Education Committee - 27 February 2020

Item 11 - Proposed Closure of Stoer Primary

Additional representations made during the 3 week period prior to Committee

As referred to in the report on the agenda of this Committee, legislation requires that the Council publish its Statutory Consultation recommendations at least 3 weeks prior to the Committee at which they will be considered, and provide a minimum 3 week period during which any further representations can be submitted.

One additional representation has been received during this period.

That representation is attached, and the Council's consideration of that representation is set out below.

Representation made by Jamie Stone MP

The representation from Jamie Stone MP is on behalf of constituents opposed to the closure of the school. His letter makes the following points:

i. Local people acknowledge that the school was originally mothballed due to falling numbers
ii. There are currently 4 children of nursery and primary school age within the Stoer PS catchment. He acknowledges the implications of such low numbers
iii. However, 4 babies are due to be born in the community this year, and if this were to be combined with a few families moving into the area, there could be a viable primary school
iv. A functioning primary school would be an incentive for other families to choose the area
v. He is concerned about children of nursery and primary school age having to travel up to 10 miles each way to school in Lochinver

The issues raised are very similar to those raised by other respondents to the consultation exercise, and which have been considered and responded to in the report before members today. Officials have considered the points made in this further representation and, taking each issue in turn, would comment as follows:

i. The school was mothballed when the roll fell to two. At the time there were three other children in the Stoer PS catchment, but their parents had chosen to send them to Lochinver PS on placing requests. The mothballing of Stoer PS came about largely as a result of choices made by local parents.

ii. The MP is correct in stating that there are currently only 4 children of nursery and primary school age within the Stoer catchment. Three are in

primary school and one is in pre-school. The pre-school child will enrol in P1 in August 2020. The report to be considered by Committee today sets out the educational implications, and case for closure in light of the expected school roll numbers. It cannot be assumed that all of these children would return to Stoer Primary, were it be re-opened. Only one parent made a representation during the public consultation exercise (the parent of the pre-school child).

iii. Any babies born during the course of the current year would not enter P1 until August 2025, by which time all three of the current primary school age children in Stoer would have moved on to secondary school. Based on current figures the maximum roll at Stoer PS would be two for session 2024-25 and five for session 2025-26. It is speculative to suggest more families might move in.

iv. As mentioned above, prior to mothballing there was a pattern of parents making placing requests from Stoer to Lochinver. This does not support the argument that a local primary school would be an incentive for families to move to the area. Some parents feel that very small schools offer insufficient opportunities for social interaction.

v. Both the Proposal Paper and the Final Report produced by the Council acknowledged that the potential for lengthy journeys from Stoer to Lochinver is the main drawback of the closure proposal. This disadvantage has to be balanced against the educational benefits that arise from children attending the larger school at Lochinver, and the parental choices that led to mothballing in the first place.

In conclusion, the Council has duly considered this additional representation, and does not consider it alters the recommendations placed before members for consideration.

Jamie Stone MP
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross

5 February 2020

Ms Nicky Grant
Interim Head of Education
The Highland Council
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness
IV3 5NX

Our Ref: JS5482

Dear Ms Grant

I am writing on behalf of a constituents who have contacted me regarding the mothballing of Stoer Primary School.

Local residents appreciate that the decision to mothball the school some three years ago was largely due to a dwindling population of school age children. However since the then the birth rate has increased and I am told that there are at least four children of nursery or primary school age and another four babies due in this year. I am fully aware of the implications of such low school numbers but if the trend was to continue with just a few more young families moving into the area a functioning primary school would be great incentive to chose this area.

I am also concerned that these very young children of nursery and primary age are in some cases having travel up to 10 miles each way to Lochinver which is not ideal. Given the increase in the number of children living within the catchment of Stoer Primary School and, with school pupil numbers set to rise, I am in full support of the school being retained.

I would be grateful for your advice and comments and I am more than happy to meet with you to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely

Jamie Stone MP

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