

Agenda Item	15.
Report No	CLH 37/19

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing

Date: 29 May 2019

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

Report By: Interim Director of Care and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following the conclusion of a statutory consultation process, this report seeks Members' agreement to a recommendation to discontinue the provision of education at Altnaharra Primary School.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are asked to agree to recommend that the Highland Council discontinues education at Altnaharra Primary School, dividing its catchment area between those of Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School, and Lairg Primary School.

3. Background

- 3.1 On 22 August 2018 this Committee agreed to commence a statutory consultation, per the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, to discontinue the provision of education at Altnaharra Primary School. The school has been mothballed since February 2017 and there is only one child of primary school or pre-school age in the catchment.
- 3.2 Following a suggestion made by the community, the Proposal included details of how the current Altnaharra Primary School catchment would be divided following a decision to close. Details are provided in the Review of Consultation Report at Appendix 1.

4. The Proposal

- 4.1 The proposal for decision, the original proposal issued for consultation, and relevant appendices for consideration by the Committee are circulated separately in the associated booklets. They provide details of all consultation comments received, the report from Education Scotland, and the Council's response to comments arising from the consultation.
- 4.2 There were a total of 5 written responses received from stakeholders during the consultation period. Only one came from within the Altnaharra PS catchment area. It expressed support for the proposal provided certain conditions were met. The suggested conditions are addressed at responses 2-4 of Appendix 1. Two of the remaining four responses also expressed support for the proposal. The remaining two responses opposed the closure of Altnaharra Primary.
- 4.3 The public meeting was well attended given the very small local population, (see **Appendix 2**). A number of questions were raised but those present accepted the school was no longer viable, and there was no opposition to the proposed closure.
- 4.4 The legislation requires that any proposal for decision must be published at least 3 weeks in advance of the meeting at which any decision may be made, to allow time for further representations. The Consultation Report was published on 24 April 2019. Any further representations that are received will be tabled at the meeting for the attention of Members.
- 4.5 In their report, Education Scotland recognised that the Highland Council's proposal has the potential to be of educational benefit. They noted that parents, staff, children and young people who spoke with HM Inspectors supported the council's proposal, and further noted that the proposal to divide the catchment area amongst Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School arose from discussion with the local community. Education Scotland recommended the Council should consider stakeholders' views on school transport arrangements in its final report, and to outline in its final report how it will engage with the local community and the Altnaharra Community Trust on future community use of the school building and associated development plans for the area. These issues are addressed in the Review Report at Appendix 1.
- 4.6 Following consideration by the Committee, if the recommendation is agreed, the following timeline will be followed as required by the legislation.
 - The recommendation of the Committee will be considered by the full Highland Council.

- If ratified by full Council, the Council must, within 6 working days of the Committee decision, advise Scottish Ministers of the decision it has reached, provide them with the proposal paper and consultation report, and publish a notice stating that Ministers have been advised and the process through which representations may be made to Ministers regarding call-in of the proposal.
- From the date of the Council decision, there is a period of 3 weeks in which representations to Scottish Ministers regarding call-in of the proposal can be made by any interested party.
- Scottish Ministers then have a further up to 5 weeks in which to decide whether or not they will issue a call-in notice.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Resource - 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 – The main risks associated with the recommendation relate to the potential for call-in by Scottish Ministers. Officials have sought to mitigate the risk through review and evaluation to ensure that procedurally the requirements of the Act and statutory consultation process have been met.
- 5.6 Gaelic – None.

Designation: Interim Director of Care and Learning

Date: 15 May 2019

Author: Brian Porter, Head of Resources
Ian Jackson, Education Officer

Background Papers: Proposal Paper and Appendices



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

CARE AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT ALTNAHARRA PRIMARY SCHOOL, DIVIDING ITS CATCHMENT AREA BETWEEN THOSE OF TONGUE, FARR, AND LAIRG PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:

- To discontinue education provision at Altnaharra Primary School, dividing its catchment area between Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School, and Lairg Primary School.

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting held at Altnaharra Primary School on 10 October 2018.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

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- Appendix 3** - List of written submissions received
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- Appendix 4** - Report from Education Scotland

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Care, Learning and Housing (CLH) Committee, at its meeting on 22 August 2018, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Altnaharra Primary School, dividing its catchment between Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School, and Lairg Primary School.
- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B - D** are the appendices to the original proposal.
- 1.3 For the avoidance of doubt, all references to Altnaharra Primary School should be taken as including references to the school nursery.
- 1.4 Altnaharra Primary School has been "mothballed" since February 2017. There is currently one child in the catchment 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 this, there will be no pupils in the school until at least August 2023, and possibly beyond.

- 1.5 Since February 2017 the single pupil from the Altnaharra Primary catchment has attended Tongue Primary, 16 miles from Altnaharra Primary itself. Highland Council considers that this arrangement has been of benefit to the pupils at both schools.
- 1.6 The school has a permanent capacity of 25.
- 1.6 Altnaharra Primary School is designated as a rural school under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In that context, the Council has had special regard to:
- any viable alternative to the closure proposal; alternatives were considered at Sections 3-6 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and have been reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5 and 9 below.
 - the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community. The effect on the local community was considered at Section 16 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and is further considered at Sections 7 and 9 below, taking into account representations received during consultation.
 - the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to;
 - the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact; effects on school transport were considered at Section 14 of the Proposal Paper, (**Appendix A**) and reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5 and 8 below.

2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 27 August 2018 to Friday 26 October 2018. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:
- (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) Education Scotland;
- (viii) Highland Youth Convener;
- (ix) Members of the Sutherland Community Planning Partnership;
- (x) Parents of pupils in the catchment area of Altnaharra Primary School, and parents of pupils attending Tongue Primary School, Lairg Primary School, Farr High School and Golspie High School, including parents of pre-school pupils;

2.3 The proposal document was also advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held in Altnaharra on the 10 October 2018. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and Facebook page, and in the *Northern Times*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

3.0 Review of proposals following the consultation period

3.1 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.

3.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by a range of Council officials. This ensured that the Council met the requirements of the 2010 Act.

3.3 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

4.0 Responses received

4.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at Appendix 3. There were 5 written responses (not including the pupil questionnaires). Copies of these responses can also be found at Appendices 3i-3vi.

4.2 The views of pupils at Tongue Primary School (which included the pupil living within the Altnaharra catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire completed by the pupils. The views of the pupils are summarised at Section 5 below.

5.0 Issues raised during the consultation period

5.1 Of the 18 pupils who responded, exactly half thought that we should continue with mothballing Altnaharra PS, on the basis that more children might turn up in the village. A further three thought we should re-open the school so that children in Altnaharra would have a school closer to their homes. Six pupils argued that Altnaharra PS should close as there were not enough children there and it would be better for them to come to other schools.

- 5.2 Re-opening Altnaharra is not presently possible as there are no children willing to attend the school. The arguments around continued mothballing are addressed at Issue 1 below.
- 5.3 Of the 5 written responses received from parents and other stakeholders, only one came from within the Altnaharra PS catchment area. It expressed support for the proposal provided certain conditions were met. The suggested conditions are addressed at Issues 2-4 below. Two of the remaining four responses also expressed support for the proposal. The remaining two responses opposed the closure of Altnaharra Primary.
- 5.4 The public meeting was well-attended given the very small local population, (see **Appendix 2**). A number of questions were raised but those present accepted the school was no longer viable, and there was no opposition to the proposed closure.
- 5.5 In the main, those who supported the Council's proposal did so because they regarded the closure as inevitable. Some of those who responded at the public meeting saw an opportunity for the community to develop and utilise the school building, which otherwise would simply decay. This view was also expressed in the one written response from the local community. Two of the written responses also highlighted the need for the Council to save money.
- 5.6 The only substantive argument advanced against closure was that the Council should continue to mothball the school in the hope that the local population will increase to a point that the school became viable again. These and the other issues raised are addressed below.

Issue 1

If genuinely committed to 'sustaining local communities' then Highland Council must look at creative ways to retain 'moth-balled' schools pending population changes.

Response 1

The school has already been mothballed since February 2017, and in certain cases the Council is willing to continue with mothballing over a period of years, pending population changes. In the case of Altnaharra, there is currently only one child of either primary school or pre-school age in the school catchment. The local community agrees with the Council that there is no realistic prospect of a population change in Altnaharra that would allow the school to reach a viable roll.

Issue 2

The school catchment to be divided as per previous correspondence & discussions.

Response 2

The Proposal Paper included a detailed division of the school catchment, as suggested by the local community. This Review Report contains the same proposal.

Issue 3

Transport to Tongue PS to be made by appropriate 4x4 transport or at least budgeted for in case of a parent contract & desired, due to H&S and our unique location.

Response 3

The road from Tongue to Altnaharra is a priority route for gritting. It is gritted from 06:00 with one gritter starting in Lairg and one starting in Tongue, although the low volume of traffic means that the gritting takes time to be effective. The road is closed approximately twice a year.

The local bus operator considers that the road has a good surface. It does get a lot of snow in winter, but is always first to be ploughed or gritted.

In bad weather the school may close before any roads are.

The Highland Council's Conditions of Contract for School Transport include the following paragraph:

Vehicles shall be suitable for the Routes where they are to be used, taking into account dimensions, ground clearance, and capability of operating in demanding conditions such as steep or uneven roads, or roads likely to be affected by snow and ice. All-weather or winter tyres should be fitted if their absence would be likely to affect safety or reliability.

The Council assesses the suitability of vehicles as part of the tender evaluation for any contract. While we would not intend to specifically require a 4x4 vehicle to be used, we will have regard to the nature of the route when awarding any contract.

Issue 4

The building & grounds associated with the PS to be offered to the community on a 'first come' basis.

Response 4

Any constituted community development body can ask for a community asset transfer, and Highland Council would welcome an application in relation to Altnaharra, within the terms of community empowerment legislation. Local elected members of Highland Council have already indicated their support for a community transfer of the school building. The constituted body will need to

have at least 20 members and have charitable status. The community body will need to explain what the building is to be used for and to demonstrate community benefit as least equal to the value of the asset.

Once constituted, the community body has the right to seek whatever terms and conditions they want for the transfer.

It is for the community to take these issues forward in the first instance, although the council would be more than willing to assist.

6.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 6.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4**.
- 6.2 In their report, Education Scotland recognise that the Highland Council's proposal has the potential to be of educational benefit. Children attending Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School benefit from learning and participating with their peers. They would be able to take part in more group learning and skills development experiences and have access to a broad range of cultural, sports and social opportunities. Education Scotland also commented that the Council has reasonably concluded that, as the school roll shows no signs of increasing, those opportunities would not be available to the same extent at Altnaharra Primary School. The Council's proposal to divide the catchment area of Altnaharra Primary School amongst Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School arises from discussion with the local community. It has the potential to be of benefit by reducing travel times for families who could move into the local area in future.
- 6.3 Education Scotland further noted that parents, staff, children and young people who spoke with HM Inspectors supported the council's proposal. Whilst they regretted the loss of the school, they could see no reasonable prospect of re-opening Altnaharra Primary School. Those children and young people who had attended Altnaharra in the past recalled feeling socially isolated from time to time and that they valued the contact they had with their peers in a larger school. Stakeholders supported the council's proposal to divide the catchment area of Altnaharra Primary School amongst Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School as this would reduce travel times to school for families who might move into the area in future.
- 6.4 HM Inspectors commented that the Council had properly considered alternatives to closure and the effect of the closure on the community.
- 6.5 Two issues were identified for further consideration. Education Scotland recommended the Council should consider stakeholders' views on school transport arrangements in its final report, and to outline in its final report how it will engage with the local community and the Altnaharra Community Trust on

future community use of the school building and associated development plans for the area.

7.0 Effects on the Community

- 7.1 Paragraphs 16.1 and 16.2 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council's assessment of the effects of closure on the local community, and advised that 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.
- 7.2 Further discussion on the potential community use of the school building took place at the public meeting on 10 October (see Appendix 2). The issue was raised in the written responses to consultation (see Response 4 above) and in the Report by Education Scotland (Appendix 4). In the event the closure is approved, the Council would welcome a community bid for the future use of the building. Further details are provided at Response 4.
- 7.3 The consultation exercise did not identify any other effects on the community from the proposal.

8.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

- 8.1 There were no alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

9.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure

- 9.1 Throughout the consultation the Council has had special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In particular, the Council has had special regard to the following:

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Alternatives to closure were reviewed at Section 3 of the original proposal paper. The consultation exercise did not identify any new alternatives for consideration.

The written responses to the consultation exercise that were opposed to closure acknowledged that there is no immediate prospect of re-opening the school, and sought instead to prolong the "mothballing" of the school that has been in place since February 2017. Whilst this would be possible, neither the Highland Council nor Education Scotland have been able to identify any evidence that suggests there is likely to be an upward trend in the local population. Local people in Altnaharra are of the same view.

Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Section 3 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal. The detailed reasons for the Council's view are set out in Section 12 of the Proposal Paper and in the Education Scotland Report at **Appendix 4**.

The Report by Education Scotland noted that parents, staff, children and young people who spoke with HM Inspectors supported the council's proposal.

- the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to; (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

The potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 16 of the Proposal and is further considered at Response 4 and Section 7 above.

- the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact, (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities.

The impact of the proposal on travel time was considered at Sections 13, 14 and 19 of the original proposal paper and again at Responses 2 and 4 above. Since Altnaharra Primary School has been mothballed since February 2017, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. It would however be reasonable in these circumstances to compare the travel arrangements under the Proposal with those that would apply were Altnaharra Primary to re-open.

There is no doubt that re-opening Altnaharra Primary School would significantly reduce the travel time for the one child currently living in the catchment. This must however be weighed against his parents view that the child benefits from being amongst his peers at Tongue Primary.

10.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers

10.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 27 June 2019 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so up until midnight on 18 July 2019. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 21 August 2019 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.

10.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to close Altnaharra Primary School is asked to email schoolclosures@gov.scot or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit**,

Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by midnight on 18 July 2019.

- 10.3 Until the outcome of the eight week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

11.0 Legal issues

- 11.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 11.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000). As with all Council duties, the Council also has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value, and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). Each of the above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

12.0 Financial Implications

- 12.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as Appendix D to the Proposal Paper.

13.0 Equality Impact Assessment

- 13.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was issued with the proposal paper and can be found at Section 18 to the Proposal Paper. The consultation exercise did not identify any additional equality issues.

14.0 Conclusion

- 14.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 above. For the reasons set out in detail in sections 5-10 above, Highland Council considers that implementation of the closure proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.

- 14.2 Education Scotland staff visited Tongue, Farr and Lairg Primary Schools to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses.
- 14.3 The Director of Care and Learning, on reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; concludes that the proposal offers educational benefits and that implementation of the Proposal in full is the most appropriate response to the reason for formulating the Proposal. The reasons for this conclusion are set out at Section 5-10 above.

15.0 Recommendation

- 15.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Altnaharra Primary School, dividing its catchment area between those of Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School, and Lairg Primary School.

Sandra Campbell
Director of Care and Learning
24 April 2019

CONSULTATION MEETING – PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ALTNAHARRA PRIMARY SCHOOL

HELD AT ALTNAHARRA PRIMARY SCHOOL – 10 OCTOBER 2018 – 6.30pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Cllr. Linda Munro - Chairperson
Jacquelyn Jennett, Area Care and Learning Manager; North
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources;
Alison Donald, Education Quality Improvement Manager, North
Katherine Wood, Head Teacher, Farr ASG Schools

13 members of the public attended. A reporter from BBC Alba was also present.

Cllr. Munro welcomed everyone, and explained her own connection to the village – her parents ran a B & B in Altnaharra for 21 years. She was well aware this would be a heartfelt issue for the community, and encouraged everyone to ask questions if there was anything they didn't understand.

Cllr. Munro continued by explaining that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to formally close Altnaharra Primary School. The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures. Other options identified in the proposal paper were re-opening the school, or continuing to "mothball" it. We could also discuss any other options or alternatives to closure which those present would like to raise.

The note of tonight's meeting would be made available on the Highland Council's website at least 3 weeks before the Council Committee that takes a decision on the proposal. At the moment we envisage this will be the meeting of the Care, Learning and Housing Committee on 14 March 2019.

Copies of the Proposal Paper and appendices were distributed. Cllr. Munro introduced the officials present and asked Jacquelyn Jennett to set out the educational benefits of the proposal.

Ms Jennett commented that the school had been mothballed in February 2017 when the roll had fallen to one pupil, who was relocated to another school with the agreement of the family. At that time the community hadn't wanted to consider a formal closure consultation as they wanted to see whether any new families could be encouraged to move to the village and provide a sustainable roll for the school.

Since February 2017 it had become clear that these efforts had not been successful. Officials had met with the community on 23 May, at which time there been an open

and frank discussion about the school's future. There was a general acceptance that the demographics of the area, and the availability of local housing, meant that the number of children was unlikely to change. No new families have arrived, nor is there sight of any. We had an extensive discussion on 23 May about catchment areas, and what would happen if the school were to close. It had been enormously helpful to have the input of local people to that discussion. The suggestion at the meeting was that the area around the Crask Inn should be re-zoned to Lairg PS/Golspie HS, whilst the rest of the catchment would remain in the Farr ASG, but be divided between Tongue PS and Farr PS. Those suggestions have been worked into the Proposal Paper you have before you.

In terms of educational benefits, the Council's Proposal sets out the benefits that arise when pupils have the opportunity to study in a larger school. Peer relationships, team sports, day trips, and the educational resources that are available are all factors that have been considered. We would have needed a few more children to move in to consider Altnaharra School to be viable.

The Chairperson then asked Ian Jackson to explain the consultation process.

Mr Jackson advised that the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 lays down a set process for any proposal to close a rural school. The process requires the Council to hold a public consultation over a period of at least 6 weeks, which must include 30 school days. Tonight's meeting was part of that consultation period, which ends on 26 October. Mr Jackson encouraged everyone present who had any questions or concerns to make a contribution tonight, and to submit written representations as well. The Council must reply to any issues raised in the public consultation before coming to a final decision. After the end of the public consultation, there will be a further 3 week consultation with Education Scotland, who will examine the educational merits of the proposal. The Council has agreed with Education Scotland that the 3 week consultation will begin on 12 November. Education Scotland will appoint an Inspector to assess the proposal. They will come to the area to meet with Katherine Wood and will be interested to meet with any parents, should anyone wish to provide views to Education Scotland.

After the Council has taken stock of all the responses, and the Report by Education Scotland, we will publish our Final Report at least 3 weeks before that is being submitted to Council Committee. Anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be sent a copy. At the present time, the intention is to submit the report for decision to the March meeting of the Care, Learning and Housing Committee. Further representations may be made during that 3 week period.

Assuming the Council decided to proceed with closure, the decision would be referred to Scottish Ministers for confirmation. Ministers would have 8 weeks to decide whether to permit the closure or whether to refer the Council's decision to an

independent School Closure Review Panel. If the latter, the Panel would have a further 8 week period to consider its decision.

Within the first 3 weeks of the 8 week period for consideration by Ministers, any person can submit representations to Ministers. There will therefore be multiple opportunities for any parent or member of the community to submit their views as part of the consultation process. The process is a long and complicated one, but is designed to ensure the Council does not ride roughshod over the wishes of local communities.

Questions and Answers

Q1 – What would the Council consider to be a reasonable number of pupils for the school to re-open again?

A1 (Jacquelyn Jennett) – I think when we spoke about it previously we felt there would really need to be half-a-dozen, and even that number is not ideal, as with such a small roll children could still lose out on quite a lot. However, if that number did appear and the school were still here, we would sit down with the community and talk about it. The ages and stages of the children would be a factor to consider as well, as would any Additional Support Needs. So although six is a guideline number, other factors would come into play. We would have to consider the educational issues, putting the child at the centre.

We realise though that Altnaharra is in a somewhat different position from other schools, due to the nature of the road, whether north or south, and the vulnerability of the route to winter weather. That was something that might need to be teased out more.

The Chairperson commented that the Council was more concerned about education being sustainable, rather than looking just at numbers. For example, if there were six pupils, but four were in the later stages of primary school, then the school would soon be back at two pupils. If those proportions were reversed, there might be more of an argument for re-opening. There's little doubt though, that bigger schools offer many advantages, especially for children's social development. The scattered nature of housing in the Altnaharra catchment meant that school was the primary location for children to socialise and get playtime with others. It was very important for the school to be able to offer that, wherever it may be.

(Ian Jackson) – The Council doesn't have a set number of children for operating a school. A number of factors have to be considered, one of which is distance, as Jacquelyn highlighted. We have a number of schools located on small islands, where there is no practical alternative to operating a school on the island, so even if there are only one or two pupils, we keep the school going. On the other hand, if we have a school with a very small roll located 10 miles from a larger alternative school,

we would take a different view. We feel that children benefit from being with other children of their own age, both educationally and socially, and that is the position we take in the Proposal Paper.

Q2 – So you would really be looking at 3 or 4 families moving in, before you would reconsider?

A2 (Chairperson) – I don't know it would necessarily be 3 or 4. It could be two families if the numbers of children were large enough. Again, it would come down to what was sustainable. We would always look at what was best for the children, and then what was best for the community. If that is our starting basis, I don't think we would go too far wrong.

(Jacquelyn Jennett) – If there was an actual scenario along these lines, then we would be willing to speak to the community again.

Q3 (Comment) – My child was the last one who attended the school here, but going forward I don't see any alternative to closure.

Q4 (Comment) – There's a general acceptance locally that the school is no longer viable.

(Chairperson) Jim Steven, the Head of Education, did a very good piece of work a couple of years ago, in terms of ensuring the school could stay open when the roll fell to zero. That was the foundation of some very respectful work that has continued since. Pieter Bakker played an important role on behalf of the community. Also, the fact that the wind farm has been approved – whilst it's not the same as having a school – it opens up a whole new chapter for the future of Altnaharra. I am sure that the strength of this community means you have a bright future, and personally I would like to see the school building go to the community. I would like to see it become a new hub for the village.

Q5 – How do people comment about the revisions to catchment area, and where are those details set out?

A5 (Jacquelyn Jennett) – The map that was drawn on at the meeting on 23 May, that's what we used.

(Ian Jackson) – In the attachments to the Proposal Paper, there's map of how the catchments would look once they are revised. There's also a couple of close ups showing how the boundaries would look, the boundary around Crask, and the boundary around Altnaharra and Clebrig. If people have any comments on those, we would be more than happy to consider them.

Q6 – And for yourselves, what is the Council's view?

A6 (Jacquelyn Jennett) – We have agreed the community’s proposals. That was the best way we could have done it as you all know the communities, where the houses are etc.

(Ian Jackson) – The maps shown in the Proposal Paper represent the Council’s formal proposals, and if the closure goes ahead and there are no comments on the catchments suggested, those will be the new catchments.

Q7 – What about the transport arrangements? If a few more children show up and require transport north, can we get an assurance that we will get appropriate transport arrangements?

A7 (Chairperson) – The transport will go according to the catchment area.

(Ian Jackson) – The Council has a legal obligation to provide funded transport for children who live beyond what we call the “statutory walking distance”, from the catchment school. That distance is 2 miles for children aged below 8 and 3 miles from children aged 8 and above, so if this village became part of the Tongue catchment we would provide transport to Tongue, whilst if there were children from Crask they would get transport to Lairg. The only thing we don’t do is provide transport to a school other than the catchment school. If parents make a choice for their children to attend another school, they have to bear the costs of transport.

Q8 – Given that the Council will be saving money by not having the school, and given the nature of the routes out of the current catchment, especially going north, could we have an assurance that we will get an enhanced service, say by using a 4x4 rather than just an ordinary car?

A8 (Ian Jackson) – Without wishing to duck the issue, I’ll just preface my remarks by saying that the actual logistics of the transport are arranged by the Council’s Community Services Department, which is a different Service from Care and Learning, so I’m not directly involved in that. What they do is advertise a route by effectively saying “we want to take this number of pupils from these points to this school” and invite tenders on that basis. I think it’s probably unlikely they will advertise the route on the basis a particular type of vehicle must be used, but if that’s what the community feel is necessary, given the height of the route and the winter weather in this area, then we will have to consider that as a response to consultation.

Q9 (follow-up question) – I understand how the system works but I think we are a special case here, because of the length of the route and the geography. Parents might not want to move here if they were faced with the prospect of having to use their own car to take their children to school in snowy weather. If a better vehicle were available to transport children they would miss school less often, and it would be safer for them to get there.

A9 (Ian Jackson) – The proposals suggest that part of the catchment will be re-allocated to Farr Primary, and for any pupils travelling along that road, I imagine the

school bus will be used. For pupils travelling to Tongue, it would be dishonest of me to give a guarantee that we will provide a 4x4 for the route, not least because that decision is not in my gift. The best I can suggest is that you submit written responses on this, which will then be considered by the Council.

(Jacquelyn Jennett) - This isn't the only part of the Highlands that is affected by winter weather. There are lots of areas that are affected by snow and ice, albeit Altnaharra is often quoted on the weather forecast as a place with particularly low temperatures. The bottom line is that, if there are any concerns about the welfare of children being transported in winter weather, then the transport simply doesn't go. However, this is something I can discuss with Mike Cooper, who is our Senior Transport Officer

(Ian Jackson) – I suppose the point being made was that a better vehicle would minimise the number of occasions when children's education is disrupted. I do agree with Jacquelyn's point that there are other parts of Highland that are badly affected by winter weather, perhaps most notably the Badenoch and Strathspey area, but I also accept that this area is one of the most vulnerable to disruption, both from the fact the winter weather is often more severe and the height of the road. Again, I can only say that Highland Council will have to consider its response to these representations, since they have been submitted as part of statutory consultation.

Q10 Can I ask about the maintenance of this building pending the Council's decision? If the community do take the building over, then its condition will be important. Is this Council still responsible for maintaining the building up to if and when it takes the decision to close?

A10 (Ian Jackson) – And Beyond. The Council will remain responsible for the building for as long as we own it.

(Jacquelyn Jennett) – So far we've done all the normal things, such as draining down the water, but I know the building has a problem with mouse infestation.

(Ian Jackson) – Any concerns about the building can be raised with Jacquelyn, who will take them up with the Maintenance Officers.

(Jacquelyn Jennett) - Yes, I've been back and forth with them about phones, computers etc. If there's a particular issue, then I would be happy to deal with it.

Q11 (follow-up question) – I'm just conscious there is no heating on in the school, which means it will deteriorate very quickly.

A11 (Jacquelyn Jennett) – Normally the best way to maintain an empty building is to make sure it's wind and watertight and to take all the water out of the system. If we were to put the heating back on, there would be issues about who was going to switch it on and off, and generally look after the place.

Q12 – Once the Council closes the school officially, at what point can the community submit their interest in taking over the building?

A12 (Ian Jackson) – An expression of interest could be submitted immediately after the school was closed. What we could do in the meantime is advise the Council's Asset Management Board that there is likely to be an expression of community interest in the building following a decision to close.

(Jacquelyn Jennett) – They already know. I have told Pablo Mascarenhas, who is the Council's Community Engagement Manager, that the community are likely to want first shout on the building if the school closes. There are forms for the purpose and it would probably be worth the community looking at those forms soon, before you need to complete them.

(Chairperson) – We will ask you to submit a business plan, and local councillors will be asked whether they support the application or not. If you get the majority support of councillors, the transfer will go ahead, and you will definitely have the majority support of the local councillors.

(Jacquelyn Jennett) – If the process from now goes like a Swiss watch, then probably by next summer we will know whether the school has been closed. If the community has done the groundwork before then, and prepared the business plan, then you would be ready to put in your application straight away.

The Chairperson asked at this point whether the community could use the school during the consultation period, should they wish to.

A comment was made that this would be difficult when there was no water.

(Ian Jackson) - We have leased other buildings in this position, with the lease specifying who is responsible for what, so it could be possible.

(Jacquelyn Jennett) – The community hold the keys to this building anyway.

One thing that would have to be considered is that by letting the building before it was closed, it could make the consultation look like a foregone conclusion. We would need to be careful to lay down rules about leaving the building if the school were re-opened.

(Chairperson) – So use of the building could be looked at if required.

There being no other comments, the **Chairperson** reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 26 October 2018 - and of where responses should be sent, either via letter, or via email, or by completing the online form on the HC website. A record of this meeting would be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Care, Learning and Housing Committee which considers the Final Report, as well as all the submissions.

**List of Respondents to Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of
Altnaharra Primary School**

1. Golspie High School Parent Council
2. Anonymous Response (Inverness City Postcode)
3. Heather Stewart, Helmsdale
4. Summary of the views of Tongue Primary School Pupils
5. John Finnie MSP
6. Pieter Bakker, Altnaharra

Fiona Livingstone

From: Golspie High PC <golspiehighpc@gmail.com>
Sent: 05 September 2018 07:16
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Fwd: Altnaharra Primary School
Attachments: Golspie HS PC.docx

Good Morning,

Thank you for inviting comments from Golspie High School Parent Council on the proposed closure of Aultnaharra Primary School.

The matter was discussed at our meeting of 30/8/18.

While the Parent Council noted with regret that this closure indicates further depopulation of the rural areas of the region it was accepted as inevitable that scarce resources could not be directed to Aultnaharra in the current circumstances.

We wish you well with your consultation but have no further comment to make.

Best Regards,

Neil McInnes
Secretary 2018/19

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Meg Wilson** <Meg.Wilson@highland.gov.uk>
Date: Mon, Aug 27, 2018 at 3:12 PM
Subject: Altnaharra Primary School
To: "golspiehighpc@gmail.com" <golspiehighpc@gmail.com>

Good afternoon,

Please find attached a letter sent on behalf of Brian Porter, Head of Resources, Highland Council.

Regards

Meg

Meg Wilson

Administrative Assistant (North East)

Highland Council

Business Support

Corporate Resources Service

Drummuie

Golspie

Sutherland

KW10 6TA

01408 635348

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Mura h-eil na beachdan a tha air an cur an cèill sa phost-d seo a' buntainn ri gnothachas Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd, 's ann leis an neach fhèin a chuir air falbh e a tha iad, is chan eil iad an-còmhnaidh a' riochdachadh beachdan na Comhairle, no buidhnean buntainneach, agus chan eil am post-d seo na phàirt de chunntadh sam bith mura h-eil sin air innse.

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Èisteachd * Fosgailte * Luach * Leasachadh * Taic * Com-pàirteachas * Libhrigeadh

Fiona Livingstone

From: School consultation <donotreply@highland.gov.uk>
Sent: 07 September 2018 08:55
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Altnaharra Primary School consultation comments

Privacy notice:

Confirmation
Ticking this box indicates that you have read the privacy notice

Name of consultation: Altnaharra Primary School

Your comments: Absolutely close the school. Though there are unlikely to be any pupils from the catchment in the foreseeable future, any that were would help support the surrounding rural schools! A journey time of half an hour plus is not outrageous. Other children routinely travel further. For junior secondary 12 years ago, I travelled circa half an hour each day and for High school ten years ago, around 50-1 hour (this was in the Western Isles, not the Highlands). By the time my youngest brother was in school, the rural primary school in our village had been closed - there is no difference between his educational and social levels than mine.

Anecdotally, I would say that in my school experience, there was a higher rate of absence for those that travelled farther distances, however this was never to the extent that it was problematic. In addition, the distance may be longer, but the journey time for children in Inverness is often similar – the Milton of Leys to Millburn Academy bus takes around 30 minutes!

We need to make savings, close the school. Close any of them with under 30 pupils providing there's another school within an hour of travel. I imagine, the cost of travel/fuel is less than a teaching post?

Trust the officers' recommendations to close.

Upload documents or letters :

I am commenting as: Local resident

I am commenting on behalf of:

Name:

Title	First name	Last name
Ms	Anon	Anon

Address:

postcode_search	Did you find the address on the list above?	Address line 1	Address line 2	Address line 3	Town	Postcode
IV2	No	Anon	Anon	Anon	Inverness	IV2 6XX

Email address: Anon@anon.com

Fiona Livingstone

From: School consultation <donotreply@highland.gov.uk>
Sent: 11 September 2018 02:39
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Altnaharra Primary School consultation comments

Privacy notice:

Confirmation
Ticking this box indicates that you have read the privacy notice

Name of consultation: Altnaharra Primary School

Your comments: I'm not from around there, but I think it's awful... But at least maybe to Tongue, to serve the school, not Lairg, that's too far in a day to go to school. It shouldn't have to close at all!

Upload documents or letters :

I am commenting as: Local resident

I am commenting on behalf of:

Name:

Title	First name	Last name
Miss	Heather	Stewart

Address:

postcode_search	Choose address	Did you find the address on the list above?
KW8 6HP	Whitehill 7 Craikaig Helmsdale KW8 6HP	Yes

Email address: hevski77@gmail.com

Hello, Everyone!

Can you help the Council with an important decision? IIII

For a while Highland Council has been trying out an idea for pupils from Altnaharra to go to Tongue Primary, instead of Altnaharra Primary.

Now we have to decide what to do for the future. We have 3 choices:

- 1. Close Altnaharra Primary for good, with most of the pupils going to Tongue Primary instead. Some children from around Altnaharra might go to Farr Primary or Lairg Primary instead, depending on where they lived.**
- 2. Re-open Altnaharra Primary, so children from Altnaharra, Crask and Upper Strathnaver go to that school and not to Tongue, Farr and Lairg.**
- 3. Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer before we decide for good.**

Which idea do you think is best? In the table below, place a tick next to which one you think is best.

Idea No. 1 – Close Altnaharra Primary. IIII	
Idea No. 2 – Re-open Altnaharra Primary. III	

Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer.

~~IIII~~ IIII

2. Why did you give the answer above?

- ① Not many in Altnaharra so better to have choice of 3 schools.
 - Not many in Tongue so Altnaharra pupils expand our numbers and make our community grow.
- ② So the children can go to school close to their homes.
- ③ More children might move into Altnaharra for their school.

Fiona Livingstone

From: School consultation <donotreply@highland.gov.uk>
Sent: 23 October 2018 16:27
To: Education Consultations
Subject: Altnaharra Primary School consultation comments

Privacy notice:

Confirmation
Ticking this box indicates that you have read the privacy notice

Name of consultation: Altnaharra Primary School

Your comments: Schools should be at the heart of our communities, both urban and rural.

If genuinely committed to 'sustaining local communities' then Highland Council must look at creative ways to retain 'moth-balled' schools pending population changes.

I do not support this closure.

Upload documents or letters :

I am commenting as: Constituency or regional MSP

I am commenting on behalf of: Constituents

Name:

Title	First name	Last name
Mr	John	Finnie

Address:

postcode_search	Did you find the address on the list above?	Address line 1	Address line 2	Address line 3	Town	Postcode
IV1 1PJ	No	16/22 Market Hall	Victorian Market		Inverness	IV1 1PJ

Email address: john.finnie.msp@parliament.scot

Fiona Livingstone

From: Pieter bakker <altnaharra.estate@btconnect.com>
Sent: 26 October 2018 14:04
To: Ian Jackson
Cc: Jacquelyn Jennett; Tina Macintosh; Alison Donald; Meg Wilson
Subject: RE: Altnaharra Primary School

Dear Mr Jackson,

As per the meeting on the 10th of October at Altnaharra, I would like to remind you of the discussions and previous proposed suggestions as an official response to the consultation with regards to the closure of Altnaharra primary school.

And for the avoidance of doubt I have put the main points below.

1. The school catchment to be divided as per previous correspondence & discussions.
2. Transport to Tongue PS to be made by appropriate 4x4 transport or at least budgeted for in case of a parent contract & desired, due to H&S and our unique location(if more info is needed please advise and we would be happy to supply)
3. The building & grounds associated with the PS to be offered to the community on a 'first come' basis.

Thanks for your assistance in the matter, and please do not hesitate to make contact if we can assist at all.

Best regards
Pieter Bakker

Altnaharra

From: Ian Jackson <ian.jackson@highland.gov.uk>
Sent: 27 August 2018 10:40
To: altnaharra.estate@btconnect.com
Cc: Jacquelyn Jennett <Jacquelyn.Jennett@highland.gov.uk>; Tina Macintosh <Tina.Macintosh@highland.gov.uk>; Alison Donald <Alison.Donald@highland.gov.uk>; Meg Wilson <Meg.Wilson@highland.gov.uk>
Subject: Altnaharra Primary School

FAO Mr Pieter Bakker

Dear Mr Bakker

Further to our recent emails, the statutory consultation on the proposed closure of Altnaharra Primary begins today. Letters have been issued to parents, staff, and the local Community Councils. I attach a copy for your information and response.

I also attach a copy of a public notice which will appear in the *Northern Times* on 28 September and 5 October.

As previously discussed, I would be grateful if you could place a copy of the public notice on the village noticeboard.

Please contact me if you have any queries about the above.

Ian Jackson
Education Officer

Unless related to the business of The Highland Council, the views or opinions expressed within this e-mail are those of the sender and do not necessarily reflect those of The Highland Council, or associated bodies, nor does this e-mail form part of any contract unless so stated.

Mura h-eil na beachdan a tha air an cur an cèill sa phost-d seo a' buntainn ri gnothachas Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd, 's ann leis an neach fhèin a chuir air falbh e a tha iad, is chan eil iad an-còmhnaidh a' riochdachadh beachdan na Comhairle, no buidhnean buntainneach, agus chan eil am post-d seo na phàirt de chunradh sam bith mura h-eil sin air innse.

Listening * Open * Valuing * Improving * Supporting * Partnering * Delivering
Èisteachd * Fosgailte * Luach * Leasachadh * Taic * Com-pàirteachas * Lìbhrigeadh

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to close Altnaharra Primary School.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010 \("the 2010 Act"\)](#). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Highland Council's proposal to close Altnaharra Primary School and divide its catchment area between the catchments of Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers and the special provisions that apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools affected; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and

- visits to the site of Altnaharra Primary School, Farr Primary School, Farr High School and Lairg Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Altnaharra Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The Highland Council proposes to discontinue education provision at Altnaharra Primary School and divide the catchment area between the catchments of Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School. The proposal will also result in an alternation to the catchment boundary between Farr High School and Golspie High School. The council undertook the consultation between 27 August and 26 October 2018. Consultees were notified of the proposal and a notice was placed in a local newspaper. Children in the affected primary schools were provided with an opportunity to discuss the proposal and provide their views. A public meeting held at Altnaharra Primary School on 10 October 2018 was attended by 13 members of the public. The council received five written responses of which three supported and two opposed the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The Highland Council's proposal to close Altnaharra Primary School has the potential to be of educational benefit. Altnaharra Primary School has been mothballed since February 2017. At present, there is only one primary school aged child living in the catchment area of the school who currently attends Tongue Primary School. There are no pre-school children and school roll forecasting indicates that there will be no additional pupils in the area in the foreseeable future. Children attending Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School benefit from learning and participating with their peers. They would be able to take part in more group learning and skills development experiences and have access to a broad range of cultural, sports and social opportunities. The Highland Council has reasonably concluded that, as the school roll shows no signs of increasing, those opportunities would not be available to the same extent at Altnaharra Primary School. The council's proposal to divide the catchment area of Altnaharra Primary School amongst Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School arises from discussion with the local community. It has the potential to be of benefit by reducing travel times for families who could move into the local area in future.

3.2 Parents, staff, children and young people who spoke with HM Inspectors supported the council's proposal. Whilst they regretted the loss of the school, they could see no reasonable prospect for re-opening Altnaharra Primary School. Those children and young people who had attended Altnaharra in the past recalled feeling

socially isolated from time to time and reported that they valued the contact they have with their peers in a larger school. Stakeholders support the council's proposal to divide the catchment area of Altnaharra Primary School amongst Tongue Primary School, Farr Primary School and Lairg Primary School as this would reduce travel times to school for families who might move into the area in future.

3.3 Stakeholders had some concerns over travelling arrangements, particularly in the winter months when they felt that a 4X4 vehicle might be required. The distances involved in travelling to each of the three alternative schools range from 16 to 24 miles on single track roads with journey times of between 30 and 50 minutes. Journey times could take longer in adverse winter conditions. The council will need to consider stakeholders views on suitable transport arrangements in its final report.

3.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard.

3.5 The council considered alternatives to closure of Altnaharra Primary School. It reasonably concluded that re-opening the school with its current catchment was not a viable option. The option of extending its catchment was considered but this would have a negative impact on travel distances for pupils currently attending the other schools. This would not increase the roll of Altnaharra Primary School to a viable number. The council considered the option of continued mothballing but concluded that, as there appears to be no prospect of the pupil roll at Altnaharra Primary School returning to a viable number, this was not a reasonable option.

3.6 The council considered the effect of its proposal on the local community and indicated that it would be prepared to work with the local community to consider community use of the school building. Stakeholders who spoke with HM Inspectors felt that the closure of the school could make it even more difficult to attract new families to live and work in the area. They hoped that the building could be used by the local community under Community Asset Transfer arrangements. An Altnaharra Community Trust has recently been formed and has begun to formulate proposals for the use of significant levels of funding arising from a local windfarm development. Their proposals include potential alternative uses for the school building some of which could result in local employment opportunities. The council will need to consider the community's aspirations and outline in its final report how it will engage with Altnaharra Community Trust to support local developments including community use of the school building.

4. Summary

The Highland Council's proposal to close Altnaharra Primary School and divide its catchment between other schools has the potential to be of educational benefit. Children would benefit from learning and socialising with their peers in schools with viable rolls. The council will need to consider stakeholders views on school transport arrangements in its final report. The council will also need to outline in its final report

how it will engage with the local community and the Altnaharra Community Trust on future community use of the school building and associated development plans for the area.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
November 2018**

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.

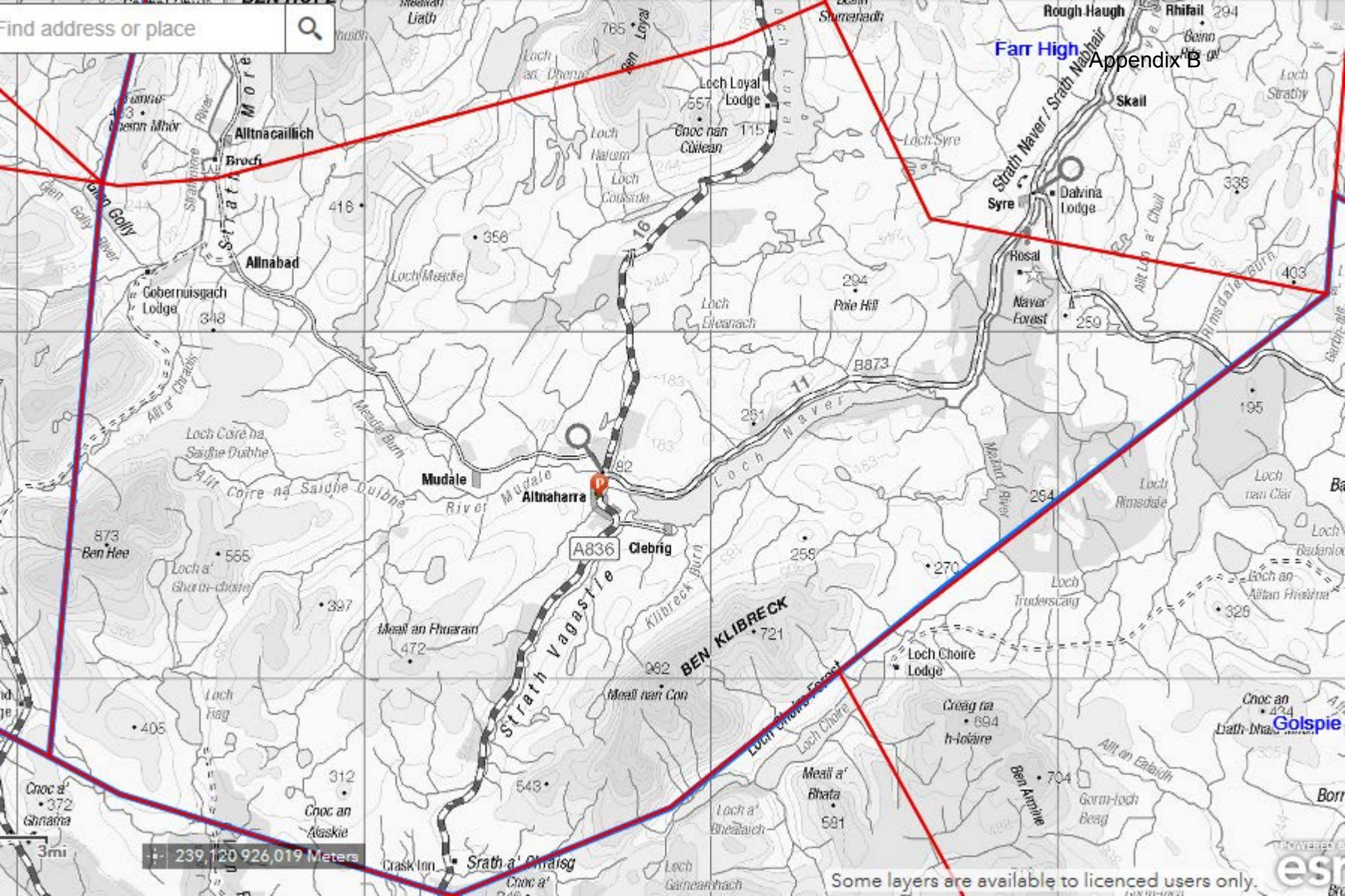
- 19.2 Funded school transport will be provided to P1-7 pupils from the Altnaharra catchment to whichever school catchment their home address is re-assigned to.
- 19.3 Although funded transport is not provided for nursery age children, there are currently no children in this age group within the Altnaharra 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



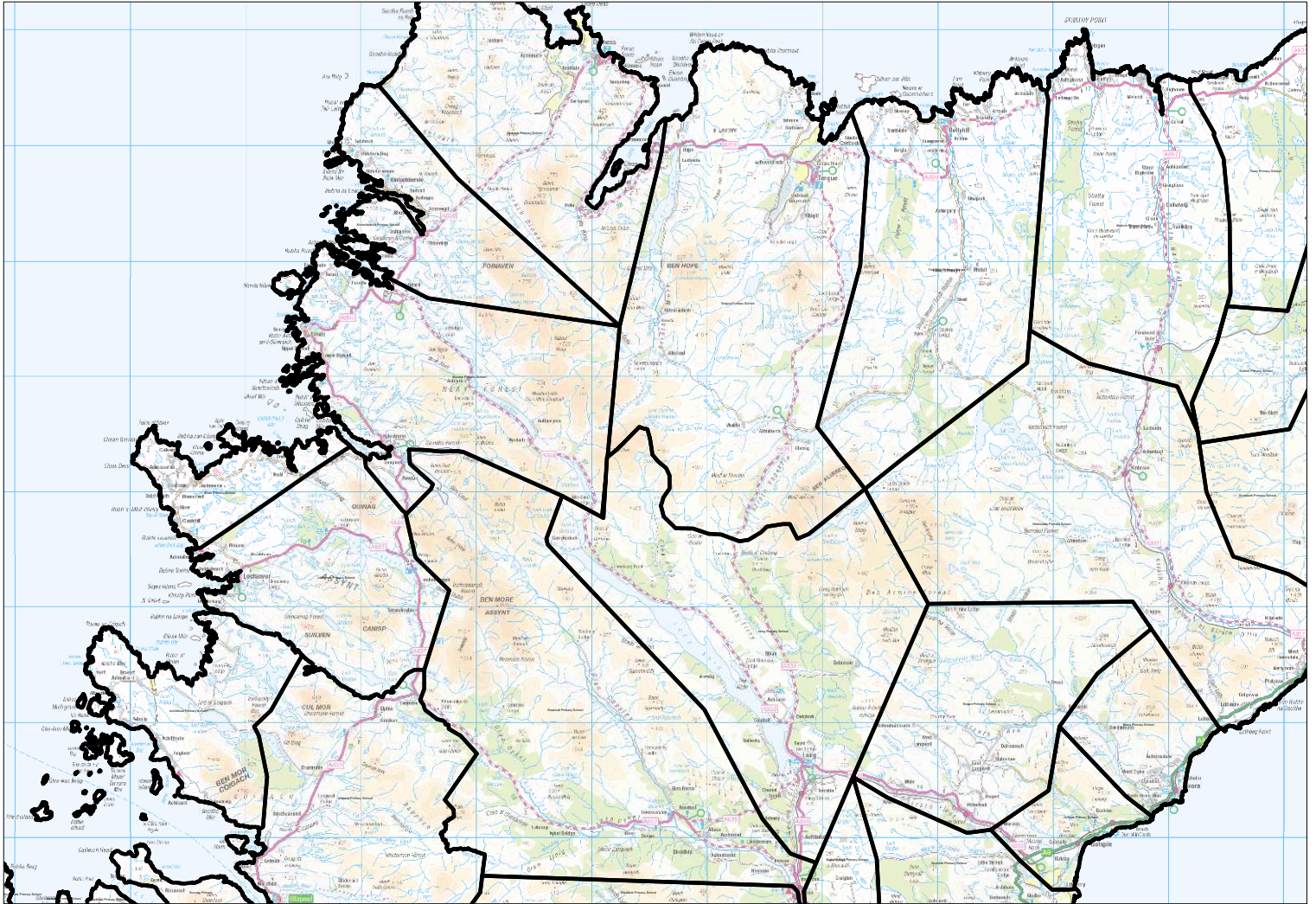
Farr High Appendix B

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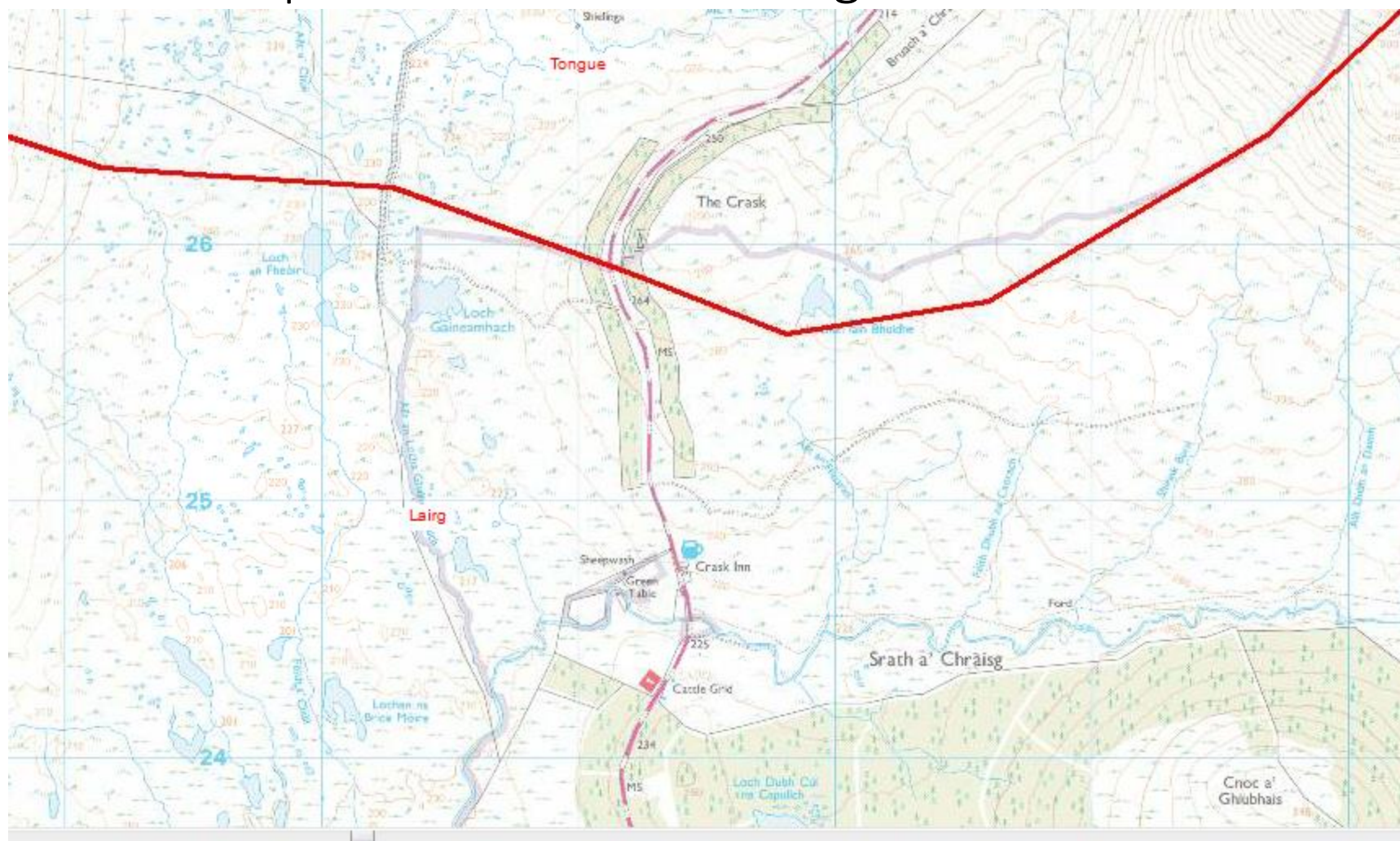
Primary Catchments Excluding Altnaharra



Close up view of catchment border near Altnaharra and Clebrig



Closeup view of Crask and Lairg catchment border



Financial Template - Altnaharra PS closure

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Forecast revenue costs for Altnaharra PS			
	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			
<i>School costs</i>			
<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

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	