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| Agenda Item | 6. |
| Report No | CLH 58/18 |

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing Committee

Date: 6 December 2018

Report Title: **Strontian Primary School Project**

Report By: Head of Resources

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following the completion of the new community led Strontian Primary School building project, this report provides some background to the project, with there being an accompanying presentation to the Committee by representatives of the community (Strontian Community School Building Limited - SCSBL), on this unique community development.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note this report, and to commend the work of the local community, and Strontian Community School Building Limited, in delivering this unique community led project.

3. Background

- 3.1 This Committee and its predecessors have received reports on progress with the new Strontian Primary School. Following the completion of the building, and occupation by the Council at the end of October 2018, this report and the accompanying presentation provide an opportunity for members to hear directly from the community who developed the project, and to commend their work in taking forward this unique example of delivering this community asset.
- 3.2 By way of background, the origins of this project date back to 2012/2013, and the Council undertaking informal engagement with the community on options to improve the condition of the existing Strontian Primary school building. The existing school building, with a school roll of circa 35 at that time, had a number of condition and suitability issues, with limited scope to what improvements could be achieved on the existing school site.
- 3.3 Options considered at that time included remaining within the existing building with improvements made, through to potential co-location within Ardnamurchan High School. Through a number of discussions, there was not an emerging solution which was supported by both the community and the Council.
- 3.4 Arising from further discussions, the Council commenced a Statutory Consultation to re-locate the existing Primary School to a new build adjacent to Ardnamurchan High School. The Council's proposed scope and size of the proposed new building did not however meet the expectations of the community, and from that situation came a unique proposal developed by the local community, with the support of the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT).
- 3.5 The community proposed to fund, develop and own a new building adjacent to the High School, with that then leased to the Council for the purpose of a new building for Strontian Primary School.
- 3.6 The outline of the design and layout of the building was based around a traditional terraced housing model, as a means of simplifying design, containing cost, and also providing flexibility around future use of the building. Through bank lending, local community shares and fund raising, and capital and lease funding from the Council, a business case was developed to fund the proposed project scope.
- 3.7 The benefits of this approach to the community were the opportunity to directly influence the scope and layout of their school facility, and to own a legacy asset and income source for the community, an asset that could be converted to housing or other use in the future if required. From the Council's perspective, the benefits were delivering a new school build that met the aspirations of the community, the avoidance of significant capital outlay on a traditional new build, the scope to have a lower cost solution delivered, and the flexibility through lease allowing the Council to review in the future should it wish to again explore co-location within the High School.
- 3.8 The design, procurement and construction was taken forward by the community, supported by HSCHT as their development partner. The Council was consulted on the school layout, design and specification, to ensure the facility met educational requirements, and Council officers reviewed on-site progress through the construction phase.
- 3.9 The project completed in Autumn 2018 with it being occupied by pupils and teaching

staff from 30 October 2018.

3.10 The project was unique in nature, and by virtue there were new challenges facing both the community and the Council throughout the development and construction phase. From the Council's perspective, some of the challenges relating to the project included:-

- agreeing and implementing an effective clerk of works on site review process, when there was no direct contractual relationship between the Council and the Contractor, and arrangements had not been sufficiently agreed at the outset;
- limited scope for the Council to ensure design and technical matters identified by Council officers and the Clerk of Works were addressed by the Contractor to the Council's satisfaction (the costs in time spent were also in excess of what was originally envisaged);
- difficulties in resolving non-compliance and safety issues, which as a result led to a protracted period of discussion before handover was achieved and a lease signed;
- a number of issues still unresolved at handover/occupation, and as a result requiring further remedial works, and changes to operational use of the building until resolved. These include the water system and the need to replace water tanks and disinfection of the water installation post handover, to ensure the building meets relevant guidelines and regulations.

It is also acknowledged that from the community perspective, the time taken to resolve many of these challenges represented an added burden, and the community themselves will have a perspective on these challenges. It is proposed that a post-project lessons learned exercise is progressed, to allow all parties the opportunity to identify improvement points should a similar project be progressed in the future.

3.11 Members will receive a presentation at Committee from representatives of SCSBL, providing their own perspective on the development of this project, with the opportunity to pose questions to those in attendance.

4. Implications

4.1 Resource –the Council's financial contribution to the project was as previously reported, £182k of capital fit out contribution and £55k p.a. of index linked lease.

4.2 Legal – nothing to highlight.

4.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – the new school build delivers a sustainable legacy community asset, and improves the quality of primary school building in this rural community.

4.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – the new school building is expected to be more energy efficient than the building it replaces.

4.5 Risk – The lease agreement process left risk with the Council for ongoing maintenance / compliance liabilities, but insufficient control through the construction phase.

4.6 Gaelic - nothing to highlight in this report.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 26 November 2018

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Background Papers: