

Agenda Item	13.
Report No	EDU/14/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education Committee

Date: 20 May 2021

Report Title: Statutory Consultation – Proposal for Gaelic Medium Catchment, Acharacle Primary School

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Members agreement to conduct a statutory consultation proposing the establishment of a Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment area for Acharacle Primary School.
- 1.2 Currently there are pupils who live in the Strontian Primary School catchment who attend GME at Acharacle Primary School. Including the Strontian catchment in the proposed GM catchment therefore reflects existing practice that has developed on an informal basis.

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 GME 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** – Any additional greenhouse gas emissions would be negligible.

3.5 **Risk** – No identified risks.

3.6 **Gaelic** - The proposal, if implemented, would clarify the transport entitlement for children accessing GME at Acharacle Primary School, and would maximise the opportunities for children to access such provision, within reason.

4. **Overview**

4.1 There are 171 currently operational primary schools in Highland, of which 20 currently offer GME.

4.2 The current arrangements under which pupils' access GME are not particularly well defined and have evolved over time. Around half of 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.

4.3 Bòrd na Gàidhlig has issued Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education. 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.

4.4 The establishment of GME catchment areas is subject to statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) Act Scotland 2010. These are resource intensive exercises, not only for The Highland Council but also for Education Scotland, who have to appoint an Inspector to assess each proposal. The Highland 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. The programme of consultations was halted in March 2020 due to the suspension of normal business with the onset of the Covid pandemic. As at the date of this report, of the 20 primary schools offering GME, 11 GM catchments have been created, and consultation on 3 others is in progress. Further proposals will be brought to future Committees, covering other parts of Highland.

4.5 Acharacle Primary School is the only primary school within the Ardnamurchan Associated School Group (ASG) to offer GME. Currently there are 35 pupils who attend GME at the school within P1-7, two of whom are from out with the Acharacle Primary catchment itself.

4.6 The Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) sets out the suggested GM catchment for Acharacle Primary. If implemented, the proposal would provide entitlement to GME for pupils across the Acharacle, Strontian and Kilchoan primary school catchments. The Ardgour and Lochaline catchments are not included, as the distances and time of travel involved from these locations are beyond what might be considered "reasonable". A map of the three English Medium catchments to be included is at **Appendix B**.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to a Committee decision to proceed to statutory consultation, a public meeting will be held to discuss The Highland Council's proposal, and there will be considerable opportunity for stakeholders to submit views to the Council in advance of any final decision being made. At this stage, it is expected the statutory consultation timeline would see a final recommendation being considered by the Committee early in 2022, though this may be subject to change to ensure the Council has sufficient time to consider and respond to matters arising from the consultation.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning

Date: 10 May 2021

Author: Ian Jackson, Education Officer

Appendices: Appendix A: Proposal Paper
Appendix B: Proposed GM catchment for Acharacle PS

SeptTHE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

The proposal is to establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Acharacle 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

INTRODUCTION

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

- To establish a Gàidhlig Medium (GM) catchment area for Acharacle Primary School. The new catchment will overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Acharacle Primary School, Strontian Primary School, and Kilchoan Primary School.
- To formalise the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Ardnamurchan High School, under which the catchment area for Ardnamurchan High School will apply to both Gàidhlig Medium and English Medium education.

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

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

If implemented as drafted, the proposed GM catchment for Acharacle Primary School will include 3 of the 5 primary school catchments within the Ardnamurchan Associated School Group (ASG). The remaining 2 primary schools are Ardgour Primary School and Lochaline Primary School. The distances and travel times to Acharacle from these 2 schools would make it impractical to include them within the GM catchment.

Any identified parental demand for local provision of GME from within the Ardgour and Lochaline catchments would be assessed in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. This process would also apply to the Strontian and Kilchoan catchments, that are included within the proposed GM catchment.

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Proposal Paper Published

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

- Acharacle Primary School
- Ardgour Primary School
- Kilchoan Primary School
- Lochaline Primary School
- Ardnamurchan Public Library, Strontian

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 Service
Highland Council
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7NE
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, Care and Learning Service, Camaghael Hostel, Fort William PH33 7NE
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 Acharacle Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) Parents of pupils attending Ardgour Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (iii) Parents of pupils attending Kilchoan Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (iv) Parents of pupils attending Lochaline Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (v) Parents of pupils attending Strontian Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (vi) Parents of pupils attending Ardnamurchan High School;
- (vii) The Parent Councils of each of the above schools;
- (viii) All staff of the schools listed above.

- (ix) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
- (x) Trade union representatives;
- (xi) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal;
- (xii) Bòrd na Gàidhlig;
- (xiii) Education Scotland.

Advertisement in Local Media

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

Consultation Period

The consultation for this Proposal will run from 23 August 2021 and will end on 8 October 2021. 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:

Acharacle Primary School, 29 September 2021 at 6.30pm.

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 Education 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 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.

Responses to the Proposals

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

Ian Jackson
Education Officer (Resources)
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7NE
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, 8 October 2021 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 15 November 2021, 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 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 3 December 2021. 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 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 early in 2022, prior to submission to the Council’s Education Committee in May 2022. 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. The Guidance goes on to say 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. Catchment areas for GME provision 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:
 - Highland Council has not previously specified catchment area 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).
 - Bòrd na Gàidhlig has issued statutory guidance recommending that local authorities create catchment areas for GME.
- 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 of Highland Council and with the Head Teachers of (i) Acharacle and Kilchoan Primary Schools, (ii) Ardgour Primary School; (iii) Lochaline Primary School and (iv) Ardnamurchan High and Strontian Primary Schools. The Parent Councils all of the local primary schools, and all of the local Community Councils, were also notified.

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

- 4.1 At secondary school level, Ardnamurchan High School offers GME.
- 4.2 There are 5 primary schools within the ASG. Acharacle Primary is the only one to offer GME at the primary stage.

Acharacle Primary School

- 5.1 Acharacle Primary is situated within the village of the same name. It has an extensive catchment extending northwards for about 14 miles to Roshven, westwards about 14 miles almost to Ardslignish, and eastwards about 6 miles to past Resipole. There are presently 50 pupils in P1-7, 35 in GM and 15 in English Medium. There are also 13 children in the Gaelic Medium Nursery. The school has excellent accommodation with well-sized classrooms, a large hall/theatre with bleacher seating, a dining room, medical room and designated nursery facility. The building also contains a community facility used by the local Feis (Fèis nan Garbh Crìochan). Both English and Gaelic Medium nursery classes are integral within the school building.
- 5.2 Of the 35 GM pupils at present, all but two are from within the Acharacle Primary catchment itself.

Proposed School Catchments for GME

- 6.1 There are 4 other primary schools within the Ardnamurchan ASG. Approximate travel distances and times to Acharacle Primary from the other schools are set out below:
- Ardgour Primary – Acharacle Primary – 25.8 miles, 47 minutes travel time.
- Kilchoan Primary – Acharacle Primary – 21.9 miles, 51 minutes travel time.
- Lochaline Primary – Acharacle Primary – 32.4 miles, 61 minutes travel time.
- Strontian Primary – Acharacle Primary – 12.5 miles, 29 minutes travel time.
- 6.2 It should be noted though, that each of the schools in the ASG has a wide catchment area, and travel from the furthest ends of each catchment will be considerably longer than the distances and times given above.

- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 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.
- 6.5 The village of Strontian is within the informal 15 mile limit that has previously been applied in respect of transport to GME, and it is therefore proposed that the Strontian Primary School catchment should be included within the proposed GM catchment.
- 6.6 The distances involved in travelling to Acharacle from communities in the Kilchoan PS catchment would normally mean that this area would not be included within the GM catchment. However, there is an existing bus service from Kilchoan to Acharacle that would be suitable for any pupils wishing to attend GME. The Council therefore proposes that school transport to GME at Acharacle Primary will be available on the basis of utilising the existing public transport between Kilchoan and Acharacle.
- 6.7 No current transport exists that would allow transport to Acharacle PS from Ardgour or Lochaline. As advised above, these communities are located at a considerable distance from Acharacle, and school transport could only be provided at disproportionate cost. For these reasons, the Council proposes that the Ardgour and Lochaline catchments are excluded from the proposed GM catchment.
- 6.8 The map at **Appendix B** shows the proposed GM catchment.
- 6.9 No changes are proposed for these catchments in respect of English Medium education.
- 6.10 For the purposes of GME, the Ardnamurchan High School catchment will be the same as the school's existing catchment.

Educational Benefits

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 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.

- 7.3 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 at Acharacle Primary School, as evidenced by the new catchment, will provide children with the opportunity to develop these skills for life.
- 7.4 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

- 8.1 Most of the children attending GME at Acharacle PS from within the Acharacle catchment, and those who require school transport utilise the same transport arrangements as those attending English Medium education. Future enrolments in GME from the Strontian PS catchment will be assessed in the same way as at present, with appropriate arrangements being made. As mentioned above, any future enrolments from the Kilchoan PS catchment will be expected to access GME by travelling on the existing public bus.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

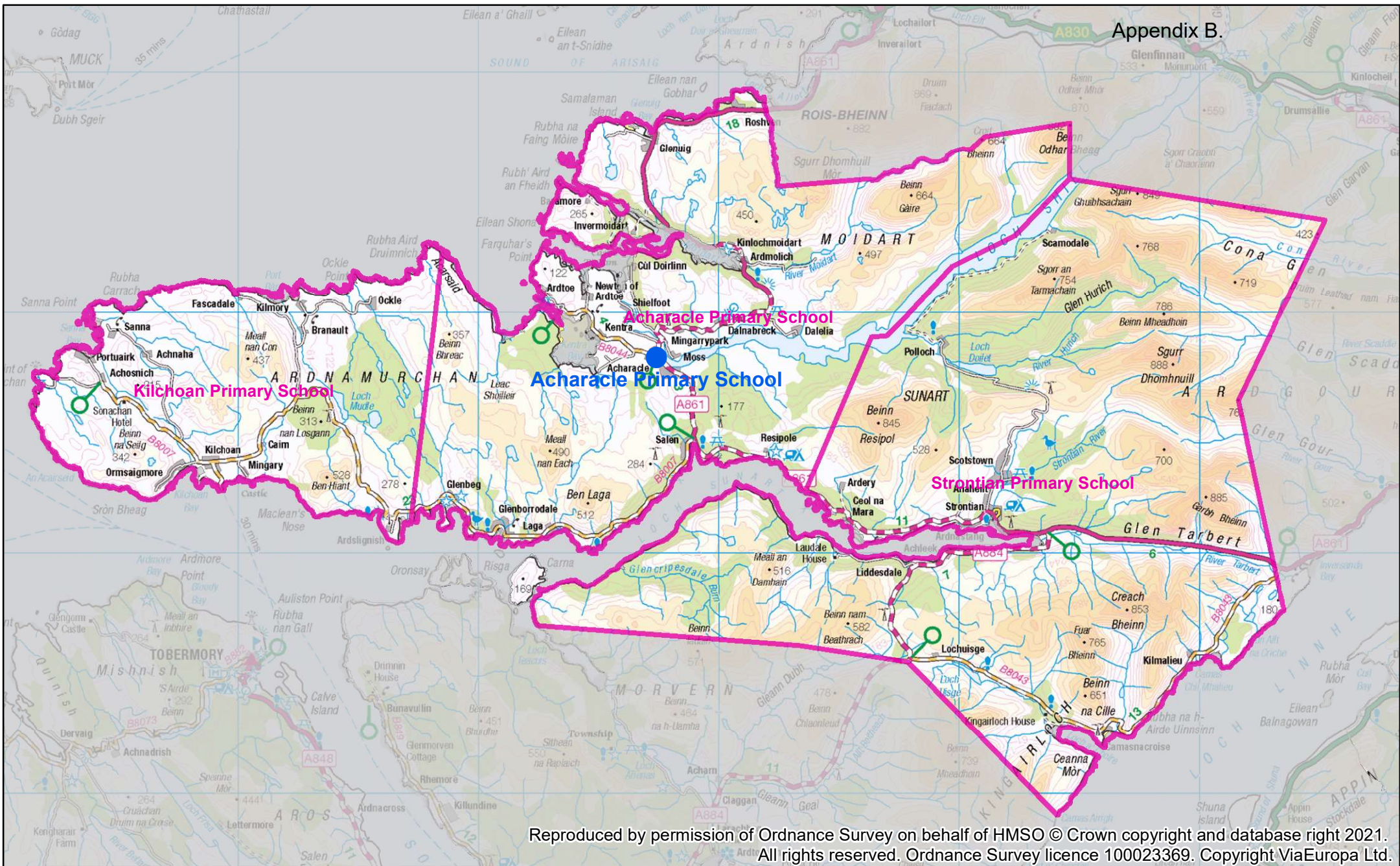
- 9.1 The proposed GM catchment reflects existing practice that has developed on an informal basis. The Council does not expect any significant impact on local school rolls. Nor do we expect any impact on staff within the schools of the Ardnamurchan ASG.

Effect on the Local Communities

- 10.1 The proposal is not expected to have any impact on the wider local community.

Recommendation

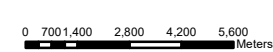
- 11.1 Highland Council recommends the adoption of a Gàidhlig Medium catchment area for Acharacle Primary School, along the lines set out in this paper.
- 11.2 This consultation paper is issued in terms of the authority's procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation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



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Proposed Acharacle Primary School Gaelic Medium catchment

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