at Tongue Primary is projected to be 19 in August 2018, and to see a gentle rise in the longer term.

- 5.2 The roll at Lairg Primary is expected to be 58 in August 2018 and to remain broadly stable for the foreseeable future.
- 5.3 The area is sparsely populated and the Altnaharra PS catchment could only be meaningfully extended by bringing the catchment boundaries very close to the villages of Tongue, Bettyhill or Lairg, which would create unfair travel burdens on the children from those communities. Any modest extension of the catchment would increase travel distances for the affected pupils without increasing the roll at Altnaharra to a viable number.
- 5.4 Analysis of the past pattern of placing requests in the area has suggested a tendency for parents in the existing Altnaharra catchment to place their children in other schools (see section 7.4 below for information on placing requests up to the time Altnaharra PS was mothballed).

Continuation of “Mothballing”

- 6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that that would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community. As set out above, there does not appear to be a realistic prospect of the roll at Altnaharra returning to a viable number. “Mothballing” would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school.
- 6.2 Scottish Government guidance relating to the mothballing of schools makes it clear that mothballing is a temporary measure and should not be used to undermine the requirements to undertake a statutory school closure consultation.
- 6.3 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.
- 6.4 Initial discussion with the community suggests the community would be interested in taking over the school building. A continuation of mothballing would prevent this from happening.

Current Details – Altnaharra Primary School

- 7.1 The school is situated in the village of Altnaharra, Sutherland. Prior to mothballing it was a very small, single teacher rural school, which is housed in a building dating back to 1963. There is one classroom used for primary children and one room which was available as a nursery. There were not always nursery age children and on those years the Nursery room was used for snack time and lunch time as well as for Art, Music and P.E.

The catchment area stretches from Crask in the south, to Loch Loyal and Naver Forest in the north.

The school has been mothballed since February 2017, when the school roll fell to 1, and the sole pupil transferred to Tongue Primary School.

- 7.2 The school has a permanent capacity of 25.
- 7.3 The Highland Council assesses all of its schools for Suitability and Condition, in line with the Scottish Government's School Estate Management guidelines. Schools are assessed on a scale with the ratings "A" (good) "B" (satisfactory), "C" (poor) and "D" (bad). Altnaharra Primary School is currently rated as "B" for educational suitability of the building and "C" for building condition.
- 7.4 During the school sessions 2014-15 to 2017-18 there were no placing requests to join Altnaharra Primary, and 3 placing requests to leave.
- 7.5 Were the school to re-open with the roll figures indicated, the staffing entitlements, as per the Council's Devolved School Management policy, would be as follows;

Associate (Cluster) Head Teacher – shared with Farr High, Farr Primary,
Tongue Primary and Melvich Primary

Unpromoted Teachers – 1.00 FTE

Class Contact Time Teacher – 0.1FTE

Clerical Assistant – 0.42FTE

In addition ASN teaching and non-teaching staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.

- 7.6 Altnaharra Primary did operate a school kitchen in the past but use of this had ceased prior to the school being mothballed. There has been no school meals provision at the school for a number of years.
- 7.7 During 2016-17, the last year the school was operational, CO₂ emissions from the Altnaharra Primary School building were 2.43 tonnes.

Current Details – Tongue Primary

- 8.1 Tongue Primary School is set in the village of the same name, in the north of Sutherland. The school was built in 1966 and consists of three classrooms (an infant room, an upper primary room and a General Purpose Room) an office, staff room, cloakrooms, canteen and kitchen.
- 8.2 Tongue Primary is managed as part of the 3-18 Campus for the Farr Associated School Group, along with Melvich and Farr Primary Schools and Farr High School. As such, pupils are able to access a range of experiences and receive specialist teaching input from a number of staff. While part of the cluster, Tongue Primary School continues to maintain its own unique identity and is a core part of the local community. The School consists of 3

classrooms, 1 nursery room, a room used for toddlers, 1 library/ music room, one gym hall, one small meeting room, one medical room, and a staffroom. There is an extensive playground.

- 8.3 For the 2018-19 school session, the school is expected to have 19 pupils.
- 8.4 Pre-school education and childcare is provided by a partner centre managed by the Care and Learning Alliance (CALA). 9 children are enrolled in the partner centre nursery for session 2018-19
- 8.5 Projections suggest the school roll will rise to 27 by 2022/23, and will stabilise thereafter. The projected rise in roll is however heavily dependent upon a continuing baseline of 3 nursery pupils per year group (2017 figures) flowing into the primary school, which is actually known to fluctuate at this school. The small amount of house building in this area cumulates to give a slightly increasing roll in the short to mid-term. It should also be noted that roll forecasts become less and less certain the further into the future they are projected. Longer term projections are given below:

2019-20 - 17
 2020-21 - 20
 2021-22 - 23
 2022-23 - 27
 2023-24 - 27
 2024-25 - 28
 2025-26 - 28
 2026-27 - 28
 2027-28 - 28
 2028-29 - 29
 2029-30 - 28
 2030-31 - 28
 2031-32 - 28
 2032-33 - 28

- 8.6 During the last 5 school sessions (2014-15 to 2018-19) there has been 1 placing request to join Tongue Primary, and no placing requests to leave.
- 8.7 The school has a permanent capacity of 50. The projected August 2018 roll of 19 pupils would therefore represent 38% use of capacity.
- 8.8 Tongue Primary is currently assessed as “B” for building Suitability and “C” for building Condition.
- 8.9 The number of pupils at the school entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.
- 8.10 The 2018-19 staffing arrangements are as follows:

Cluster Head Teacher – shared with Farr High, Farr Primary and Melvich Primary

Principal Teacher – 1.00FTE
 Class Teacher – 1.00FTE
 Class Contact Time/Management Time Teachers – 0.3 FTE
 Clerical Assistant – 0.5FTE

In addition, ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are allocated to the school on an annual basis, according to assessed need.

- 8.11 Tongue Primary has a production kitchen producing approx. 17/20 primary/nursery meals per day with 2 catering staff members, one cook and an hour per week paid to the school secretary for completion of financial returns.
- 8.12 CO₂ emissions from the Tongue Primary School building for 2017/18 were 20.45 tonnes. Implementing the closure proposal would not alter this figure.
- 8.13 There are presently 2 school transport routes to Tongue Primary. Nine pupils are scheduled to receive school transport from the anticipated 2018-19 roll of 19, approximately 47% of the pupil population.
- 8.14 The closure of Altnaharra Primary would not be expected to cause any adverse effects to Tongue Primary. Rather it could be argued that closing Altnaharra Primary would to a certain extent help maintain the current school roll at Tongue, which is itself a small rural school.

Current Details – Farr Primary

- 9.1 Farr Primary School & Nursery is located within the village of Bettyhill, in north Sutherland. The school comprises 1 pre-school nursery class and two primary classrooms. Pupils and staff have access to the school gymnasium, lunch hall, music room, an ICT suite, an extensive playing field, all weather pitch, trim trail and school garden, all of which are extremely valuable resources which help aid and support the teaching and learning for pupils.
- 9.2 The primary school shares a campus with Farr High School. This enhances opportunities, knowledge and resources for all staff & pupils. Children can join the nursery at 3 years of age and complete their primary and secondary education on the same site.
- 9.3 Farr is part of the 3-18 Campus, along with Tongue and Melvich Primary Schools and Farr High School. As such, pupils are able to access a range of experiences and receive specialist teaching input from a number of specialist staff. While part of the cluster, Farr Primary School continues to maintain its own unique identity and is a core part of the local community.
- 9.4 For the 2018-19 school session, the school is expected to have 27 pupils in 2 classes. 7 children are enrolled in the nursery class for session 2018-19.
- 9.5 Projections suggest the school roll will rise to 49 by 2024/25, and will stabilise thereafter. The projected rise in roll is however heavily dependent upon a

continuing baseline of 5 nursery pupils per year group (2017 figures) flowing into the primary school, though the annual intake does appear to be quite constant at this school. A small amount of placing request pupils and the predicted house building rate (up to 40 homes over 15 years) combine to give an increasing roll. It should also be noted that roll forecasts become less and less certain the further into the future they are projected. Longer term projections are given below:

2019-20 - 33
 2020-21 - 36
 2021-22 - 39
 2022-23 - 40
 2023-24 - 43
 2024-25 - 49
 2025-26 - 49
 2026-27 - 49
 2027-28 - 49
 2028-29 - 49
 2029-30 - 49
 2030-31 - 49
 2031-32 - 49
 2032-33 - 50

- 9.6 During the last 5 school sessions (2010-10 to 2018-19) there have been 6 placing requests to join Farr Primary, and 1 placing request to leave.
- 9.7 The school has a permanent capacity of 46. The projected August 2016 roll of 27 pupils would therefore represent 58% use of capacity.
- 9.8 Farr Primary is currently assessed as “C for building Suitability and “C” for building Condition.
- 9.9 The number of pupils at the school entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.
- 9.10 The 2018-19 staffing arrangements are as follows:

Head Teacher - shared with Farr High, Tongue Primary and Melvich Primary

Principal Teacher – 1.00FTE

Unpromoted Teachers – 1.00FTE

Class Contact Time/Management Time Teachers – 0.4FTE

Clerical Assistant – 0.45FTE

Playground Supervisor – 0.14FTE

Early Years Practitioners – 1.18 FTE

In addition, ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are currently allocated annually to the school, according to assessed levels of need.

- 9.11 Pupils at Farr Primary use the dining facilities at Farr High. Approximately 20 primary/nursery meals are served per day, There are 3 catering staff at Farr High.
- 9.12 CO₂ emissions from the Farr Primary School building for 2017-18 were just over 35 tonnes. Implementing the proposal would not alter this figure.
- 9.13 As Farr Primary is co-located with Farr High, transport to the school is provided as part of transport to Farr High. Five pupils are scheduled to receive school transport to the primary school during 2018-19, 18% of the school roll.
- 9.14 The closure of Altnaharra Primary would not be expected to cause any adverse effects to Farr Primary. Enlarging the school's catchment would not provide any additional pupils to Farr PS at present, but offers at least the prospect of helping to maintain future pupil numbers at Farr Primary.

Current Details – Lairg Primary

- 10.1 Lairg Primary is located in the middle of the village of the same name. The school building at one time included a secondary department, but now the whole building is devoted to primary education. Currently there are two classrooms used for primary classes and one room used for Nursery. A GP room is available for assemblies, Art and Music. One classroom is used as an area base for Support for Learning.
- 10.2 The school has the facilities to cook dinners on premises and has a separate canteen. This building also has a gym where children undertake P.E. and sports. Concerts are also held in the Gym as the room contains a stage. There is a large playing field and a further large open playground space.
- 10.3 The school is linked with Rosehall Primary School, with which it shares a Cluster Head Teacher. The Head Teacher usually spends three days in Lairg and two days in Rosehall. The cluster has a Principal Teacher who is based at Rosehall Primary for much of the week.
- 10.4 For the 2018-19 school session, the school is expected to have 58 pupils in three classes. 14 children are enrolled in the nursery class for session 2018-19.
- 10.5 Projections suggest the school roll will fall to 49 by 2024/25, and will stabilise thereafter before an increase in the roll from 2031/32. A slight drop in average year group size at nursery level, combined with a negative placing request flow, produce a decreasing future school roll, which is not fully countered by the minimal new housing build rate. It should also be noted that roll forecasts become less and less certain the further into the future they are projected. Longer term projections are given below:

2019-20 - 57

2020-21 - 60

2021-22 - 54
2022-23 - 53
2023-24 - 52
2024-25 - 49
2025-26 - 49
2026-27 - 49
2027-28 - 49
2028-29 - 49
2029-30 - 49
2030-31 - 49
2031-32 - 56
2032-33 - 56

- 10.6 During the last 5 school sessions (2010-10 to 2018-19) there have been 4 placing requests to join Lairg Primary School, and 16 placing requests to leave.
- 10.7 The school has a permanent capacity of 75. The projected August 2018 roll of 58 pupils would therefore represent 77% use of capacity.
- 10.8 Lairg Primary is currently assessed as “B” for building Suitability and “C” for building Condition.
- 10.9 The number of pupils at the school entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.
- 10.10 The 2018-19 staffing arrangements are as follows:
- Cluster Head Teacher – shared with Rosehall Primary
Unpromoted Teachers – 3.00FTE
Class Contact Time/Management Time Teachers – 0.3FTE
Clerical Assistant – 0.65FTE
Playground Supervisor – 0.11 FTE
Early Years Practitioners – 1.16 FTE
- In addition, ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are allocated annually to the school, according to assessed levels of need.
- 10.11 Lairg Primary has a production kitchen producing approximately 40 primary/nursery meals per day. There are 2 catering staff.
- 10.12 CO₂ emissions from the Lairg Primary School building for 2017/18 were 6.46 tonnes. Implementing this proposal would not alter this figure.
- 10.13 There are presently 4 school transport routes to Lairg Primary, scheduled to carry 24 pupils during session 2018-19. This represents approximately 41% of the total school roll.
- 10.14 The proposal is not expected to cause any adverse effects for Lairg Primary.

Farr and Golspie High Schools

- 11.1 The proposed transfer of Crask to the Lairg PS catchment would mean that property, and associated house, would transfer from the Farr High School to the Golspie High School catchment. There are currently no children at this location.
- 11.2 Farr High School is a small secondary school (78 pupils for session 2017-18) located in Bettyhill on the north coast of Sutherland. Roll projections suggest a fluctuating picture but an overall long term rise. The average year size coming through from the primary schools is expected to continue at current levels, but the combined build rate and positive placing request value contribute to a significant increase in roll over 15 years. It should be noted that roll forecasts become less and less certain the further into the future they are projected. Longer term projections are given below:
- 2019-20 - 88
 2020-21 - 83
 2021-22 - 75
 2022-23 - 79
 2023-24 - 77
 2024-25 - 77
 2025-26 - 82
 2026-27 - 94
 2027-28 - 101
 2028-29 - 101
 2029-30 - 107
 2030-31 - 111
 2031-32 - 111
 2032-33 - 111
- 11.3 During the last 5 school sessions (2014-15 to 2018-19) there have been 21 placing requests to join Farr High School, and 5 placing requests to leave.
- 11.4 Farr High is rated “C” for building Condition and “C” for building Suitability. CO₂ equivalent emissions from the Farr High School building for 2017/18 were just under 60 tonnes. Implementing this proposal would not alter this figure.
- 11.5 Golspie High School has a 2017-18 roll of 243. The school roll is projected to be 228 in session 2018-19 and to continue to fall in the longer term. The average year group moving up from the primary schools is expected to continue at a similar level. Some additional pupils are expected to arrive from new housing, but historically the school has had a high negative placing request value, and if this continues the school roll will diminish significantly over the long term. It should be noted that roll forecasts become less and less certain the further into the future they are projected. Longer term projections are given below:

2019-20 - 226
 2020-21 - 225
 2021-22 - 234
 2022-23 - 236
 2023-24 - 220
 2024-25 - 222
 2025-26 - 210
 2026-27 - 203
 2027-28 - 196
 2028-29 - 192
 2029-30 - 193
 2030/31 - 191
 2031/32 - 193
 2032/33 - 193

- 11.6 Golspie High is rated “C” for building Suitability and “C” for building Condition. CO₂ emissions from the Golspie High School building during 2017-18 were just over 172 tonnes. Implementing this proposal would not alter this figure.
- 11.7 During the last 5 school sessions (2014-15 to 2018-19) there have been 3 placing requests to join Golspie High School, and 50 placing requests to leave.

Educational Benefits

- 12.1 Highland Council is of the view that the school environment should be of a quality that sustains and improves education provision, pupil performance and outcomes for the young people of Highland.
- 12.2 With the above aim in mind, Highland Council has adopted the above indicators in reviewing its school estate:
1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
 2. Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
 3. Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.
 4. Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
 5. Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary) although it is recognised that this may not always be possible in a rural Council area such as Highland.
 6. School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
 7. School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
 8. Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.

9. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
10. The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
11. Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built up community.

- 12.3 It is Highland Council's view that the pupil from the Altnaharra catchment derives educational benefit from their current attendance at Tongue Primary School, and that this would also apply to any pupils from the catchment who in future might attend either Lairg or Farr Primary. Formalising the current arrangements would provide a number of educational benefits, judged against the Highland criteria set out above, and in particular those at points, 2, 3, 4 and 9.
- 12.4 Pupils at Tongue, Farr and Lairg Primary Schools regularly work in co-operative learning groups of various sizes, with mixed ages and abilities.
- 12.5 Since there are currently no children envisaged for Altnaharra Primary, and therefore comparison of educational benefit would be on a hypothetical scenario in which the school re-opened with a very small number of pupils of varying ages. Any learning groups would not only be limited in size but also static, since there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. The variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups would also be limited, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
- 12.5 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.
- 12.6 It is self-evident that a very small school roll of pupils at varying ages, such as could be imagined for a re-opened Altnaharra Primary, restricts opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. This applies even to individual sports, where successful learning of skills is helped by talking and sharing of experiences. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices. Whilst these problems can be overcome by taking the pupils to participate in activities in neighbouring schools, that in itself involves time out of school in travelling.
- 12.8 As with sports, the larger rolls at Tongue, Farr and Lairg Primaries provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of creative and artistic opportunities, such as for drama and in choirs. Pupils in the larger schools can participate in regional and national Mod competitions. School

shows, plays and public performances are events that that are much more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers.

- 12.9 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form and reform. These features are much harder to achieve the material well-being of children where there are only 2 or 3 children in a school, let alone when there is just one child.

Catchment Areas

- 13.1 The single primary age pupil currently living with the Altnaharra catchment attends Tongue PS. The Council has held discussions with local residents on the best division of the Altnaharra PS catchment following any decision to close the school. Based on the size, geography, spread of population, and distance from neighbouring schools, the Council's proposal is to re-align the catchment of Altnaharra PS between the Tongue, Farr and Lairg catchments. In making this proposal, the Council have given considerable weight to the views of the local community, (who suggested this split during pre-consultation). We have also given consideration to relative travel distances and times between the various communities within the current catchment.
- 13.2 The distances and travel times from Altnaharra Primary itself to the neighbouring schools is given below:
- Altnaharra PS – Tongue PS – 16 miles – 28 minutes
 Altnaharra PS – Farr PS – 24 miles – 50 minutes
 Altnaharra PS – Lairg PS – 21 miles – 33 minutes.
- 13.3 In the event that Altnaharra PS is closed, the community of Altnaharra itself should be re-zoned to the catchment of Tongue PS.
- 13.4 Crask, at the south end of the Altnaharra catchment, is however closer to Lairg (16 miles/28 minutes) than it is to either Tongue PS (24 miles/40 minutes, or Farr Primary School (32 miles/61 minutes). It seems clear therefore, that if Altnaharra Primary closes, Crask should be re-zoned to the Lairg Primary School catchment. This would mean that any secondary school pupils from the area around Crask would attend Golspie High School, rather than Farr High School as at present. The distance and travel time between Crask and Golspie High are 31 miles and 45 minutes, significantly less than the travel time to Farr High.
- 13.5 In order to implement the above, the northern boundary of the redrawn Lairg PS catchment would mirror the northern boundary of the Lairg Community Council area.

- 13.6 A third part of the Altnaharra catchment, encompassing Loch Naver and part of Strathnaver, has road links that are better aligned with Bettyhill than with Tongue. It would be appropriate to rezone this area to the Farr PS catchment, in the event of a decision to close Altnaharra PS.
- 13.7 A map of the proposed new catchments is at **Appendix C**. A close-up of the new boundaries around Altnaharra Village is at **Appendix Ci**, whilst a close-up of the new Lairg boundary, around the area of Crask, is at **Appendix Cii**.
- 13.8 The proposed split of the catchment would have no effect on current pupils within the catchment.

Effects on School Transport

- 14.1 The single pupil within the Altnaharra catchment qualifies for school transport to Tongue Primary School. Based on current prices and 190 days in the school year, the annual cost is £7,030. Were Altnaharra Primary School to re-open, the pupil would qualify for school transport at a lower annual cost of £1140, producing a saving to the school transport budget of £5890. This saving would of course need to be balanced against the additional staffing and other costs that would arise from re-opening Altnaharra Primary. These are set out in more detail in **Appendix D** – see section 17 below.
- 14.2 The journey time from the pupil's home to Tongue Primary School is approximately 33 minutes, compared to less than 10 minutes to Altnaharra Primary.
- 14.3 It is difficult to provide an accurate figure for the additional emissions generated by the extra transport required to allow the one current pupil to attend Tongue Primary School. Given the distance involved and type of vehicle used, our best estimate is that the transport from Altnaharra to Tongue Primary generates about 1.6 tonnes per annum of CO₂ emissions. The figures can however only be estimates as emissions are affected by the speed at which vehicles are driven and the type of road travelled.
- 14.4 The additional emissions set out above must be set against the estimated 2.5 tonnes annually of CO₂ emissions from a re-opened school.
- 14.5 The Altnaharra to Tongue road can be affected by winter weather, but over the last few years disruption has been limited. The contractor taking pupils to Farr High School advises that pupils have sometimes been late for school due to adverse road conditions, but that no full days have been lost.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 15.1 As Altnaharra Primary has been mothballed since February 2017, there will be no impact on staff and school management arrangements from a formal closure of the school.

- 15.2 A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements at any of the other affected schools.

Effect on the Local Community

- 16.1 In the event of the merger proceeding, and subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community to see whether the current school building could be turned over to community use. Any such proposal would be progressed within the terms of the Council's current asset management policy.
- 16.2 Past analyses of rural locations in Highland that have experienced school closures has established no clear relationship between school closures and population patterns.

Financial Consequences

- 17.1 The Table at **Appendix D** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger. The table suggest that re-opening Altnaharra Primary would result in an overall annual cost to the authority of over just under £75,000.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 18.1 The proposal has been assessed as having no impact on the following Equality areas:
- Gender
 - Gender reassignment
 - Pregnancy or Maternity
 - Marriage/Civil Partnership
 - Race
 - Religion or Belief
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Looked After Children
 - Young Carers
 - Children and Young People Living in Deprivation
- 18.2 In respect of age equality, the proposal is for the closure of a primary school, and as such potentially affects children in the 3-12 age group and their parents. The proposal is advanced on the basis of educational benefit to children in the area concerned. No negative age related effects arise. Age is not a protected characteristic for the purposes of schools provision.

Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 19.1 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the length of journey from the Altnaharra catchment to the alternative schools, details of

which are provided above. However, as the school has been mothballed since February 2017, the single current pupil is already making the journey to Tongue PS on a daily basis. The population in this area is accustomed to making long journeys to access things that people in urban areas take for granted.

- 19.2 Funded school transport will be provided to P1-7 pupils from the Altnaharra catchment to whichever school catchment their home address is re-assigned to.
- 19.3 Although funded transport is not provided for nursery age children, there are currently no children in this age group within the Altnaharra catchment.
- 19.4 In overall terms, the adverse effects arising from the additional travelling time for pupils must be balanced against the educational benefits that will arise for pupils set out at section 12 above.

Recommendation

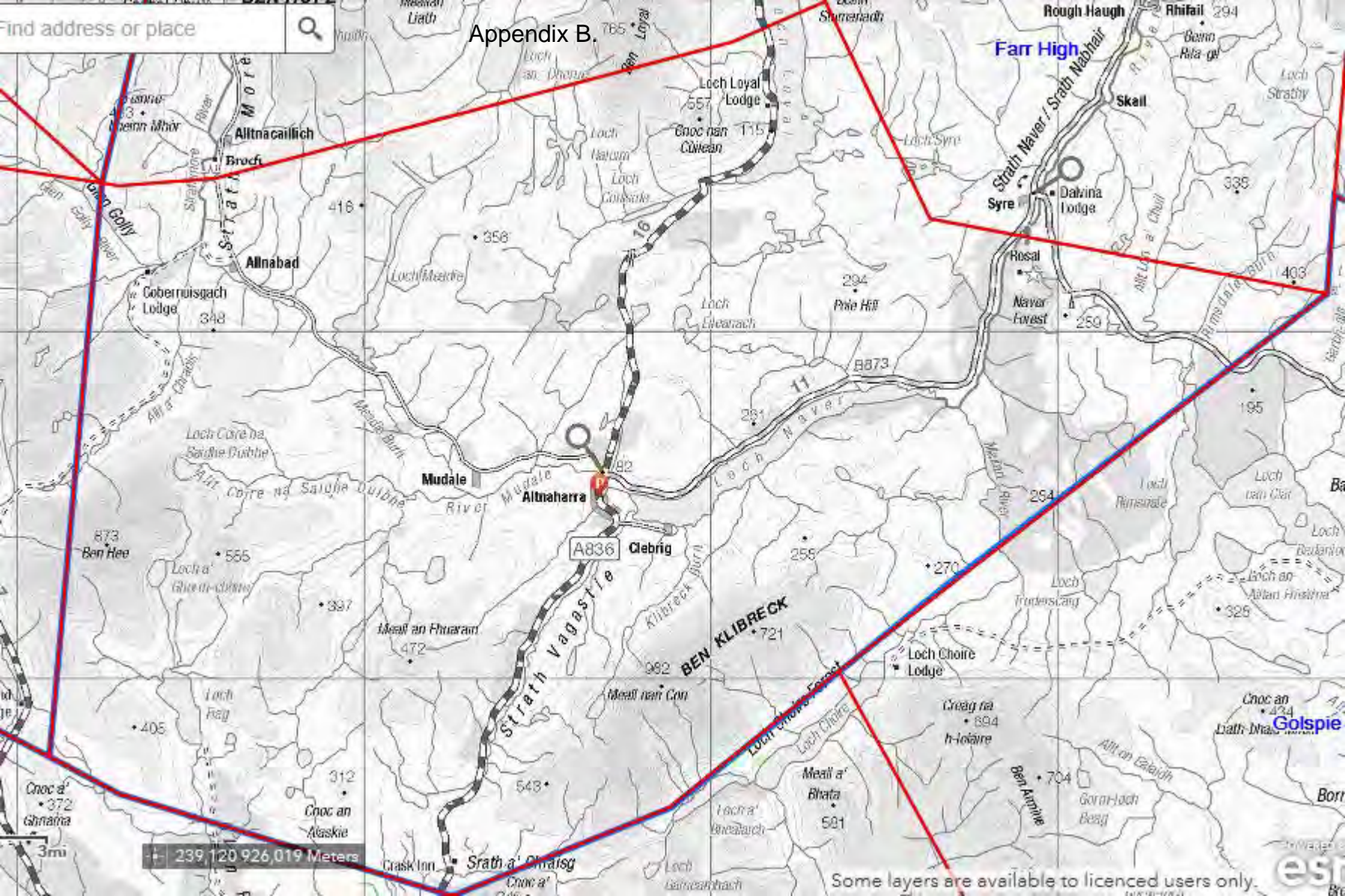
- 20.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Altnaharra Primary School, currently “mothballed,” is closed. The Council further proposes that the current Altnaharra Primary School catchment is divided between those of Tongue Primary, Farr Primary and Lairg Primary, as shown on the map at **Appendix C**.
- 20.2 This consultation paper is issued in terms of the authority’s procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee of Highland Council.

END OF PROPOSAL PAPER

Find address or place



Appendix B.

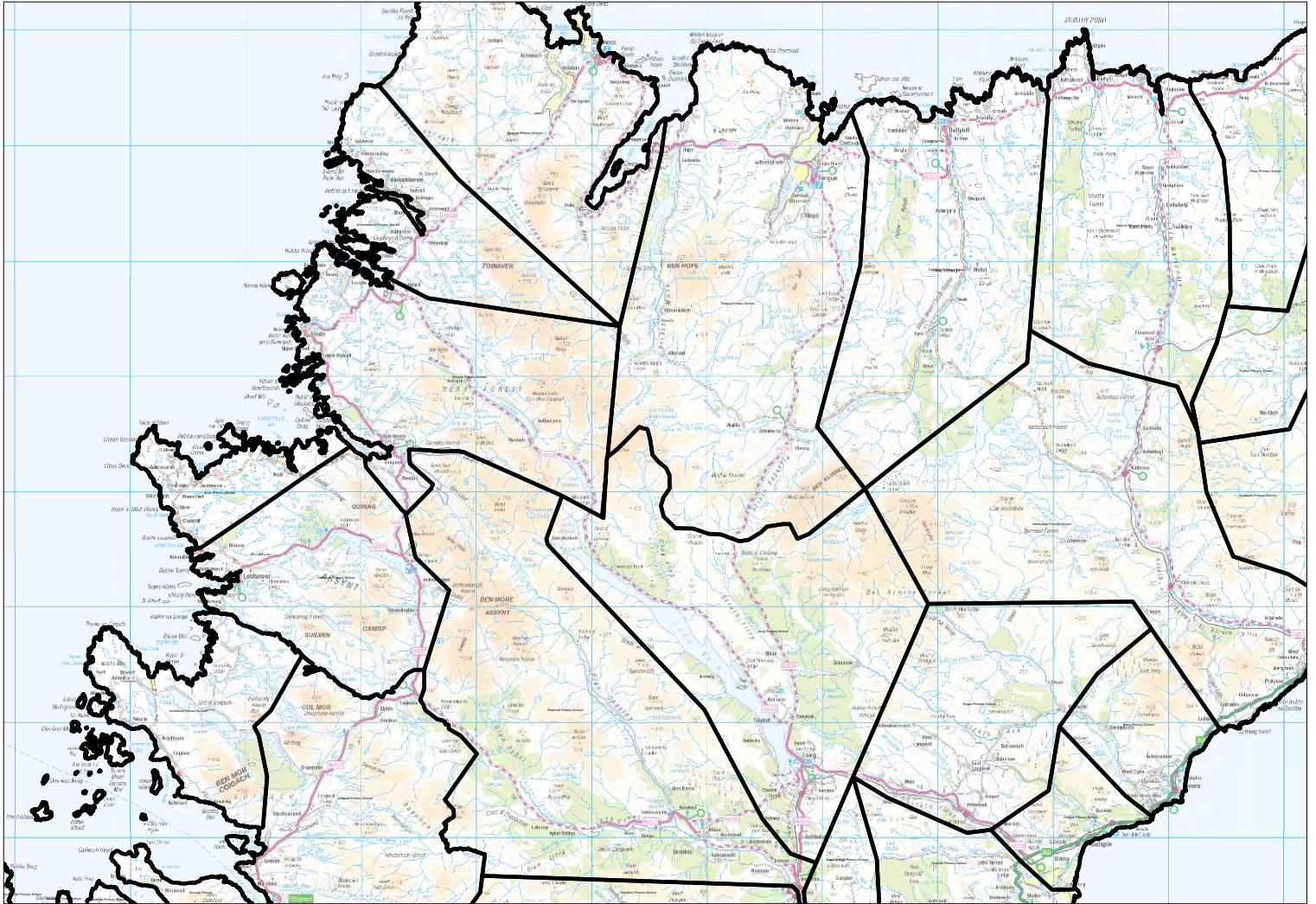


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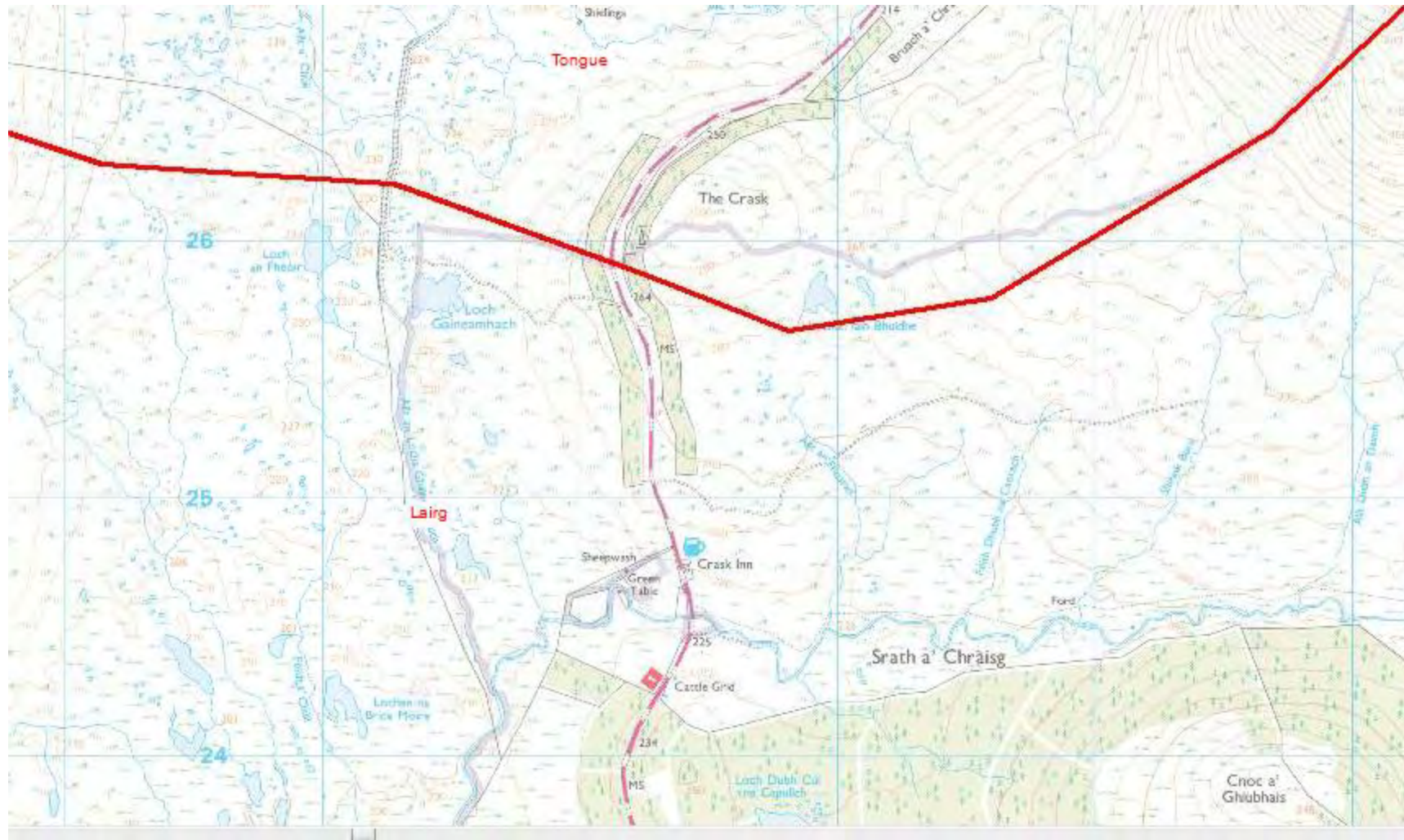
Primary Catchments Excluding Altnaharra



Close up view of catchment border near Altnaharra and Clebrig



Closeup view of Crask and Lairg catchment border



Appendix D.

Financial Template - Altnaharra PS closure

Forecast revenue costs for Altnaharra PS	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
	Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)	Additional financial impact on receiving schools	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 1)
ALTNAHARRA PRIMARY SCHOOL			
School costs			
<i>Employee costs:</i>			
teaching staff	60,846		-60,846
support staff	8,481		-8,481
teaching staff training (CPD etc)	257		-257
support staff training			0
Supply costs	2,233		-2,233
<i>Building costs:</i>			
property insurance	113		-113
non domestic rates			0
water & sewerage charges	860		-860
energy costs	2,585		-2,585
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	1,582		-1,582
building repair & maintenance	94		-94
grounds maintenance			0
facilities management costs	1,582		-1,582
revenue costs arising from capital			0
other			0
<i>School operational costs:</i>			
learning materials	1,395		-1,395
catering (contract or inhouse)	437		-437
SQA costs	0	0	0
other school operational costs (e.g. licences)			0
<i>Transport costs:</i>			
home to school	1,140	7,030	5,890
other pupil transport costs			0
staff travel	140		-140
SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL	81,745	7,030	-74,715
<i>Income:</i>			
Sale of meals			
Lets			
External care provider			
Other			
SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL	0	0	0
TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL	81,745	7,030	-74,715
UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	81,745	7,030	-74,715

Note: As Altnaharra PS is currently mothballed the costs in column 1 of table 1 above reflect the estimated costs of running the school if it were to reopen. As the school is currently mothballed these savings are already being realised.

Table 2

Capital costs	School proposed for closure	Receiving school
Capital Life Cycle cost		
Third party contributions to capital costs		

Table 3

Annual Property costs incurred (moth-balling) until disposal	
property insurance	113
non domestic rates	0
water & sewerage charges	832
energy costs	1009
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	0
security costs	0
building repair & maintenance	0
grounds maintenance	0
facilities management costs	0
other	0
TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL	1954

Table 4

Non-recurring revenue costs	
none	0
TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS	0

Table 5

Impact on GAE	
none	0
GAE IMPACT	