

Agenda Item	12.
Report No	EDU/07/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education Committee

Date: 27 February 2020

Report Title: Statutory Consultation – Gaelic Medium Catchment Proposals for the Plockton Associated School Group

Report By: Chief Executive

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This Report seeks Members' agreement to conduct a statutory consultation proposing the establishment of Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment areas for Plockton Primary School and Lochcarron Primary School.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to agree to proceed to statutory consultation, on the basis of the Proposal attached to this Report.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - The Proposal seeks to maximise access to GME whilst still considering and balancing financial implications, particularly with regard to school transport. No additional costs are envisaged at present as a result of the proposal.

3.2 Legal - The Proposal will be issued for statutory consultation as required by the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, It also complies with the provisions for school transport set out within the Education (Scotland) Act 1980; with the provisions relating to Gaelic Medium Education contained within the Education (Scotland) Act 2016; and with statutory guidance on the creation of GM catchment areas, issued by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - There are no specific impacts on equality, poverty or rural issues, beyond those already considered as part of access to GME.

3.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever – Since travel to school would be provided by means of existing transport, any additional greenhouse gas emissions would be negligible.

- 3.5 Risk - There are no identified risks arising specifically from this proposal.
- 3.6 Gaelic - The Proposal, if implemented, would clarify the transport entitlement for children accessing Gaelic Medium education at Plockton Primary School and Lochcarron Primary School, and would maximise the opportunities for children to access such provision, within reason.

4. Background

- 4.1 There are 171 currently operational primary schools in Highland, of which 20 currently offer Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME).
- 4.2 The current arrangements under which pupils access GME are not particularly well defined, and have evolved over time. Most schools do not have defined catchment areas for GME, and current policy in such cases is to provide transport “within reasonable travelling distance”. This is often interpreted as meaning up to 15 miles, but there are variations and distances travelled are often longer.

5. The Statutory Guidance

- 5.1 On 1 February 2017 Bòrd na Gàidhlig issued new Statutory Guidance on GME. The Guidance includes a recommendation that local authorities should establish catchment areas for schools that offer GME, and that these catchment areas would normally overlay a number of English Medium catchment areas. A catchment area for GME provision should be an area in which the education authority thinks it is reasonable for pupils wishing to receive GME provision to travel to school, and should have the potential to attract parents to choose GME provision for their children.
- 5.2 The establishment of GM catchment areas is subject to statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) Act Scotland 2010. These are resource intensive exercises, not only for Highland Council but also for Education Scotland, who have to appoint an Inspector to assess each proposal. The Council has been progressing statutory consultations to establish GME catchments across those locations in Highland currently offering GME. It is necessary to stagger the exercise given the volume of GME provision, and other statutory consultations to be progressed. As at the date of this report, of the 20 primary schools offering GME, 10 consultation exercises have been completed, and 1 other is in progress. Further proposals will be brought to future Committees, covering other parts of Highland.

6.0 Plockton Associated School Group (ASG)

- 6.1 Within the ASG, Plockton Primary School, and Lochcarron Primary School, both offer GME. At Plockton Primary there 15 GM pupils in the P1-7 class. Eleven of these are from within the Plockton PS catchment and 4 are from within the Kyle PS catchment. There are also 11 pupils in the GM nursery at Plockton Primary. Of these 3 are from the Plockton PS catchment, 3 are from the Auchtertyre PS catchment, and 5 are from within the Kyle PS catchment.

All of the pupils attending GME at Lochcarron Primary are from within the Lochcarron catchment.

- 6.2 The Proposal Paper (Appendix A) sets out the suggested GM catchments for both schools. It proposes that the GM catchment for Lochcarron PS is the same as the school’s EM catchment. The Applecross PS catchment is excluded due the travel time

to Lochcarron, and the nature of the route. The proposed GM catchment for Plockton PS would encompass the current EM catchments for Plockton PS, Kyle PS, Kyleakin PS, Auchtertyre PS and Loch Duich PS. The Glenelg PS catchment is excluded on the grounds it is beyond reasonable travelling distance. There would also be a presumption that any travel to access GME from other school catchments would be via existing buses travelling to Plockton High School.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 7 February 2020

Authors: Brian Porter, Head of Resource and Ian Jackson, Education Officer

Background Papers: Appendix A – Proposal Paper for Consultation
Appendix B – Proposed GM catchment for Plockton PS
Appendix C – Proposed GM catchment for Lochcarron PS

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

The proposal is to establish Gaelic Medium catchment areas for schools within the Plockton Associated School Group

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

INTRODUCTION

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

- To establish a Gàidhlig Medium (GM) catchment area for Plockton Primary School. The new catchment will overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Plockton Primary School, Kyle of Lochalsh Primary School, Kyleakin Primary School, Auchtertyre Primary School, and Loch Duich Primary School. Particular arrangements will apply for transport to Plockton from the other catchment areas.
- To establish a Gàidhlig Medium catchment area for Lochcarron Primary School, the GM catchment to be identical to the school's English Medium catchment.

If implemented as drafted, the two proposed GM catchments will include 6 of the 8 primary school catchments within the Plockton ASG. The remaining 2 primary schools are Glenelg Primary and Applecross Primary. The distances and travel times between Plockton and Glenelg, and between Applecross and Lochcarron, make it impractical to include them within the suggested GM catchments.

Existing primary school catchments for the provision of English Medium education will be unaffected.

Highland Council is making this Proposal to comply with Statutory Guidance issued by Bòrd na Gàidhlig under Section 9 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. Part 1 of the Statutory Guidance specifically relates to the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 and the duty placed on education authorities to promote and support Gaelic education.

The Guidance includes a specific requirement on local authorities to create GM catchment areas for schools that offer GME.

The proposed changes, if approved, will be implemented at the conclusion of the statutory consultation process.

Any identified parental demand for future local provision of GME from within any of the primary schools identified above, would be assessed in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education (2017).

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Proposal Paper Published

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

- Plockton Primary School
- Lochcarron Primary School
- Kyle of Lochalsh Primary School
- Kyleakin Primary School
- Auchtertyre Primary School
- Loch Duich Primary School
- Glenelg Primary School
- Applecross Primary School
- Plockton Library
- Lochcarron Library
- Skye and Lochalsh 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

Care and Learning Office

The Fingal Centre

Portree

IV51 9ES

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, Fingal Centre, Portree, IV51 9ES

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

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 Plockton Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) Parents of pupils attending Lochcarron Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (iii) Parents of pupils attending Kyle of Lochalsh Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (iv) Parents of pupils attending Kyleakin Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (v) Parents of pupils attending Auchtertyre Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (vi) Parents of pupils attending Loch Duich Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (vii) Parents of pupils attending Glenelg Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (viii) Parents of pupils attending Applecross Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ix) The Parent Councils of each of the above schools;
- (x) All staff of the schools listed above.
- (xi) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
- (xii) Trade union representatives;
- (xiii) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal;
- (xiv) Bòrd na Gàidhlig;
- (xv) Education Scotland;

Advertisement in Local Media

A notice announcing the public meetings will be placed in the *West Highland Free Press* and on the Highland Council's website and Facebook page.

Consultation Period

The consultation for this Proposal will run from 9 March 2020 and will end on 4 May 2020. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meetings

Two public meetings will be held, the details of which are set out below:

Lochcarron Primary School, 14 April 2020 at 6.00pm.

Plockton High School, 14 April 2020 at 8.00pm

Anyone wishing to attend the public meetings is invited to do so. Both meetings 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 meetings will provide opportunities 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 of questions asked and views expressed at each meeting. These notes will be published on the Council website. The meetings will also be recorded.

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

Responses to the Proposals

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

Area Care and Learning Office (West)

The Fingal Centre

Portree

IV51 9ES

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, 4 May 2020 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 11 May 2020, 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 summary notes of the public meetings 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 29 May 2020. 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 meetings. 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 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 Education 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.

The Council intends to publish its Report in August 2020 prior to submission to the Council's Education Committee in November 2020. 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 Education 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); to publish or otherwise make available information as to their arrangements for the placing of children in schools under their management (S.28 of the 1980 Act) and to promote and support Gaelic Medium education and learning (S.15 of The Education (Scotland) Act 2016. Statutory Guidance issued by Bòrd na Gàidhlig early in 2017 specifies that local authorities should establish catchment areas for Gàidhlig Medium education, and the Council must comply with this Guidance. A catchment area for GME provision should be an area in which the education authority thinks it is reasonable for pupils wishing to receive GME provision to travel to school, and should have the potential to attract parents to choose GME provision for their children. Catchment areas for GME will normally overlay a number of school catchment areas.
- 1.2 In common with all public bodies in Scotland, the Highland Council also has a duty to provide Best Value. This includes making arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost; and, in making those arrangements and securing that balance, to have regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equal opportunities requirements and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Reason for the Proposal

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
 - Bòrd na Gàidhlig has issued statutory guidance recommending that local authorities create catchment areas for GME.
 - Highland Council has not previously specified catchment areas for many of its schools offering GME. This has led to a lack of clarity for parents in respect of entitlement to GME (see paragraph 2.2 below).
- 2.2 The current criteria for providing transport to GME in Highland are not particularly well defined, and have evolved over time. The minimum distance and road safety criteria are the same as for English Medium education. The Council currently has an informal arrangement under which transport to GME

can be provided “within reasonable travelling distance”. This has been generally interpreted as meaning up to 15 miles, but there are numerous variations.

Informal Consultation

- 3.1 Informal discussions have been held with local elected councillors, with staff of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and with the Head Teachers of each of the primary schools in the area, as well as with the Head Teacher of Plockton High School. Contact was also made with the Parent Councils of each of the above schools, and with all the local Community Councils. An explanation of the Proposal was provided and comments were invited. At the time of writing only Loch Duich Community Council had responded. They expressed concern that Loch Duich Primary School’s catchment area extends beyond Inverinate village to Cluanie and Letterfearn. If young children from 5 years of age were attending and had to travel on the secondary school bus, this would involve lengthy journeys of more than 1 hour at both ends of the day. The CC feel that this would be an unrealistic expectation, and that it would be unfair to expect primary school children to stay in a school hostel.

Current and Planned Provision of Gàidhlig Medium Education within the Plockton ASG

- 4.1 There are 8 primary schools within the ASG. Two of these, Plockton Primary and Lochcarron Primary offer GME at the primary stage. Plockton High also offers GME.

Plockton Primary School

- 5.1 Plockton Primary is located within the village of the same name. Presently the school has 15 pupils across P1-7 in Gàidhlig Medium and 10 pupils across P1-7 in English Medium. There are also 10 children in Sgoil-àraich (Gàidhlig Medium pre-school nursery).
- 5.2 Of the 15 GM pupils in P1-7 at present, 11 are from within the Plockton Primary School catchment and four are from within the Kyle Primary School catchment. There are also 11 pupils in the GM nursery at Plockton Primary. Of these 3 are from the Plockton PS catchment, 3 are from the Auchtertyre PS catchment, and 5 are from within the Kyle PS catchment.
- 5.3 The school is located a few hundred yards from Plockton High School, on the main road through the village of Plockton. It was opened as an independent unit in 1975 in refurbished old school buildings. The main building is a single-storey listed building and comprises one classroom, currently being used by an English medium class, a resource room, nursery, staffroom, office, and boys’ and girls’ toilets. The Gaelic medium class is situated in a separate building, the

other half of which is for the P3-7 EM class at present. There is a separate room available used as a dining and assembly hall. The main building of the school was refurbished in 2015 and has new windows and heating, toilets and décor. The playground comprises an asphalted vehicle-free area which surrounds the school buildings and a school garden area which was developed by the pupils, staff and parents of the school. The High School playing field and games hall facilities are also used at various times throughout the year.

Lochcarron Primary School

- 6.1 **Lochcarron Primary School** serves the village of Lochcarron and the surrounding rural area. The traditional building is situated on the shores of Lochcarron on the main road through the village. The original school, built in 1876, was closed and demolished and replaced by the present building in 1937. The accommodation consists of the main building and two prefabricated units. The main building has two teaching rooms and a dining room which doubles up as a general purpose room. The kitchen and toilets are also situated in the main building. The tarred playground area and grass playing field offer facilities for sports and games, and there is an adventure playground to the side of the main building.
- 6.2 Presently the school has 40 pupils across P1-7 in English Medium classes and 11 pupils in the Gàidhlig Medium class. At the time of writing there are also 11 children in the English medium nursery. All 11 pupils accessing GME are from within the Lochcarron catchment

Proposed School Catchments for GME

- 7.1 Approximate travel distances and times to Plockton Primary from the other schools are set out below:
- Auchtertyre Primary – Plockton Primary – 7.5 miles, 16 minutes travel time.
- Glenelg Primary – Plockton Primary – 26.8 miles, 49 minutes travel time. The road from Glenelg to Plockton passes over the Bealach Ratagain, a steeply rising road that reaches a height of around 1150’.
- Kyle of Lochalsh Primary – Plockton Primary – 5.5 miles, 13 minutes travel time.
- Kyleakin Primary – Plockton Primary – 7.9 miles, 19 minutes travel time.
- Loch Duich Primary – Plockton Primary – 15.3 miles, 26 minutes travel time.
- 7.2 The approximate distance and travel time from Applecross Primary to Lochcarron Primary is 21.2 miles/56 minutes. The Applecross to Lochcarron

road is over the Bealach na Bà, which rises steeply to 2054' and is often adversely affected by winter weather.

- 7.3 The statutory guidance specifies that a catchment area for GME provision should be an area in which the education authority thinks it is reasonable for pupils wishing to receive GME provision to travel to school, and should have the potential to attract parents to choose GME provision for their children.
- 7.4 The distance involved in travelling from Applecross to Lochcarron, and more importantly the nature of the route, means that the Applecross catchment would not be included within the Lochcarron GM catchment.
- 7.5 Similarly the distance involved in travelling from Glenelg to Plockton, and again the nature of the route, means that the Glenelg catchment would not be included within the Plockton GM catchment.
- 7.6 The Council is sympathetic to the idea that Gàidhlig Medium Education should be accessible as many pupils Highland as possible, provided it is practical and reasonable to provide access.
- 7.7 The Council therefore proposes that the GM catchment for Plockton Primary will overlay the English Medium catchments of Plockton Primary, Kyle Primary, Kyleakin Primary, Auchtertyre Primary, and Loch Duich Primary, but with restrictions on transport as set out below. Meanwhile the GM catchment for Lochcarron Primary will be the same as the English Medium catchment for that school
- 7.8 It should be noted though that the Loch Duich PS catchment covers a wide area, and travel from the furthest end of the catchment will be considerably longer than the distances and times given above. The Council would welcome views on whether the whole of the Loch Duich catchment should be included in the proposed GM catchment.
- 7.9 In considering the principles of Best Value – see paragraph 1.2 above - Highland Council has noted that to provide dedicated transport from the areas outwith Plockton, but within the Plockton GM catchment, could result in an unacceptably high level of additional cost to the taxpayer.
- 7.10 The Council therefore proposes that school transport to GME at Plockton Primary will be on the basis of utilising the existing transport for Plockton High School, wherever it is practicable to do so. Dedicated transport by taxi or minibus will not normally be provided.
- 7.11 The map at **Appendix B** shows the proposed GM catchment for Plockton Primary School (outlined in blue), with the existing EM catchments outlined in

red. **Appendix C** shows the proposed GM catchment for Lochcarron PS, (identical to the current EM catchment).

- 7.12 No changes are proposed for these catchments in respect of English Medium education.
- 7.13 For the purposes of GME, the Plockton High School catchment will be the same as the school's existing catchment.

Educational Benefits

- 8.1 The Proposal forms part of Highland Council's overall approach to the promotion of Gàidhlig medium education. Up to now, Highland Council's admission arrangements to GME have been informal and based on a "reasonable distance" (often applied as a 15 mile radius) from each school offering GME. In some locations these radii have overlapped, and the "15 mile" principle has not always been applied consistently. The creation of GM catchment areas, extended throughout Highland, will mean that admissions to GME will in future be more formal and robust.
- 8.2 The Proposal therefore helps to consolidate our existing provision of GME, and allows for the more efficient use of resources. It should be considered alongside other measures being undertaken to promote Gaelic and the benefits of bilingualism.
- 8.3 It is acknowledged that bilingualism has educational benefits as it provides the user with a better sense of the structure of language, and bilingual children often find it easier to pick up other languages. The continued availability of Gaelic medium education in to schools within the Plockton ASG, as evidenced by the new catchments, will provide children with the opportunity to develop these skills for life.
- 8.4 The creation of a GM catchment area will demonstrate the Council's commitment to the long-term future of Gaelic Medium education. Evidence of this commitment may help with the known problem with "drop-out" from GME.

Effects on School Transport

- 9.1 There will no impact on transport arrangements to Lochcarron Primary.
- 9.2 Within the Plockton Primary School catchment, pupils attending GME are offered school transport on the same basis as children attending English Medium education. Paragraph 7.10 above explains why no other effects on school transport are anticipated.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 10.1 At the present time there are 15 children attending GME at Plockton Primary and 11 at Lochcarron Primary. Currently Highland Council provides 1 teacher where a primary school with 1-15 pupils and 1.5 teachers where a primary school has 16-19 pupils. It is possible therefore that the numbers attending GME at either school will increase to a point that requires more staffing in future.

Effect on the Local Communities

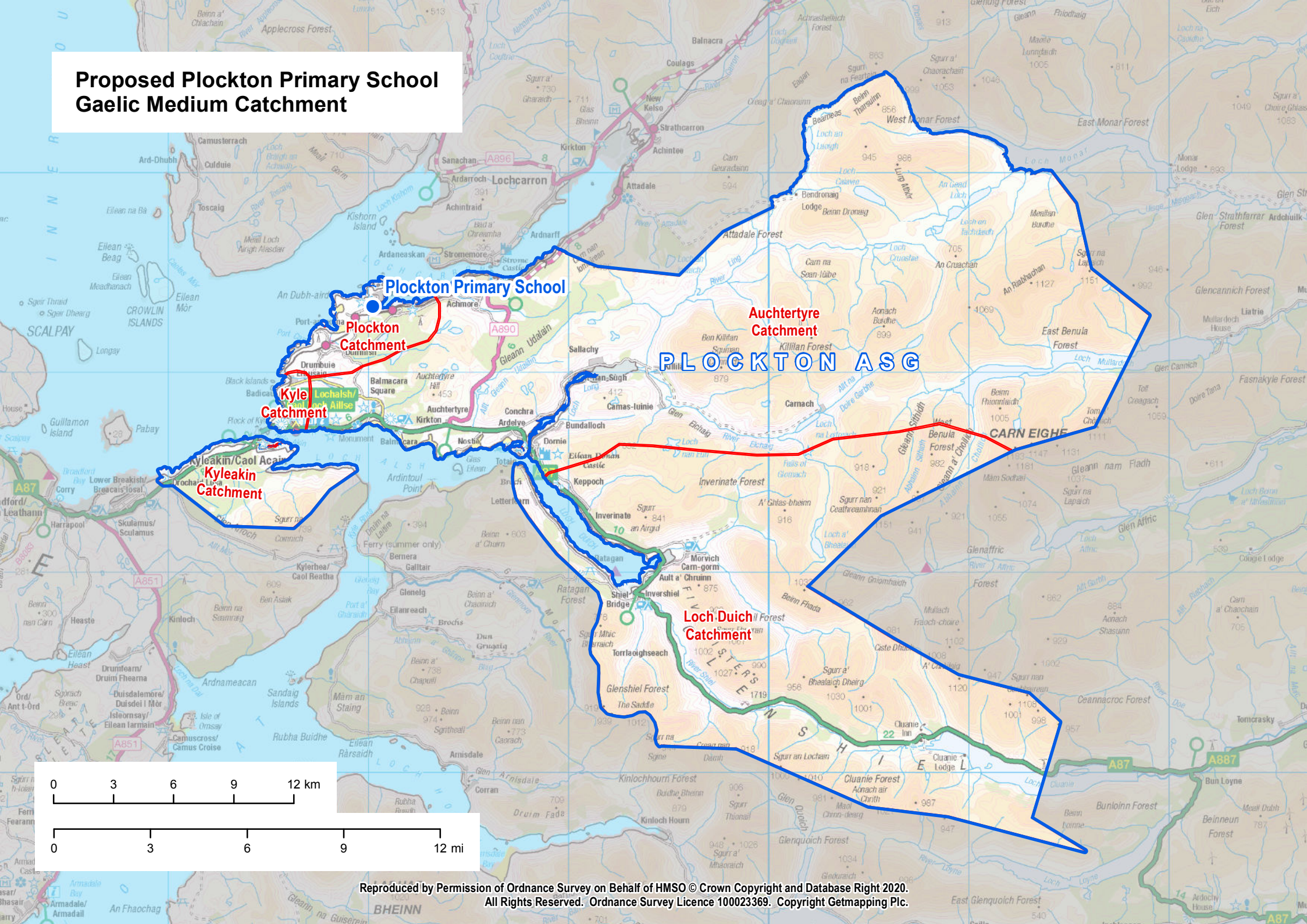
- 11.1 The proposal is not expected to have any impact on the wider local communities, either at Plockton or Lochcarron.

Recommendation

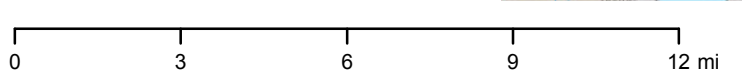
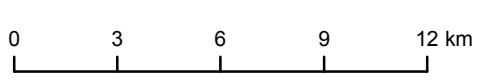
- 12.1 Highland Council recommends the adoption of Gàidhlig Medium catchment areas for Plockton Primary School and Lochcarron Primary School, along the lines set out in this paper.
- 12.2 This consultation paper is issued in terms of the authority's procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the Education Committee of the Highland Council.

END OF PROPOSAL PAPER

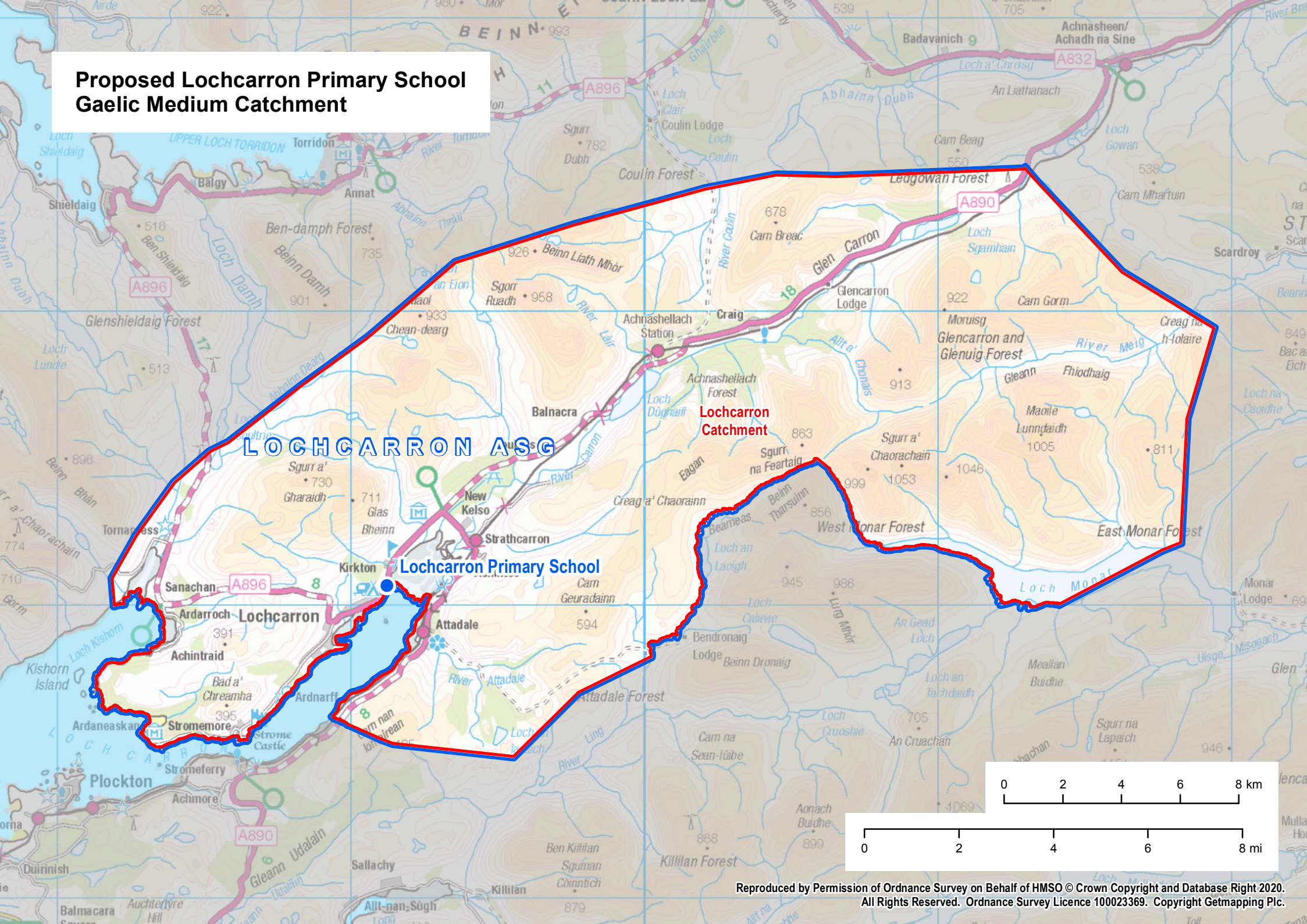
Proposed Plockton Primary School Gaelic Medium Catchment



PLOCKTON ASG



Proposed Lochcarron Primary School Gaelic Medium Catchment



LOHCARRON ASG

Lohcarron
Catchment

Lohcarron Primary School

