

Agenda Item	14.
Report No	EDU/15/22

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Education Committee

**Date:** 15 September 2022

**Report Title:** Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of Roy Bridge Primary School

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following conclusion of the statutory consultation process, this report seeks Members' agreement to a recommendation to discontinue the provision of education at Roy Bridge Primary School, which has been "mothballed" since Easter 2017.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to recommend that the Highland Council discontinues education at Roy Bridge Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Spean Bridge Primary School. Roy Bridge Primary has not been operational since 2017, and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

### 3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – These are set out in the Table at **Appendix F** of the attached documentation.
- 3.2 Legal - The statutory consultation has been taken forward as per the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – The Equalities and Rural impacts were assessed at Sections 14 and 15 of **Appendix A**. The Proposal is not anticipated as having any effect on poverty issues. The Proposal Paper at Appendix A also assesses the community implications – See Section 12.
- 3.4 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.

- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 Gaelic – The proposed closure would have no effect on Gaelic Medium education (GME) which was not offered at Roy Bridge Primary School prior to the school being mothballed. During the public consultation, a suggestion was made that the school should be re-opened as a school offering GME, which would be a new development. The suggestion is discussed at Appendix 1 at paragraph 2.7, Issues/Responses 8-10, and paragraph 9.7. The Council provided local residents with advice on how to follow up this suggestion. No further feedback or enquiry has subsequently been received by the Council.

#### 4. Overview

- 4.1 **Appendix 1** is the proposal for decision. The original proposal for consultation, and relevant documents for consideration by the Committee, are all also circulated as appendices to this Paper. They provide details of all consultation comments received, the note of the public meeting, the report from Education Scotland, and the Council's response to comments arising from the consultation.
- 4.2 The outcome of the public consultation exercise was discussed with local elected members following the election. They were content that the Proposal was put to the Committee, giving due account to the evidence that there is a lack of parental interest in re-opening Roy Bridge school.
- 4.3 There were 5 written responses received from other stakeholders, only one of which was from a current parent of pre-school or primary age children. Three of the responses were mainly taken up with alleged procedural errors in consultation or factual errors in the Proposal Paper, in particular suggestions that the local community were given insufficient notice of the closure proposal. These concerns are addressed at Issue 6 of Appendix 1. All parents of children attending Spean Bridge Primary School were notified of the closure proposal by individual letter, and this included parents of pre-school children. This of course included all parents from the Roy Bridge PS catchment whose children are attending Spean Bridge PS, including the Chairperson of the Spean Bridge PS Parent Council. All staff at Spean Bridge PS were also notified by individual letter. Additionally, the closure proposal was publicised on the Highland Council website. The public meeting received additional publicity on the Highland Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- The remaining response to the consultation addressed the possibility of re-opening Roy Bridge PS in order to offer Gaelic Medium education – see paragraph 3.6 above.
- 4.4 The public meeting was attended by a total of 23 people, including 14 parents and other members of the local community (see **Appendix 2**). A total of 15 questions are recorded in the note along with the associated answers.

4.5 In their report, Education recognise that positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Roy Bridge Primary School and Spean Bridge Primary Schools since Roy Bridge Primary School was mothballed in 2017. They also noted that low parental interest in committing to sending children to Roy Bridge Primary School to enable it to reopen, demonstrated that reopening the school is not viable.

## **5. Next Steps**

5.1 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 proposal was published on 15 August 2022. Any further representations that are received will be tabled at the meeting for the attention of Members.

5.2 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 they will issue a call-in notice.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Education

Date: 15 August 2022

Author: Ian Jackson, Education Officer



## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

### EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

#### REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT ROY BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL, RE-ASSIGNING ITS CATCHMENT AREA TO THAT OF SPEAN BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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

- To discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge 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 online on 12 January 2022.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

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## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 17 November 2021, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B - E** are the appendices to the original proposal.
- 1.3 Roy Bridge Primary School has been mothballed since Easter 2017, when the school roll fell to two.
- 1.4 Having once again reviewed the status of Roy Bridge Primary, it is the Council's view that re-opening the school would have a negative educational impact on any pupils who wished to attend the school. Further details on this are provided in Sections 6 and 10 below.
- 1.5 Roy Bridge 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 6-10 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and have been reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5-10 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 12 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and is further considered at Sections 8 and 10 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. The effects on school transport were considered at Section 10 of the Proposal Paper, (**Appendix A**) and reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 6 and 10 below.

## 2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Wednesday 24 November 2021 to Friday 21 January 2022. 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 Spean Bridge Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) The Parent Council of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (iv) Staff of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- (v) Trade Union representatives.

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

2.4 A public meeting was held online on 12 January 2022. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website, Twitter Account and Facebook page, and in the *Lochaber Times*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

2.5 The public meeting had originally been scheduled to take place in Roy Bridge Village Hall, but was moved to online after the sharp rise in COVID cases in late December 2021, linked to the appearance of the Omicron variant.

2.6 During the public consultation exercise, an alternative to closure was suggested, which would involve re-opening Roy Bridge Primary School as a school offering Gaelic Medium education. A detailed note of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**. It was attended by 15 parents and members of the public, and the Council received no representations from individuals unable to attend.

2.7 On 9 February 2022, Council officials wrote to the respondent who made this suggestion, providing advice on following up the idea. The letter advised that there are less than five children from the Roy Bridge PS catchment attending Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, and that based on the current numbers of pupils, and their ages, it would not be viable to offer GME in Roy Bridge Primary School. It continued by advising of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education and the process by which parents can request an assessment of the need for Gaelic medium primary education (GMPE) in their local area. The letter then suggested that an assessment of the level of demand from pre-school children would be an alternative way of pursuing the suggestion of GME at Roy Bridge, and recommended that Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comann nam Pàrant (Naiseanta) might be further sources of advice. A copy of this letter is at **Appendix 6**. There has been no further feedback or follow up by the community since the letter issued in February 2022.

### **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-3v.
- 4.2 The views of P4-7 pupils at Spean Bridge Primary School (which included the pupils living within the Roy Bridge catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire. Appendix 3vi summarises their views, which are also discussed at Section 5 below. It was not possible to consult the younger pupils due to COVID complications at the time. Since Roy Bridge PS has been mothballed in since 2017, P1-3 pupils will never have attended the school, and the consultation on closure may not have been particularly meaningful for them.

#### **5.0 Overview of Issues raised during the consultation period**

- 5.1 Of the 31 pupils who returned questionnaires, 2 thought the Council should permanently close Roy Bridge Primary School, whilst three thought should be re-opened. Continued mothballing was by far the most popular option amongst the pupils, with twenty-six pupils indicating this was their preferred option. The detailed feedback from pupils suggested that the main interest of the children was around continued use of /access to the play park at Roy Bridge.
- 5.2 Education Scotland Inspectors who visited the school reported that the children who spoke with HM Inspectors spoke positively about their experience at Spean Bridge Primary School. They identified the importance of maintaining friendships already established there. Children described the benefits of having access to a range of lunchtime activities and clubs. They particularly enjoy using the school's large sports pitch.
- 5.3 The arguments advanced by the pupils in favour of continued mothballing, and those in favour of re-opening the school, are set out at Issues 1-3 below. The responses encountered by Education Scotland are set out at paragraph 7.3 below.
- 5.4 There were 5 written responses received from other stakeholders, only one of which was from a current parent of pre-school or primary age children.
- 5.5 Three of the responses were mainly taken up with alleged procedural errors in consultation or factual errors in the Proposal Paper. The remaining response addressed the possibility of re-opening Roy Bridge PS in order to offer Gaelic Medium education – see paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7 above.
- 5.6 The public meeting was attended by a total of 23 people, including 14 parents and other members of the local community (see **Appendix 2**). A total of 15 questions are recorded in the note along with the associated answers.



- 5.7 The main arguments put forward are summarised below, together with the responses from the Council. Where different responses raise similar issues, these have been “grouped” for the purposes of the response.

## 6.0 Responses to the Issues raised in Public Consultation

- 6.1 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of continued mothballing are set out at Issue 1 below, and addressed at Response 1.

### Issue 1

“I would like to be able to carry on playing in the old school playground.”

“I would be separated from really close friends (if it re-opened) but I still want to be able to play in the playground.”

“I don’t want my best friends to leave.”

“Make it into something else instead of a school but leave the playground.”

“I want to use the playground but not lose my friends.”

### Response 1

Retaining the school playground for public use seems to be an important issue for children living in Roy Bridge. This is discussed further at Response 12 below.

- 6.2 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of re-opening Roy Bridge PS are set out at Issues 2 and 3 below, and addressed at Responses 2 and 3.

### Issue 2

“At the moment the school is big enough when we are all here but when the houses get built the older classes could go up there.”

“It could be part of Spean Bridge Primary School and P5, P6 & P7 could go there.”

### Response 2

This would effectively mean Spean Bridge PS operating as a single school over two sites. Highland Council would not want to do this unless it was unavoidable.

Whilst it would mean using the Roy Bridge building for education, it would still be a closure of Roy Bridge as a separate school.

Highland Council thinks there will be enough room at Spean Bridge to cope with any increase to the number of pupils, who might come from new housing.

The Highland Council assesses all of its schools for building Suitability and Condition, in line with Scottish Government guidelines. Schools are assessed on a scale with the ratings “A” (good) “B” (satisfactory), “C” (poor) and “D” (bad). Roy Bridge Primary School was rated as “B” for the educational suitability of the building and “B” for building condition.

Roy Bridge Primary School is rated as “B” for the educational suitability of the building and “B” for building condition. Spean Bridge Primary School is rated as “A” for the educational suitability of the building and “A” for building condition. Moving children from Spean to Roy would therefore mean moving them to poorer quality accommodation.

Any suggestion to move the upper stage classes at Spean Bridge across to the Roy Bridge school building would require a statutory consultation.

### **Issue 3**

“I would like to go to a different school to meet new friends and go to the park.”

“It is fun to skate around but most of my friends will go to Spean”

“I would like to be in a smaller school.”

### **Response 3**

Although the Council can understand the attraction of a smaller school, we think Roy Bridge would be too small. The school was mothballed in 2017 when the number of children at the school fell to just two. Children would not make new friends there as all the children from Roy Bridge already attend Spean Bridge.

- 6.3 The arguments advanced in written responses are set out at Issues 4-12 below, and addressed at Responses 4-12.

### **Issue 4**

The village has many young families, but the closure of the school would drive many away to other areas. It would be difficult to manage a child attending a school 3 miles away.

For people who live in Roy Bridge, it is a hassle to get to Spean Bridge.

### **Response 4**

Roy Bridge PS has been mothballed since Easter 2017, and since then young children in the village have attended Spean Bridge PS. Pre-school

children did this even prior to 2017, since there has never been a school nursery in Roy Bridge.

School age children from the Roy Bridge catchment are provided with free home-school transport to Spean Bridge PS. Although this does not apply to after-school activities, these would have to continue in Spean Bridge even if Roy Bridge PS were re-opened. All the available evidence suggests that the numbers attending a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would be insufficient to allow after-school activities to take place there.

#### **Issue 5**

Having a school in Roy Bridge would ensure that children would have other children of their own age, to play with and develop together.

#### **Response 5**

On the contrary, it was lack of numbers at Roy Bridge that caused the school to be mothballed, when the roll fell to two. Children at Roy Bridge did not have other children of their own age to play with and develop together. All the work undertaken by Highland Council prior to the formal consultation suggests that very few, if any, parents would remove their children from Spean Bridge School and place them in a re-opened Roy Bridge Primary. This information is further reinforced by the low number of responses from parents in response to the formal consultation.

#### **Issue 6**

The Council have allowed very little time to allow the public to get their thoughts together.

Parents of children not yet at school have been given no notification of the plans.

The consultation has been centred around Spean Bridge parents.

Although the Education Officer was fully aware of the community of Roy Bridge's continued concerns about the future of their primary school having personally attended the packed Community Council Meeting of 1st September 2019 the first the Community knew about the current proposal was an advert in the Oban Times on the 6th January 2022, some 43 days after the consultation started, about a Public Meeting to be held on 12th January on a Proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Roy Bridge Primary School with a closing date for submissions of 21st January 2022.

The Consultation Paper which is a pivotal document in the process and should have been widely available was even unknown to the Chair of the Spean Bridge Primary School Parent Council until the Public Meeting on the 12th January. Posting it on the Highland Council Website and Fort William

Library may fulfil legal requirements technically, but expecting the community at large to find it there without prompting surely a fallacy.

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO who took on the principal responder role during COVID 19 lockdowns were able to ensure that all homes in our 995 square kilometre area knew of our services by conducting mail drops through Royal Mail so surely Highland Council could have adopted the same procedure to ensure everyone in the Roy Bridge Primary School Catchment Area were aware of this new proposal with its attendant literature.

To assist the community the Education Officer should have elaborated on what constituted other suggestions. At the Parent Council Meeting of 12th March 2020 wrongly attributed to that of 7th May 2019 in Ci the minutes say: "Support was vocalised for community transfer if possible. In place of the community council the local SCIO would be consulted". Needless to say although Highland Council is well aware of our contact details we have heard nothing.

I understand that mothballing is only meant to be a temporary measure and 5 years is longer than the legislation would normally expect, but as the guidance to the legislation says it expects authorities like Highland Council to seek and achieve high standards and conduct rural school closure proposals in a fair and transparent manner, and I don't believe they have acted fairly in their dialogue with the community of Roy Bridge.

On reviewing the proposals as a member of the community within the Roy Bridge Primary School catchment area, it is clear that there has been a degree of consultation with the current Parent Council at Spean Bridge PS as well as other parents of primary age children via the Spean Bridge PS noticeboard. However, there appears to have been only a token attempt to involve the wider community. An advert was placed in the Oban Times of 6 January advising of a public meeting on 12 January, just six days later. Rather than being postponed when it became clear that Covid restrictions prevented an in-person gathering the meeting went ahead via Zoom, a medium not accessible to the whole community. A previous face-to-face public meeting in September 2019 had been well attended and opposed final closure but the opportunity for widespread local involvement was not available on this occasion.

I feel that an extended consultation period would ensure that the wider community are given the opportunity to have its say.

### **Response 6**

All parents of children attending Spean Bridge Primary School were notified of the closure proposal by individual letter, and this included parents of pre-school children. This of course included all parents from the Roy Bridge PS catchment whose children are attending Spean Bridge PS, including the Chairperson of the Spean Bridge PS Parent Council. All staff at Spean

Bridge PS were also notified by individual letter. Additionally, the closure proposal was publicised on the Highland Council website. The public meeting received additional publicity on the Highland Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

It was unfortunate that at the time of the consultation the Spean Bridge, Achnacarry and Roy Bridge Community Council was not in operation, and so could not be included in the consultation. However, given the wide circulation of the Proposal within the rural communities of Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge, the Council was surprised to hear claims that people had not heard of the Proposal. This might reflect the low level of interest from parents themselves. Of the 5 written responses received, only one was from a parent of school age or pre-school age children.

The documents were available not just at Fort William Library but also at Spean Bridge Primary School itself.

In publicising the Proposal, the Council has at all times complied with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

### **Issue 7**

The Council has set about forcing children out of Roy Bridge School.

### **Response 7**

The Council categorially denies this suggestion. Parents moved their children from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge by means of placing requests, submitted of their own free will.

The roll figures for Roy Bridge PS from 2008 to its eventual mothballing were:

2008-09	33
2009-10	29
2010-11	25
2011-12	23
2012-13	18
2013-14	19
2014-15	20
2015-16	12
2016-17	6

The original enrolment of 6 at the beginning of session 2016-17 fell to 2 by Easter 2017.

### **Issue 8**

I would suggest that the Proposal Paper is factually inaccurate that the proposal does not properly consider Gaelic medium education and pupil

numbers from the Roy Bridge catchment attending Gaelic medium education in Fort William. Without these figures the document is incomplete and does not properly illustrate the current situation regarding education provision for children from the Roy Bridge area. In order to present correct information regarding education provision for children from the Roy Bridge catchment accurate numbers for pre-school and Primary Gaelic medium education need to be included and factually presented. Parents of children living within the Roy Bridge catchment but attending GME need to be included in the consultation.

### **Response 8**

The mothballing of Roy Bridge Primary in 2017 did not arise because of a shortage of pupils in the school catchment, but because parents of pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment made placing requests for their children to attend school in Spean Bridge. A very small number of pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment, less than five at the time of writing, currently attend Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar (BSGL). Clearly parents who make the choice send their children to BSGL do so because they are seeking GME, and would be uninterested in sending their children to a re-opened Roy Bridge PS that offered only English Medium education. The issue of offering GME at Roy Bridge itself is considered at Issue/Response 9 below.

### **Issue 9**

“... The existence of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar makes it unlikely that there will be demand for another Gaelic Medium nursery in Roy Bridge”. I would suggest that this statement is unfounded and would ask for evidence. From 2000 to 2012 I was involved in the development of Gaelic medium preschool provision in Roy Bridge. There was significant demand and we established a Gaelic medium nursery under contract to Highland Council. This is acknowledged in the Consultation document. Parents from Fort Augustus and Fort William as well Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and surrounding areas attended the provision. It was evident that, with the right support, there was the opportunity for this pre-school provision to grow into Primary provision in due course. With the advent of Bun Sgoil Ghaidhlig Loch Abar it is correct that there is now alternative provision however the travel time from Roy Bridge is prohibitive and the size of the nursery is very much urban rather than rural. I understand that there may also be pressure of numbers at BSGLA. If Highland Council were to open a Gaelic medium nursery in Roy Bridge it is likely that it would be well attended. Like BSGLA and all other Gaelic schools, over time, numbers would grow. Children would come from both Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge and surrounding areas and pressure on facilities in Spean Bridge and in the Gaelic nursery in BSGLA would be eased. When GM nursery education ceased in Roy Bridge in 2012 it was due to the need for additional support from Highland Council, particularly with staffing. With the advent of BSGLA parents are much more aware now of the benefits and opportunities that GM education presents. I would suggest that there is opportunity now to reintroduce GM nursery provision which would very quickly grow into Primary provision. The travel requirement is excessive

for these younger age groups and there would be numerous benefits if there were local provision.

### **Response 9**

As mentioned at Response 8 above, there are currently less than five children from the Roy Bridge PS catchment attending Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, (we do not normally provide details of children when numbers are less than five). Based purely on the current numbers of pupils, and their ages, it would not be viable to offer GME in Roy Bridge Primary School.

Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education has been published by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which lays down a process by which parents can request an assessment of the need for Gaelic medium primary education (GMPE) in their local area. Given the current numbers from Roy Bridge attending Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, it may be that an assessment of the level of demand from pre-school children would be an alternative way of pursuing the suggestion of GME at Roy Bridge. This information was provided to parents (see Appendix 6) but no request for GMPE at Roy Bridge has been forthcoming.

As no request for GMPE has come forward from the community, there is every reason to suppose that re-opening Roy Bridge PS as a school offering GME would result in a school with a very low roll, most probably in single figures. By contrast, at the time of writing Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar is expecting 134 pupils in its P1-7 classes for session 2022-23. Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar therefore offers larger numbers that are much better for language learning. It also offers an immersive Gaelic language experience that would not be offered at a school that provided both Gaelic and English medium education, should that option be suggested. We would therefore see some merit in GME in the area being provided at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, and the Council has invested heavily in providing that facility.

### **Issue 10**

If there were GME provision in Roy Bridge a wider catchment would be expected. It is notable that there are currently several HC Consultation papers ongoing regarding the creation of GME catchment areas for schools e.g., Acharacle, Glenurquhart. A hypothetical catchment for Roy Bridge Primary as a GME Primary might enable those within the hypothetical catchment to be consulted and included in the formal Consultation. The narrative at Option 3, points 8.1 and 8.2 of the Consultation paper should be amended to reflect this.

The carbon footprint and financial costs associated with transportation of children to GME provision need to be explored and clearly documented. We are living in times of change. Carbon footprint and impact on climate change has become a key consideration. We are also emerging from a pandemic. Have guidelines on educational provision been amended to reflect these changing times? A classroom that was once deemed suitable for 25 children

might in future be deemed suitable for less children in order to enable social distancing and adequate health and hygiene considerations for staff and pupils. Journey times that were once acceptable may no longer be acceptable in future. Where bigger was seen to be better in recent years, might it be the case that, with new challenges, smaller rural schools become more desirable regardless of whether or not there might be slightly higher per capita running costs?

I would urge Highland Council to give full consideration to the above points prior to reaching a conclusion on the future educational provision in Roy Bridge and surrounding area.

### **Response 10**

As mentioned at Response 9, it is open to parents in the Roy Bridge area to make a request for Gaelic Medium Primary Education, and the availability of this has been publicised to parents. No request has been made in response.

It is approximately 12 miles from Roy Bridge Primary School to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, so a very small number of pupils are travelling 24 miles per day between the two locations.

The proposal to close Roy Bridge PS makes no comment on the general desirability of small schools as opposed to large schools. As previously mentioned, this specific proposal has only been advanced because the Roy Bridge parents, of their own free will, submitted placing requests or their children to attend Spean Bridge PS.

### **Issue 11**

The Act says the authority should ensure the proposal paper provides sufficient detail on areas likely to be of concern to communities. This would include a clear travel plan for pupils, including identifying safe routes to the new school location and providing clarity, where relevant, on school transport that will be provided and traffic management around the school site(s).

I note that Highland Council have provided School Transport by Shiel Buses, but nothing about alternative travel, and parents themselves have to make travel arrangements for extracurricular activities when it falls out with the bus departure time. It also states that the cost of transporting the pupils is £36,195. This is however a public bus which would continue to operate along the route even if Roy PS was to reopen so the savings would be less. Another inaccuracy as the current school service is not part of a public service and would be discontinued if the school reopened.

### **Response 11**

Children from Roy Bridge have been provided with school transport ever since Roy Bridge School was mothballed in 2017, and these arrangements have worked well. Response 4 comments that the available evidence on the



numbers of children who would attend a re-opened Roy Bridge PS cast considerable doubt on whether after-school activities could take place there.

The issue of the savings figure is covered under “Omissions and Inaccuracies” in Section 9 below.

### **Issue 12**

The proposal paper should also be clear on the authority’s plans for the future use of any school building and associated facilities that will be released by the proposal. It is reasonable for communities to be concerned whether a school building would have another public purpose, be available for the community, sold or might remain vacant for a significant period, and authorities should provide as much certainty and transparency as possible. The only certainty given in the paper is “Other suggestions have been made for the future use of the building in the event of the closure proceeding. Subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community over the future use of the building and site. Any such proposal would however have to be progressed within the terms of the Council’s current asset management policy.”

Future use suggestions for the school buildings and site made to Highland Council to date have not been specified, either within the Consultation paper or at the Zoom meeting. Furthermore, the play equipment gifted to Roy Bridge PS by Corrour Estate a significant expense soon before the school’s mothballing may have alternative uses at its existing site or at Spean Bridge PS.

### **Response 12**

It is not possible for Highland Council to provide the community with guarantees about the future use of the school building, as to do so would preempt the outcome of the consultation. The Proposal Paper specified that 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 community of Roy Bridge to see whether some or all of 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.

## **7.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland**

- 7.1 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**. A Gaelic language version is at **Appendix 5**.
- 7.2 In their report, Education Scotland recognise that positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Roy Bridge Primary School and Spean Bridge

Primary Schools since Roy Bridge Primary School was mothballed in 2017. Children work regularly in cooperative learning groups of various sizes. Being part of an age-appropriate peer group of sufficient size allows children to participate in a range of social interactions and a broad range of curriculum activities. Their development of skills for learning, life and work benefits from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age and stage. The opportunity to participate in sporting, musical and artistic activities is enhanced. The current arrangements allow for smooth transition for children moving from the nursery class into P1. When compared to the current Roy Bridge Primary School premises the accommodation at Spean Bridge Primary School has the potential to provide a better learning environment. This includes access to facilities such as a large sports pitch. HM Inspectors agree that there are potential educational benefits if the council's proposal goes ahead, and that the proposal supports the council's duty to ensure Best Value. Education Scotland note that information gathered by the Council indicates that should Roy Bridge Primary School reopen, enrolment would remain very low

- 7.3 Education Scotland noted that the children who spoke with HM Inspectors spoke positively about their experience at Spean Bridge Primary School. They identified the importance of maintaining friendships already established there. Children described the benefits of having access to a range of lunchtime activities and clubs. They particularly enjoy using the school's large sports pitch. Both parents and children spoke of the positive benefits of having access to Roy Bridge Primary School's grounds for leisure activity use. They believe that this provides a vital safe area in which children can play, skate and cycle, particularly as there is no safe cycle route between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge.
- 7.4 Education Scotland further noted that the few parents who spoke with HM Inspectors indicated their sadness at the potential loss of a school within the village of Roy Bridge. They expressed concern about the safety of school transport with children being picked up and dropped off near a busy road in Roy Bridge. There were mixed views as to whether they would enrol their child at Roy Bridge Primary School should it reopen.
- 7.5 Education Scotland noted that Staff who spoke with HM Inspectors support the proposal to close Roy Bridge Primary School. They recognise the impact of the declining roll and feel that reopening the school would be unsustainable. Children attending Spean Bridge Primary School for their nursery provision settle well, with parents choosing to maintain this through transition into P1. Staff identified that around half of the children within the Roy Bridge Primary School catchment would still require school transport should the school remain open. They felt that the additional travel time of five to six minutes was not excessive.
- 7.6 Lastly, Education Scotland noted that low parental interest in committing to sending children to Roy Bridge Primary School to enable it to reopen, demonstrated that reopening the school is not viable.
- 7.7. Two issues were identified for further consideration, and are set out below.

**Issue 13**

The council has clarified that, should there be sufficient future demand for Gaelic Medium Education, that they would follow legislation to determine the need for a local provision. The council's final report should include this clarification and details of how they will promote Gaelic Medium Education with parents. This is a statutory duty.

**Response 13**

Highland Council is the largest provider of Gaelic Medium Education in Scotland. Our Education service has over 200 schools in total, covering a geographical area nearly the size of Belgium. The area is a mix of urban, semi urban and rural areas and we have ambition to provide opportunities for Gaelic across the whole region. Over the last year, the Council has increased the profile of Gaelic, invested in the team, established a Gaelic Committee and Gaelic is embedded in the Council's Executive Leadership Team, led by an Executive Chief Officer. This reflects that the Council is committed to growing and developing the GM and GL Education sector; Gaelic learning and curriculum development; and Gaelic culture and communities.

The Council plans to focus on growth in ELC and 0-3, curriculum development, support to ASN, and focus on language use within our communities for both our children and our fragile communities to ensure Gaelic has a sustained and strong presence. These are the key priorities within our projects over the next year and beyond.

Challenges include our geography, demographics with a declining population and the protection of our fragile Gaelic communities. Growth in GME is impacted by a lack of probationer allocation teachers, difficulty in recruiting Gaelic teachers and a narrowing of curriculum choice at the senior phase.

The Highland Council's third generation Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2023 was submitted to Bòrd na Gàidhlig on September 18th, 2017. The Plan has been developed under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. The Highland Council has received statutory approval from Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Plan has 6 priority areas. The specific Strategic Commitments within Priority Area 3 (Gaelic in Education) are:

- Contribute to national strategic partnership initiatives and policy formulation across Gaelic education.
- Ensure that Gaelic education is embedded in The Highland Council's Strategic Education Improvement Planning.
- Build on established partnerships to continue to grow a professionally organised and trained staff to support the 0–3 Early Learning and Childcare sector.
- Develop 3–18 Gaelic Education through a systematic and sustainable approach to increase the percentage of Gaelic Learners in establishments.

- Work with partners to review the learning materials and learning resources provided to support Gaelic Education.

Within the local ASG for this Proposal, Lochaber High School is able to promote the Gaelic ethos to all pupils, across the ASG, through transition, curriculum and events. The Council also promotes the GMPE procedure to parents via its website, where full details of how to apply are available.

#### **Issue 14**

Should the proposal go ahead, the council should work with the community to explore how to make best use of the former Roy Bridge Primary School. It should explore with the community their wish to ensure continued access to the safe play space provided by the school grounds.

#### **Response 14**

The Council is happy to make this commitment.

### **8.0 Effects on the Community**

- 8.1 Paragraphs 12.1 and 12.2 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 and site could be turned over to community use.
- 8.2 The future of the site and building was one of the main issues that arose in the consultation exercise. As previously discussed, the Council cannot prejudge the outcome of the current consultation by agreeing any future use of the building at this stage. In the event the closure is approved, the Council would welcome a community bid for the future use of the building and site.
- 8.3 The consultation exercise did not identify any other effects on the community from the proposal.

### **9.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies**

- 9.1 Section 10.1 of the Proposal Paper at Appendix A commented that *“Currently, pupils from the Roy Bridge PS catchment are transported to Spean Bridge PS at an annual cost of £36,195. This is however via a public bus which would continue to operate along the route even if Roy Bridge PS were to re-open, so the actual transport saving from re-opening would be less than the figure set out above.”*
- 9.2 One of the responses to consultation highlighted that this was an inaccuracy as the school transport between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge is not by means of a public bus. Highland Council agrees that this was an inaccuracy in the original Proposal Paper.

- 9.3 A new version of the Financial Analysis attached to the Proposal Paper has been prepared and is attached at **Appendix 7**. The revised analysis shows an annual saving of approximately £84,000 per year, compared to a re-opened Roy Bridge PS.
- 9.4 The Council has carefully considered the impact of this inaccuracy on the Proposal but has concluded it does not represent a material consideration relevant to the Authority's decision as to implementation of the proposal. School transport contracts are subject to award via a regular tendering process, which means that costs relating to future school, transport can never be more than estimates.
- 9.5 More significantly, the proposed closure of Roy Bridge PS is not being advanced on financial grounds but instead due to the lack of viability of Roy Bridge PS, following the voluntary decisions of parents to move their children to Spean Bridge PS.
- 9.6 Separately, it has been suggested that the paper was inaccurate in that it did not consider the numbers of children from the Roy Bridge catchment who attend Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar in Fort William – see Issue 8 above.
- 9.7 Roy Bridge PS did not offer Gaelic Medium Education before the school was mothballed, so the small number of children attending GME in Fort William, who are all enrolled at the Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, is not relevant to any consideration of Roy Bridge PS re-opening as it was before Easter 2017. Highland Council does not therefore consider the exclusion of GM pupils to have been an inaccuracy in the Proposal Paper.
- 9.8 The suggested alternative to closure, of opening Roy Bridge PS as a school offering GME, is considered further at Paragraph 10.7 below.

## **10.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure**

- 10.1 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;

Sections 5-8 of the Proposal Paper identified and discussed the following alternatives to closure:

- i. To continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement.
- ii. To re-open Roy Bridge PS with its current catchment area.
- iii. To re-open Roy Bridge PS with an expanded catchment area.

- 10.2 In respect of option (i) above, Roy Bridge PS has now been mothballed since Easter 2017, and continued mothballing has little to recommend it. In terms of option (ii) above, since the school was mothballed, consultation, both informal

and during the current statutory period, has provided no evidence that a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would attract enough children to make the school viable. This view has been endorsed by Education Scotland.

- 10.3 In respect of option (iii) in paragraph 10.1 above, paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 of the original Proposal Paper set out the reasons why an expanded catchment area would not be a viable option for Roy Bridge PS.
- 10.4 Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Sections 5-8 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal.
- 10.5 One further alternative approach was suggested during the consultation exercise:
- Re-open Roy Bridge Primary School as a school offering Gaelic Medium education
- 10.6 This suggestion has been fully considered by the Council, with the results set out at Responses 9 and 10 above. For the reasons set out, the Council again does not consider this a viable option.
- 10.7 The Council has also reconsidered 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 12 of the Proposal Paper and is further considered at Section 8 above.

As set out at paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7 above, the Council has considered a suggestion that we re-open Roy Bridge Primary School as a school offering Gaelic Medium education. In February 2022 officials wrote to the respondent who put forward this proposal, setting out the process by which this could be pursued. There has been no further feedback or follow up by the community since the letter issued in February 2022.

- 10.8 The Council has further reconsidered 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 10 and 16 of the original proposal paper and again at Responses 4 and 11 above. Since Roy Bridge Primary School has been mothballed since Easter 2017, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. Whilst it is accepted that the

travel times would be shorter were Roy Bridge PS to re-open, the travel times to Spean Bridge are not excessive and are well within the normal range of school journeys in Highland.

## **11.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers**

- 11.1 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 October 2022 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 16 November 2022. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 21 December 2022 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.
- 11.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to close Roy Bridge Primary School is asked to email [schoolclosure@scotland.gov.uk](mailto:schoolclosure@scotland.gov.uk) or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ** by midnight on 16 November 2022.
- 11.3 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.

## **12.0 Legal issues**

- 12.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 12.2 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.

## **13.0 Financial Implications**

- 13.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as Appendix E to the Proposal Paper, and a revised version is now at Appendix 7.

## **14.0 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was issued with the proposal paper and can be found at Section 14 of the Proposal Paper. The consultation exercise did not identify any additional equality issues.

## **15.0 Conclusion**

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 The most significant reason for closure is that all the available evidence suggests that the number of children who would attend a re-opened Roy Bridge Primary School would be too low to make the school viable, and that there would consequently be educational disadvantages arising from such a decision. Other factors include the length of time that Roy Bridge Primary has been mothballed. Lastly, Spean Bridge Primary School is itself a rural school.
- 15.3 Education Scotland staff visited Spean Bridge Primary School, to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses. They recognise that positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Roy Bridge Primary School and Spean Bridge Primary Schools since Roy Bridge Primary School was mothballed in 2017. They also noted that low parental interest in committing to sending children to Roy Bridge Primary School demonstrated that reopening the school is not viable.
- 15.4 The Executive Chief Officer (Education), 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 Sections 5-10 above.

## **16.0 Recommendation**

- 16.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.

Nicky Grant  
Executive Chief Officer (Education)

**15 August 2022**



## **MINUTE OF PUBLIC MEETING HELD ONLINE ON 12 JANUARY 2022**

### **CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT ROY BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

#### **Panel**

Andrew Baxter, Councillor (Chair)  
Don Esson, Area Education Manager (West)  
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Highland Council

#### **Elected Members of Highland Council**

Cllr. Allan Henderson  
Cllr. Denis Rixson  
Cllr. Sarah Fanet

Emily Brown, Head Teacher, Spean Bridge and Invergarry Primary Schools  
Pamela Adamson, HMIE

2 journalists (from the BBC, and the Press and Journal)

14 members of the public attended the meeting.

**The Chairperson** began by welcoming everyone to the meeting, by introducing himself as the Chair of the Lochaber Area Committee, and introducing the officials present. He advised that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to formally close Roy Bridge Primary School, (as set out in the recommendation to the Proposal Paper). The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures. Copies of the Proposal Paper and appendices were distributed. The Proposal Paper identified various options, and the Chairperson explained that we could also discuss any other options or alternatives to closure which those present would like to raise. The Chairperson then asked Ian Jackson to describe the consultation process.

**Ian Jackson** - Since Easter 2017 Roy Bridge PS has been in what we term a "mothballed" status, which means it is not operational, but neither is it permanently closed. The permanent closure of the school, which is what the Council is now proposing, is subject to a statutory consultation process, of which this meeting is part. We are currently in the initial phase of that consultation, which is due to end on Friday 21 January, and I would urge anyone who wants to submit views in writing to do so by that date. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather views, and we will try to answer any questions that are raised.

My colleague Don Esson will shortly set out the educational basis for the Council's proposal to formally close Roy Bridge PS, but before that I will briefly describe the rest of the consultation process.

The formal process has a number of stages. Once the public consultation ends on 21 January, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper, the note of the meeting tonight, and any written representations, and will form their own view on the educational benefits of the proposal. Education Scotland will contact Spean Bridge Primary, and they will be keen to hear from any parents who wish to make their views known. The Council has to take account of Education Scotland's view on the educational benefits and respond to any points raised by their report, as well as any representations received as a result of the consultation process. Following the completion of that stage, the Council will prepare a Report reviewing the consultation exercise and present it to the Council's Education Committee. The Review Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, and anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be invited to make "further representations" during those 3 weeks. Any further representations that are made are submitted to the members of the Committee, either in advance or tabled on the day, so that members are fully informed of any issues that may have arisen. Members will also see copies of the original responses and the note of this meeting.

After all that, there would still be a further opportunity for representations to be made to Scottish Ministers. All school closures in Scotland have to be ratified by Ministers, and they have 8 weeks from the date of the Council's decision to themselves decide whether to ratify the proposal or to refer it to what's called a school closure review panel. During the first 3 weeks of that 8-week period, Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person on whether the decision should be called in, or not called in, for review by a panel. Advice about how to make those representations will be provided at the relevant time.

In summary, I would say that the consultation process provides multiple opportunities for views to be expressed to the Council before any final decision is made

**The Chairperson** then asked Don Esson to explain the educational aspects of the proposal.

**Don Esson** – Just by way of introduction, I am currently the Area Education Manger for the Highland Council's West area, but before that I was Quality Improvement Manager for the West, so I have worked in the area for many years and I know the local context well. I worked closely with the two previous Head Teachers of Spean Bridge Primary and continue to work with the current HT.

In terms of the educational benefits offered by the closure of Roy Bridge PS, you will see these outlined in pages 11-13 of the Proposal Paper. Highland Council is looking very much at the local context. Young people should have a sufficient number of age-appropriate peers for socialization purposes. When the total school roll falls to single

numbers, there can be huge challenges around that. We are also looking at the opportunity for youngsters to participate in activities such as music, drama and team sports, which require a sufficient number of other children. We also know that young people with Additional Support Needs require support in the most appropriate local setting, and Spean Bridge Primary can offer excellent facilities for providing that support.

We know that the mothballing of Roy Bridge took place because of a pattern of parents voluntarily placing their children in Spean Bridge to take account of the better facilities on offer there.

In terms of professional development, it is very beneficial to have a number of members of staff, to have a thriving teaching and learning community.

There is also the existence of the pre-school class at Spean Bridge, which is very successful and where there are strong transition arrangements into P1.

Spean Bridge PS has strong programmes for the development of language – reading, writing, listening and talking, and French and Gaelic Learners is on offer to support language development. Prior to COVID the school was developing lunchtime clubs and other social activities.

Currently there are more than 30 pupils in the Roy Bridge catchment, with the majority of these attending Spean Bridge Primary, with some others attending Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar. All the indications are that if Roy Bridge Primary were to re-open, it would be with a very small roll, in single figures.

In summary, Highland Council feels that a range of educational benefits have derived from the operational merger of Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge schools.

**The Chairperson** then opened the meeting to the Q and A session. He added that, if anyone was making comments, it was equally as important for people to also submit written responses to the consultation.

**Q1 – (Ali Berardelli)** I was just wondering about the Proposal Paper. Is that something we can access now?

**A1 (Ian Jackson)** – It's available on the website, and a letter went out to parents in November, which contained the link to the website page.

**Ali Berardelli** – Thanks. I'll get the link from the school.

**Q2 (Cllr. Allan Henderson)** – This is a sad day. When I joined the Council in 2007, I got together with Davie Dignan and Marie-Claire Russell in a long hard fight to reverse the Council's decision to close Roy Bridge at that time. It was thanks to the financial genius of a chap called Sandy Longmuir of the Scottish Rural Schools Network that we succeeded in demolishing the Council's financial case. We also enlisted the help of John Finnie, who became an MSP, and Maxine Smith as well. When we won our

case it was a very happy day, and we managed to get the school up to about 28 pupils, but then when parents started to vote with their feet, which we couldn't argue against, then the numbers dwindled and we reached the position of this closure. I would though like to appeal to any parents who have an interest in stopping this closure – there is still a school there, and there are still things you can do. If so please get in touch with the Council. If a school has no pupils then it can't stay open, but perhaps some use can be made of the building. Thanks again for everyone who was part of the good fight last time.

**Q3 (Valerie Steel)** – I worked as a peripatetic teacher for many years in the Scottish Borders, and worked in lots of little schools. Were you suggesting Allan, that if Roy Bridge Primary stops being a school, the community should find another use for it?

**(Cllr. Allan Henderson)** – Absolutely – there is still a building there even if it isn't a school. There would need to be a community initiative on the future of the building, and the community would need to deal with the Council, who are always easy to deal with on buildings.

**Valerie Steel** – So just to clarify, once this closure has been made, are the Council proposing to retain the building, or sell the building?

**Chairperson (Cllr. Baxter)** – The easy answer to that is that it is still to be determined.

**A3 (Ian Jackson)** – At the moment the school is not closed, so the building is not available because the school could re-open. For us to be talking about the future use of the building would be prejudging the outcome of this consultation exercise. If the school does eventually close, there would be, as I understand it, a 3-stage process to determine the future of the building. Firstly there would be an internal consultation within the Council to see whether any other Council Service, for example Housing, might have any use for the building. If that's not the case, there would be an opportunity for the community to prepare a business case for some future use of the building, and failing that, the Council would dispose of the property on the open market. At this stage though, we're still talking about whether the school is to close.

**Q4 – (Joanne Matheson)** – This all sounds like a foregone conclusion, but, as someone who has attended that school previously, and who is of child-bearing age, I wasn't informed of this consultation. I first found out last week through a newspaper article, which is disappointing. However, if this does go ahead, and children were to move to Spean Bridge, how does that fit with initiatives like promoting walking and healthy lifestyles? If you live in Roy Bridge and have a P1 pupil, you would have to navigate a 3-mile walk to the school in Spean Bridge, with no safe footpath.

**Chairperson (Cllr. Baxter)**- Before I ask officials to respond, I want to make it clear this is not a foregone conclusion. The members of the Council's Education Committee, the current members anyway, are very open-minded and will consider all

the consultation responses before coming to a final decision. In my experience, councillors don't like being told by officers that there is only one possible conclusion.

**A4 (Ian Jackson)** – I'm a little disappointed to hear that you didn't know about the consultation Joanne. All parents, including pre-school parents, were notified of the consultation by individual letter in November, and I know those letters went out because I know some of the parents who received them, and who have confirmed they had received a letter from me. [Ali Beradelli, a parent, confirmed she had received the letter]. On the matter of walking routes, clearly when you close a school, pupils have to travel further and have less opportunity to walk, and this is recognised as a downside of a school closure. The Highland Council does provide school transport from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge Primary, so pupils would not necessarily be expected to walk. The main point I would make in response is that pupils would not have to "move" to Spean Bridge, since they are already there and have been for the last 4 years. This proposal does not entail any difference to the current arrangements in practice, although it does involve a change to the formal status of Roy Bridge Primary.

**Don Esson** – There are obviously challenges in Highland in terms of walking and cycling to school, given the distances that are often involved. Schools do however promote cycling proficiency and initiatives like the "Daily Mile", where children are encouraged to walk together. Overall, our feeling is that the educational benefits from this proposal outweigh the challenges that arise in terms of walking or cycling to school.

**Q5 – (Annabel Strachan)** - Has the capacity limit for children at Spean Bridge been looked at and included in the paper, taking into account the housing that is being built in the area?

**A5 – (Ian Jackson)** – Yes we have looked at that, and the school capacity is considered in the paper. The Council has 15-year roll projections on its website, and also posts its methodology – how we calculate the projections. Anticipated housebuilding is included in the calculation, and there is also a figure to allow for ad hoc housing developments. It's not a precise science and includes an element of crystal ball gazing, but we base the figures on the best information that we have. We do feel that Spean Bridge has enough capacity for the foreseeable future.

**(Don Esson)** – You might also be interested to know that the last Lochaber Area Committee considered a paper, which is now in the public domain, which contained the details of school buildings within the Lochaber High School and their capacities

**Q6 – (Anna Danby)** What effort has been made by the Council to establish how many pre-school age children there are in Roy Bridge? I have a 3-year-old and like others I didn't hear about this consultation until recently.

**A6 - (Ian Jackson)** I am glad that you had heard about the proposal before tonight's meeting. We notify the parents of children on the school and pre-school roll, but it's

not always possible for us to identify all the children of pe-nursery age within a community. We have had a number of informal discussions over the past few years about the future of the school as well, both in Roy Bridge and in Spean Bridge.

**Q7 – (Robert Strachan)** – I just wanted to add that, as a former pupil, I would say there are huge benefits to being in a multi-stage composite class. I don't agree that there are benefits to being in a bigger school.

**Q8 – (Catherine MacKinnon)** I've read the consultation paper. My children unfortunately had to make the journey into Fort William to access Gaelic Medium education, all 5 of them, and we had considerable problems with school transport, and the children were considerably disadvantaged in terms of after-school activities. When they were pre-school age we had the Partner Centre Gaelic Medium nursery so that was fine – it was so much better than travelling to Fort William. However we just never quite got the numbers to turn it into a primary school class. Had that happened the quality of their experience would have been so much higher, particularly in the early years, and they would have been educated within their local community. The consultation paper doesn't mention the number of children who are travelling from this area to GME in Fort William, and it doesn't consider the carbon footprint of that. It seems to class those who have opted for GME as non-members of the community. It should be acknowledged in the paper that there are children who travel from this catchment but who have to travel to Fort William. They should be counted as part of the Roy Bridge catchment. The consultation paper also looks at possibilities to change the catchment to add other areas to the Roy Bridge catchment. Whilst there are no opportunities to do that in English Medium, there could be in Gaelic Medium. I don't know where the nearest Gaelic Medium provision is in the Badenoch direction, but in Lochaber it's in Fort William. I don't know whether any of this would change the situation we are currently in, but I think for completeness it should be looked at. We need to know how many children are travelling from this area to GME, and what the demand is. My own children are all through school and I'm not yet at the stage of having grandchildren, but that could be different in 10 years' time.

**A8 – (Ian Jackson)** – You raise some interesting points Catherine. Andrew mentioned at the beginning of the meeting that, although we are proposing closure, we have identified alternative options, and that we could also consider other options put forward during consultation. In effect, I think you are suggesting we look at GME in Roy Bridge as an alternative to closure.

In terms of the numbers, our view was that if someone lives in Roy Bridge but has children attending Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, they would continue to attend that school irrespective of whether Roy Bridge was re-opened as an English Medium school, which is what it was before it was mothballed. In respect of the opportunity for GME to be provided at Roy Bridge, there is an opportunity for parents to request local provision of Gaelic Medium education, and the criteria for that are laid down in the Statutory Guidance for Gaelic Education. Essentially, if there are 5 children in a year

group whose parents request an assessment for GMPE, we are required to carry out that assessment. I would say, and possibly Don will comment on this as well, that Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar not only offers larger numbers – better for language learning – but also offers an immersive Gaelic language experience that would not be offered at a school that provided both Gaelic and English medium education. We would therefore see some merit in GME in the area being provided at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, and of course the Council has invested heavily in providing that facility. Nevertheless, you have made an interesting suggestion and I think the Council will have to consider it as a possible alternative to closure.

**Don Esson** – It's very good that you have highlighted the potential for GME, and we are aware of the problems with travelling. Ian has highlighted that there is a statutory process for moving forward with GME, if the demand can be shown. I would add that neither Ian nor I are particularly flying a flag for large schools – both of us live in small Highland communities – but there are huge disadvantages when the numbers fall as low as they did in Roy Bridge.

**Q9 (Valerie Steel)** – I feel I have been misled because I thought this consultation was about the closure of Roy Bridge Primary, and I am now hearing that it's not a foregone conclusion, and that Roy Bridge could open up again as a result of this consultation. Also I think there are multiple issues around transport. We live in Inverroy, a mile from Roy Bridge and 2 miles from Spean Bridge, but there is no safe walking route to Spean Bridge. My grandson is attending Spean Bridge PS, and he loves cycling. He would be delighted to cycle to school, or walk. He loves shinty as well, and he has just joined the Beavers, so I am using a lot of fuel to drive him up and down to his activities. When the operational merger of the two schools took place, what consideration was given to the fact that children wouldn't be able to walk or cycle to school?

**The Chairperson (Cllr. Andrew Baxter)** – I am sorry that you feel misled, but the Proposal is to close the school. The statutory consultation process does oblige us to consider other options if they are presented.

**A9 (Ian Jackson)** – The school was mothballed in 2017 because the roll eventually fell to two, because all the other parents had moved their children to Spean Bridge of their own free will. If every child in Roy Bridge had continued to attend Roy Bridge School it would have remained a viable school, but although as Don says we aren't here to do down small schools, when the total roll falls to two, there are some serious disadvantages in terms of socialization. In terms of walking, I would have thought the journey would have been as difficult from Inverroy to Roy Bridge as it is to Spean Bridge.

**(Valerie Steel)** – No we have a path, although it's not the best.

**(Ian Jackson)** – I stand corrected on that then! However as previously mentioned we do provide school transport from the Roy Bridge catchment to Spean Bridge PS.

**Don Esson** - Parents took a conscious and informed decision to move their children to either Spean Bridge Primary or Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar.

**Q10 – Joanne Matheson** – You mentioned sports, music, lunch clubs and such like. Would these things not be available at Roy Bridge if it re-opened?

**A10 (Don Esson)** – They could be, depending on the school roll, but many activities might not be viable, again depending on the size of the roll.

**Q11 – (John Fotheringham)** – I invited a number of people in the community to this meeting, because of an advert in the *Lochaber Times* last week. The advert made no mention of closing the school and only spoke about transferring the catchment area of Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge. There seems to have been some duplicity here, and I am concerned that the closure of this school by stealth. People in the general community of Roy Bridge almost certainly know nothing about this report. Now, when I was active in the Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council, it always seemed to me that the primary reason for the fall in numbers at Roy Bridge came about because the lack of a nursery. Once children went to the nursery at Spean Bridge, they preferred to go into P1 at the same school. I think the community did lose out because of the lack of a school nursery in Roy Bridge. The community has lost a lot over the years. It's lost its shop and its post office although it is still a vibrant community. The people of Roy Bridge should have been better dealt with by Highland Council.

**The Chairperson (Cllr. Andrew Baxter)** – It probably doesn't help that the area no longer has a community council, as they would have been a statutory consultee.

**A11 (Ian Jackson)** – There is a set format with standard wording for these notices, so I would have to check whether there was an error [Following the meeting – there was no error – the Notice did refer to the closure of the school]. Every parent and nursery parent was notified of this consultation by individual letter, as was every member of staff. There was the notice in the *Lochaber Times*, the public meeting was advertised on the Council's Facebook page and the Council's Twitter account, and it has been on the Council's website continuously since November. There has been no attempt by the Council to put this through by stealth, we have done everything we reasonably could to publicise the consultation, and the turnout tonight suggests there are people who are aware of it. There is still time for people to submit written responses by 21 January. Going onto the point about the nursery, it's obviously correct to say that Roy Bridge did not have a nursery when it was in operation. It was certainly not the only school in that situation. In South Lochaber, Glencoe PS does not have a nursery – children go to Ballachulish nursery due to its geographical proximity. Similarly, in the Mallaig area, Lady Lovat PS in Morar does not have a nursery – children go to Mallaig to access nursery provision. Where schools are in close proximity, it's quite common for only one of them to offer nursery. I would add that, were Roy Bridge PS to re-open, it would be on the same basis as when it was last operational i.e., without a nursery.



**Q12 – (John Fotheringham)** I still feel you could have connected with the general population of Roy Bridge in some other way – you could have used the public notice system to have done that. I understand the point about not every school having a nursery, but I think it was the reason for the decline in the roll at Roy Bridge, but if children in Roy Bridge had the opportunity to attend a school nursery in the village, Roy Bridge school could be made viable.

**Q13 (Stuart Matheson)** – I was in Roy Bridge School up to 12 years ago, and we had sporting activities. We did join with Spean to play shinty, but otherwise I don't see what the issue is with that side of things. Again, I only heard late on about this meeting – I was notified though my parents, so that was a bit disappointing.

**Q14 (Annabel Strachan)** – An argument for continuing with mothballing might be around the use of the building, parents not as a separate school but as a continuation of the facilities of Spean Bridge School. In some schools, nursery and P1/2 is in one building and the older stages in another building. That could provide extra capacity for Spean Bridge. There's also a great outdoor play area at Roy Bridge School, which at the moment isn't used apart from a few local kids using it for rollerblading and skateboarding. It could be another area that Spean Bridge could use.

**A14 – (Ian Jackson)** – The only point I would wish to make at this stage is that using the Roy Bridge facilities as an adjunct of Spean Bridge school would still constitute a formal closure of Roy Bridge School.

**Q15 - (Cllr. Denis Rixson)** – As an ex-school teacher I don't like to see schools close, and as the Chair has already indicated, there is no particular agenda here on the part of Highland councillors. It's up to the parents on this one. If parents are sufficiently keen to see the school retained, submit written responses to the consultation. It's really in your own hands. This is not the only location in Highland where we have a bigger school drawing children from a smaller one. We have exactly the same situation in Mallaig and Morar, where parents in Morar send their children to the school in Mallaig because of the perceived better facilities in Mallaig. I am sure that councillors would be very supportive if parents came forward with suggestions for alternatives to closure for Roy Bridge school.

There being no other comments, the **Chairperson** thanked everyone for coming and for the thoughtful and measured comments made. He reminded those present of the closing date for responses – 21 January 2022 – and of where responses should be sent, either via letter or via email, or by using the online form. A record of this meeting would be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Education Committee that considered the results of consultation. The members of the Committee would have a chance to see the note and all other representations before the meeting. Following the decision of the Committee, the minutes would be submitted to the full Council for ratification.

MEETING CLOSED

**List of Respondents to Statutory Consultation Exercise – Proposal to  
Discontinue Education at Roy Bridge Primary School**

1. Stuart Matheson
2. Janis Matheson
3. Catherine MacKinnon
4. John Fotheringham
5. Tony Perriam
6. Spean Bridge Pupils P4-7

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**Elaine Easson (Revenues and Customer Services)**

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**From:** School consultation <donotreply@highland.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 07 January 2022 13:07  
**To:** Education Consultations  
**Subject:** Roy Bridge Primary School consultation comments

**Name of consultation:** Roy Bridge Primary School

**Your comments:** I think that the closing of the school will be detrimental to the village. With the village having many new young families, including my young family, the closure of the school will drive many of us away to other areas. It would be difficult to manage having my child go to a school 3 miles away. I was a student there at one point and having the school ensures the children have kids their age, to play and develop together.

**Upload documents or letters :**

**I am commenting as:** Parent

**I am commenting on behalf of:**

**Name:**

Title	First name	Last name
Mr	Stuart	Matheson

**Address:**

postcode search	Choose address	Did you find the address on the list above?
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	Yes

**Email address:** [REDACTED]

:

**Elaine Easson (Revenues and Customer Services)**

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**From:** School consultation <donotreply@highland.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 08 January 2022 15:25  
**To:** Education Consultations  
**Subject:** Roy Bridge Primary School consultation comments

**Categories:** C&L LOCHABER ADMIN

**Name of consultation:** Roy Bridge Primary School

**Your comments:** Once again the Council have given us very little time to put our thoughts together regarding this proposal. I have a grandchild living in this area who is not yet at school but the parents have been given no notification of the plans. Amazingly this has all been centred around Spean Bridge parents and the school. There is no fairness here. The council had it in mind to close Roybridge a long time ago and set about forcing us out contrary to a previous meeting where it was implied that the parents had left the school willingly. Looking after a grandchild I would like to see the school open. Not to have the hassle of going to Spean Bridge.

**Upload documents or letters :**

**I am commenting as:** Relative of a pupil

**I am commenting on behalf of:** A grandparent

**Name:**

Title	First name	Last name
Mrs	Janis	Matheson

**Address:**

postcode_search	Did you find the address on the list above?	Address line 1	Address line 2	Town	Postcode
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

**Email address** [REDACTED]

17<sup>th</sup> January 2022

To whom it may concern:

### **Re Roy Bridge Primary School Consultation**

Further to the recent Consultation document proposing to 'discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School and to reallocate the school's catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School' I would like to make the following comments:

I would suggest that it is factually inaccurate that the proposal does not properly consider Gaelic medium education and pupil numbers from the Roy Bridge catchment attending Gaelic medium education in Fort William. Without these figures the document is incomplete and does not properly illustrate the current situation regarding education provision for children from the Roy Bridge area. In order to present correct information regarding education provision for children from the Roy Bridge catchment accurate numbers for pre-school and Primary Gaelic medium education need to be included and factually presented. Parents of children living within the Roy Bridge catchment but attending GME need to be included in the Consultation. Note Appendix A, Note on Corrections.

### **GM Nursery**

3.5 "... The existence of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar makes it unlikely that there will be demand for another Gaelic Medium nursery in Roy Bridge". I would suggest that this statement is unfounded and would ask for evidence. From 2000 to 2012 I was involved in the development of Gaelic medium pre-school provision in Roy Bridge. There was significant demand and we established a Gaelic medium nursery under contract to Highland Council. This is acknowledged in the Consultation document. Parents from Fort Augustus and Fort William as well Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and surrounding areas attended the provision. It was evident that, with the right support, there was the opportunity for this pre-school provision to grow into Primary provision in due course. With the advent of Bun Sgoil Ghaidhlig Loch Abar it is correct that there is now alternative provision however the travel time from Roy Bridge is prohibitive and the size of the nursery is very much urban rather than rural. I understand that there may also be pressure of numbers at BSGLA. If Highland Council were to open a Gaelic medium nursery in Roy Bridge it is likely that it would be well attended. Like BSGLA and all other Gaelic schools, over time, numbers would grow. Children would come from both Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge and surrounding areas and pressure on facilities in Spean Bridge and in the Gaelic nursery in BSGLA would be eased. When GM nursery education ceased in Roy Bridge in 2012 it was due to the need for additional support from Highland Council, particularly with staffing. With the advent of BSGLA parents are much more aware now of the benefits and opportunities that GM education presents. I would suggest that there is opportunity now to reintroduce GM nursery provision which would very quickly grow into Primary provision. The travel requirement is excessive for these younger age groups and there would be numerous benefits if there were local provision.

### **Catchment**

If there were GME provision in Roy Bridge a wider catchment would be expected. It is notable that there are currently several HC Consultation papers ongoing regarding the creation of GME catchment

areas for schools eg Acharacle, Glenurquhart. A hypothetical catchment for Roy Bridge Primary as a GME Primary might enable those within the hypothetical catchment to be consulted and included in the formal Consultation. The narrative at Option 3, points 8.1 and 8.2 of the Consultation paper should be amended to reflect this.

The carbon footprint and financial costs associated with transportation of children to GME provision need to be explored and clearly documented.

We are living in times of change. Carbon footprint and impact on climate change has become a key consideration. We are also emerging from a pandemic. Have guidelines on educational provision been amended to reflect these changing times? A classroom that was once deemed suitable for 25 children might in future be deemed suitable for less children in order to enable social distancing and adequate health and hygiene considerations for staff and pupils. Journey times that were once acceptable may no longer be acceptable in future. Where bigger was seen to be better in recent years, might it be the case that, with new challenges, smaller rural schools become more desirable regardless of whether or not there might be slightly higher per capita running costs?

I would urge Highland Council to give full consideration to the above points prior to reaching a conclusion on the future educational provision in Roy Bridge and surrounding area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

Catherine M MacKinnon

Dear Sir,

I attended the Public Meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> January, have studied the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010, and the Consultation Paper in great detail and don't consider that the present consultation is within either the spirit or the letter of the legislation.

The Act says that it is important for the Authorities to engage constructively with communities in advance of a statutory consultation so that it does not come as a surprise to the Community and addresses the issues that concern them.

Although the Education Officer was fully aware of the community of Roy Bridge's continued concerns about the future of their primary school having personally attended the packed Community Council Meeting of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 the first the Community knew about the current proposal was an advert in the Oban Times on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022, some 43 days after the consultation started, about a Public Meeting to be held on 12<sup>th</sup> January on a Proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Roy Bridge Primary School with a closing date for submissions of 21<sup>st</sup> January 2022.

The Consultation Paper which is a pivotal document in the process and should have been widely available was even unknown to the Chair of the Spean Bridge Primary School Parent Council until the Public Meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> January. Posting it on the Highland Council Website and Fort William Library may fulfil legal requirements technically, but expecting the community at large to find it there without prompting surely a fallacy.

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO who took on the principal responder role during COVID 19 lockdowns were able to ensure that all homes in our 995 square kilometre area knew of our services by conducting mail drops through Royal Mail so surely Highland Council could have adopted the same procedure to ensure everyone in the Roy Bridge Primary School Catchment Area were aware of this new proposal with its attendant literature.

The Act also says the authority should ensure the proposal paper provides sufficient detail on areas likely to be of concern to communities. This would include a clear travel plan for pupils, including identifying safe routes to the new school location and providing clarity, where relevant, on school transport that will be provided and traffic management around the school site(s).

I note that Highland Council have provided School Transport by Shiel Buses, but nothing about alternative travel, and parents themselves have to make travel arrangements for extra curricular activities when it falls out with the bus departure time. It also states that the cost of transporting the pupils is £36,195. This is however a public bus which would continue to operate along the route even if Roy PS was to reopen so the savings would be less. Another inaccuracy as the current school service is not part of a public service and would be discontinued if the school reopened.

The proposal paper should also be clear on the authority's plans for the future use of any school building and associated facilities that will be released by the proposal. It is reasonable for communities to be concerned whether a school building would have another public purpose, be available for the community, sold or might remain vacant for a significant period, and authorities should provide as much certainty and transparency as possible.

The only certainty given in the paper is "Other suggestions have been made for the future use of the building in the event of the closure proceeding. Subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community over the

future use of the building and site. Any such proposal would however have to be progressed within the terms of the Council's current asset management policy."

To assist the community the Education Officer should have elaborated on what constituted other suggestions. At the Parent Council Meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020 wrongly attributed to that of 7<sup>th</sup> May 2019 in Ci the minutes say : "Support was vocalised for community transfer if possible. In place of the community council the local SCIO would be consulted".

Needless to say although Highland Council is well aware of our contact details we have heard nothing.

The Guidance to the Act says: " It is essential that authorities seek and achieve high standards both in the information that underpins school consultations and in the consultation documents that are published. These will be examined closely by communities, school staff and parents, and errors in details can easily undermine confidence in a proposal. It is a key learning point from the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education's work that a failure to provide accurate, high quality consultation documents has led to consultations being abandoned, taking much longer than expected and to increased conflict with communities. Significant inaccuracies in the information in consultation documents for a closure proposal could also be grounds for a decision to be called in by the Scottish Ministers."

I understand that mothballing is only meant to be a temporary measure and 5 years is longer than the legislation would normally expect, but as the guidance to the legislation says it expects authorities like Highland Council to seek and achieve high standards and conduct rural school closure proposals in a fair and transparent manner, and I don't believe they have acted fairly in their dialogue with the community of Roy Bridge.

It would seem proper to either extend the consultation period or withdraw the proposal and start again ensuring than all parents, pupils, and the community are onboard from the outset not a mere after thought.

John W Fotheringham  
Chairman  
Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO



Sirs,

I note that responses to your Consultation Paper on the future of Roy Bridge Primary School close today.

On reviewing the proposals as a member of the community within the Roy Bridge Primary School catchment area, it is clear that there has been a degree of consultation with the current Parent Council at Spean Bridge PS as well as other parents of primary age children via the Spean Bridge PS noticeboard. However, there appears to have been only a token attempt to involve the wider community. An advert was placed in the Oban Times of 6 January advising of a public meeting on 12 January, just six days later. Rather than being postponed when it became clear that Covid restrictions prevented an in-person gathering the meeting went ahead via Zoom, a medium not accessible to the whole community. A previous face-to-face public meeting in September 2019 had been well attended and opposed final closure but the opportunity for widespread local involvement was not available on this occasion.

Future use suggestions for the school buildings and site made to Highland Council to date have not been specified, either within the Consultation paper or at at the Zoom meeting. Furthermore, the play equipment gifted to Roy Bridge PS by Corroul Estate a significant expense soon before the school's mothballing may have alternative uses at its existing site or at Spean Bridge PS.

In short, I do feel that an extended consultation period would ensure that the wider community are given the opportunity to have its say.

Yours sincerely,  
Tony Perriam

**Anthony Perriam**  
**Community Development Officer, Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO**

**Roy Bridge Primary School Consultation with P4-7**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Idea No.1 Close Roy Bridge School for good.</b>	<b>Idea No.2 Re-open Roy Bridge Primary</b>	<b>Idea No. 3 Keep trying out the ideas for a bit longer.</b>
<b>P7</b>	2	0	2
<b>P5/6</b>	0	0	13
<b>P4/5</b>	0	3	11

**Close Roy Bridge School for good.**

“ I don’t want to leave my friends.”

“ I don’t want my best friend to leave.”

**Re-open Roy Bridge School**

“At the moment the school is big enough when we are all here but when the houses get built the older classes could go up there.”

“I would like to go to a different school to meet new friends and go to the park.”

“It is fun to skate around but most of my friends will go to Spean”

“I would like to be in a smaller school.”

“It could be part of Spean Bridge Primary School and P5, P6 & P7 could go there.”

**Keep trying out ideas for a bit longer**

“ I would like to be able to carry on playing in the old school playground.”

“I would be separated from really close friends (if it re-opened) but I still want to be able to play in the playground.”

“I don’t want my best friends to leave.”

“Make it into something else instead of a school but leave the playground.”

“I want to use the playground but not lose my friends.”

# **Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

**Report by HM Inspectors of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.**

February 2022

## 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 discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge 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 2010 Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include 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 of the school; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children 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:

- attendance at the virtual public meeting held on 12 January 2022 in connection with the council's proposals;
- 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
- a virtual visit to the site of Spean Bridge 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 Roy Bridge 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 formal consultation process commenced on 24 November 2021 and concluded on 21 January 2022. The consultation proposal paper was made available to members of the public, stakeholders and staff. Announcements were placed in the local press and published on the council's website and social media page. Copies of the consultation document were made available at Fort William Public Library and Spean Bridge Primary School. Due to public health concerns and to follow national guidance, a virtual public meeting was held on 12 January 2022. This was attended by 14 members of the public. At the meeting, attendees expressed the view that the decision to close Roy Bridge Primary School was a foregone conclusion. Concerns were shared by attendees surrounding the potential future use of the school building and perceived failures to inform the wider community of the consultation process. Alternative suggestions were offered by attendees to use the school for Gaelic Medium Education.

2.3 The Highland Council took the decision to mothball Roy Bridge Primary School in 2017 when the roll fell to two children. The school has remained mothballed since that time. Prior to commencing this statutory consultation, the council sought the views of parents and the local community informally. The council met with Spean Bridge Primary School's Parent Council in May 2019 (just under ten attendees) with parents indicating their opposition to closure. A well-attended meeting with the Community Council took place in September 2019. Despite opposition to the closure of Roy Bridge Primary School, very few parents were prepared to commit to sending their child to the school should it reopen. Further meetings with the Parent Council were held in March 2020 (with six attendees) and September 2021 (with three attendees) by which time parents felt closure was inevitable.

2.4 The council received five written responses to the consultation. These included concerns about the perceived lack of engagement with the wider community in advance of the formal consultation process. HM Inspectors have not found grounds to support these points. A few responders requested additional time to consider the proposal. A request to consider Gaelic Medium Education prior to reaching a conclusion was also made.

2.5 The council sought the views of children currently attending Spean Bridge Primary School. In total, 31 children provided their views about the proposal. Most children thought the council should continue to mothball the school. A few children agreed with the proposal to close the school and a few thought that Roy Bridge Primary School should reopen. Children expressed concern that existing friendships at Spean Bridge Primary School could potentially be affected should Roy Bridge Primary School reopen. They value being able to continue to play in Roy Bridge Primary School's playground.

### 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The Highland Council sets out a number of potential educational benefits in the proposal to permanently close Roy Bridge Primary School. The council gathered information informally from stakeholders. This information indicates that should Roy Bridge Primary School reopen enrolment would remain very low. Positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Roy Bridge Primary School and Spean Bridge Primary Schools since Roy Bridge Primary School was mothballed in 2017. Children work regularly in cooperative learning groups of various sizes. Being part of an age-appropriate peer group of sufficient size allows children to participate in a range of social interactions and a broad range of curriculum activities. Their development of skills for learning, life and work benefits from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age and stage. The opportunity to participate in sporting, musical and artistic activities is enhanced. The current arrangements allow for smooth transition for children moving from the nursery class into P1. When compared to the current Roy Bridge Primary School premises the accommodation at Spean Bridge Primary School has the potential to provide a better learning environment. This includes access to facilities such as a large sports pitch. HM Inspectors agree that there are

potential educational benefits if the council's proposal goes ahead. The proposal supports the council's duty to ensure best value.

3.2 The few parents who spoke with HM Inspectors indicated their sadness at the potential loss of a school within the village of Roy Bridge. They expressed concern about the safety of school transport with children being picked up and dropped off near a busy road in Roy Bridge. There were mixed views as to whether they would enrol their child at Roy Bridge Primary School should it reopen. The children who spoke with HM Inspectors spoke positively about their experience at Spean Bridge Primary School. They identified the importance of maintaining friendships already established there. Children described the benefits of having access to a range of lunchtime activities and clubs. They particularly enjoy using the school's large sports pitch. Both parents and children spoke of the positive benefits of having access to Roy Bridge Primary School's grounds for leisure activity use. They believe that this provides a vital safe area in which children can play, skate and cycle, particularly as there is no safe cycle route between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge.

3.3 Staff who spoke with HM Inspectors support the proposal to close Roy Bridge Primary School. They recognise the impact of the declining roll and feel that reopening the school would be unsustainable. Children attending Spean Bridge Primary School for their nursery provision settle well, with parents choosing to maintain this through transition into P1. Staff identified that around half of the children within the Roy Bridge Primary School catchment would still require school transport should the school remain open. They felt that the additional travel time of five to six minutes was not excessive.

3.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. The council has identified clearly its reasons for formulating the proposal. In doing so, it considered a number of alternatives to closure of the school before it consulted on the proposal. The alternatives included continuing with the current mothballing arrangement, reopening with the current catchment area, or reopening with an expanded catchment area. The council concluded that none of the alternatives will bring greater benefits. Low parental interest in committing to sending their child to Roy Bridge Primary School to enable it to reopen, demonstrated that reopening the school is not viable.

3.5 In relation to transport, the likely effect on the environment and on children will be very limited. The council acknowledges that there is no safe walking or cycling route between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge. The drive between Roy Bridge Primary School and Spean Bridge Primary School is about five to six minutes. Travel arrangements in place since mothballing in 2017 would remain unchanged. The local community are very interested in the future use of the Roy Bridge Primary School building should the proposal go ahead. Local residents would like the building to remain as a community asset.

3.6 This proposed closure is of an English medium school whose catchment area overlaps with that for Gaelic Medium Education at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar and Lochaber High School. The council has clarified that, should there be sufficient future demand for Gaelic Medium Education, that they would follow legislation to determine the need for a local provision. The council's final report should include this clarification and details of how they will promote Gaelic Medium Education with parents. This is a statutory duty.

3.7 During the consultation period consultees identified alleged inaccuracies or omissions in the proposal. The council need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to respond to these alleged inaccuracies or omissions. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

## 4. Summary

HM Inspectors believe that The Highland Council's proposal has the potential to deliver overall educational benefits. Its attempt to secure the commitment of a sufficient number of parents to send their child to Roy Bridge Primary School enabling it to reopen have been unsuccessful. The proposal provides clarity for parents and the community with regard to future education provision in the area. There are potential educational benefits to children socially and educationally. Children will be working closely with a larger peer group closely aligned to their age and stage. They will have increased opportunities to develop skills in a range of activities otherwise not readily available at the current site. They will have greater opportunities to participate in sporting, musical and artistic activities and clubs.

Should the proposal go ahead, the council should work with the community to explore how to make best use of the former Roy Bridge Primary School. It should explore with the community their wish to ensure continued access to the safe play space provided by the school grounds. The proposal will assist the council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

**HM Inspectors**  
**February 2022**

## **Achd Sgoiltean (Co-chomhairleachadh) (Alba) 2010**

**Aithisg le Luchd-sgrùdaidh Foghlaim na Banrigh a' dèiligeadh ri taobhan foghlaim den mholadh le Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd gus crìoch a thoirt air solair foghlaim aig Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh, agus a' cur an sgìre-sgoile aice ri sgìre-sgoile Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain.**

Gearran 2022



## 1. Ro-ràdh

1.1 Chaidh an aithisg seo bho Fhoghlam Alba ullachadh le Luchd-sgrùdaidh Foghlaim na Banrigh (Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh) ann an co-rèir ri teirmichean [Achd Sgoiltean \(Co-chomhairleachadh\) \(Alba\) 2010](#) (“Achd 2010”). 'S e adhbhar na h-aithisg seo beachdachadh neo-eisimeileach agus neo-phàirteach a libhrigeadh air moladh Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd gus solair foghlaim a thoirt gu ceann aig Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh, agus a sgìre-sgoile a chur ri sgìre-sgoile Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain. Tha mion-fhiosrachadh goirid ann an Roinn 2 na h-aithisge air a’ phròiseas chonaltraidh. Tha Roinn 3 na h-aithisge a’ stèidheachadh beachdachadh Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh air taobhan foghlaim a’ mholaidh, a’ gabhail a-steach beachdan sònraichte air an toirt seachad le luchd-comhairle. Tha Roinn 4 a’ toirt geàrr-chunntas air àrd-shealladh Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh air a’ mholadh. Nuair a gheibhear an aithisg seo, tha Achd 2010 ag òrdachadh gum bi a’ chomhairle a’ beachdachadh air agus an uair sin ag ullachadh aithisg co-chomhairleachaidh dheireannach. Bu chòir gum bi an aithisg seo an lùib aithisg co-chomhairleachaidh dheireannach na comhairle, còmhla ri mìneachadh air ciamar, ann an crìoch a chur air a’ mholadh, a rinneadh ath-sgrùdadh air a’ chiad mholadh, a’ gabhail a-steach geàrr-chunntas air puingeann a chaidh a thogail anns a’ phròiseas chonaltraidh agus freagairt na comhairle riutha. Feumaidh a’ chomhairle an aithisg co-chomhairleachaidh dheireannach aca fhoillseachadh trì seachdainean mus gabh iad an co-dhùnadh mu dheireadh. Far a bheil comhairle a’ moladh sgoil a dhùnadh, feumaidh i na dleastanasan reachdail air fad a tha ann an Achd 2010 a leantainn, a’ gabhail a-steach fios gu Ministearan taobh a-staigh sia làithean obrach an dèidh dhi a thighinn chun a’ cho-dhùnaidh dheireannaich agus mìneachadh do luchd-comhairle gu bheil cothrom aca air riochdachaidhean a dhèanamh chun nam Ministearan agus na h-ullachaidhean spèisealta a tha co-cheangailte ri molaidhean a thaobh sgoil dhùthchail a dhùnadh.

1.2 Bheachdaich Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh air:

- na buaidhean a dh’fhaodadh a bhith aig a’ mholadh air clann san sgoil; clann a dh’fhaodadh a bhith nan sgoilearan taobh a-staigh dà bhliadhna bho chaidh am pàipear molaidh fhoillseachadh; agus clann eile ann an sgìre na comhairle;
- buaidhean coltach sam bith eile aig a’ mholadh;
- mar a tha a’ chomhairle an dùil buaidhean dona sam bith a dh’fhaodadh tighinn am bàrr bhon mholadh a lùghdachadh no a sheachnadh; agus
- na buannachdan foghlaim a tha a’ chomhairle an dùil a thig bho bhith a’ cur a’ mholaidh an cèill, agus adhbharan na comhairle airson nam beachdan seo a ruigsinn.

1.3 Ann a bhith ag ullachadh na h-aithisg seo, ghabh Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh na gnìomhan seo os làimh:

- làthaireachd aig a’ choinneimh phoblaich bhiortail air a chumail air 12 Faoilleach 2022 a thaobh molaidhean na comhairle;
- beachdachadh air a h-uile sgrìobhainn iomchaidh a chaidh a sholarachadh leis a’ chomhairle a thaobh a’ mholaidh, gu sònraichte aithris nan sochairean foghlaim agus sgrìobhainnean co-chomhairleachaidh co-cheangailte, freagairtean sgrìobhte agus labhairteach bho phàrantan is eile; agus
- turas bhiortail gu làrach Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain, a’ gabhail a-steach conaltradh ri luchd-comhairleachaidh iomchaidh.

1.4 Leis gum bi am moladh a’ leantainn air adhart gu dùnadh sgoil dhùthchail, ghabh Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh cunntas air beachdachadh na comhairle mu roghainnean reusanta sam bith eile seach a bhith a’ dùnadh Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh, a’ bhuaidh a dh’fhaodadh a

bhith aige air a' choimhearsnachd ionadail agus a' bhuidh a dh'fhaodadh a bhith aig an dùnadh a bha air a mholadh air ullachaidhean siubhail eadar-dhealaichte sam bith.

## 2. Pròiseas Co-chomhairleachaidh

2.1 Ghabh Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd os làimh co-chomhairleachadh air a' mholadh/na molaidhean aca a thaobh [Achd Sgoiltean \(Co-chomhairleachadh\) \(Alba\) 2010](#).

2.2 Thòisich am pròiseas co-chomhairleachaidh foirmeil air 24 Samhain 2021 agus chrìochnaich e air 21 Faoilleach 2022. Bha am pàipear co-chomhairleachaidh ri fhaotainn le buill a' phobaill, luchd-ùidh agus luchd-obrach. Chuireadh sanasan sna pàipearan ionadail agus chaidh am foillseachadh air làrach-lìn na comhairle agus air duilleag nam meadhanan sòisealta. Bha lethbhreacan den sgrìobhainn co-chomhairleachaidh rim faotainn ann an Leabharlann Poblach a' Ghearasdain agus ann am Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain. Mar thoradh air uallachaidhean a thaobh slàinte a' phobaill agus gus stiùireadh nàiseanta a leantainn, chaidh coinneamh phoblach bhiorail a chumail air 12 Faoilleach 2022. Bha 14 ball den phoball an làthair aig a' choinneimh. Aig a' choinneimh, thuirt an luchd-frithealaidh a bha an làthair gun robh iad dhen bheachd gun robh an co-dhùnadh a thaobh Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh a dhùnadh, air a dhèanamh ro-làimh. Bha draghan air an roinn leis na bha an làthair mun fheum a dheigheadh a dhèanamh de thogalach na sgoile san àm ri teachd, agus fàilligidhean a bha iad a' toirt fa-near a thaobh fiosrachadh a chumail ris a' choimhearsnachd nas fharsainge mun phròiseas co-chomhairleachaidh. Chaidh molaidhean eile a thabhann leis an luchd-frithealaidh gun deigheadh an sgoil a chleachdadh airson Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig.

2.3 Thàinig Roinn na Gàidhealtachd chun a' cho-dhùnaidh Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh a dhùnadh car ùine ann an 2017 an uair a thuit rola na sgoile gu dithis chloinne. Tha an sgoil air a bhith dùinte on àm sin. Mus do thòisich an co-chomhairleachadh reachdail seo, bha a' chomhairle a' sireadh bheachdan bho phàrantan agus bhon choimhearsnachd ionadail ann an dòigh neo-foirmeil. Choinnich a' chomhairle ri Comhairle Phàrant Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain sa Chèitean 2019 (le dìreach nas lugha na deichnear an làthair), le pàrantan a' nochdadh gun robh iad an aghaidh a dhùnadh. Chaidh coinneamh a bha air a deagh fhrithealadh a chumail leis a' Chomhairle Choimhearsnachd san t-Sultain 2019. Ged a bhathar an aghaidh Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh a dhùnadh, b' e glè bheag de phàrantan a bha deònach gealltainn gun cuireadh iad an leanabh chun na sgoile nam fosgladh i a-rithist. Chaidh coinneamhan eile a chumail leis a' Chomhairle Phàrant sa Mhàrt 2020 (le sianar an làthair) agus san t-Sultain 2021 (le triùir an làthair) agus mun àm sin bha na pàrantan a' faireachdainn gun robh dùnadh do-sheachanta.

2.4 Fhuair a' chomhairle còig freagairtean ann an sgrìobhadh mun cho-chomhairleachadh. Bha iad sin a' gabhail a-steach uallachaidhean mun dith conaltraidh don robh iad mothachail leis a' choimhearsnachd san fharsaingeachd ron phròiseas co-chomhairleachaidh foirmeil. Chan eil Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh air bun-adhbharan a lorg airson taic a chur ris na puingean sin. Dh'iarr beagan luchd-freagairt barrachd ùine airson beachdachadh air a' mholadh. Chaidh iartas airson beachdachadh air Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig a dhèanamh cuideachd mus deach a thighinn chun a' cho-dhùnaidh.

2.5 Shir a' chomhairle beachdan na cloinne a tha an-dràsta a' frithealadh Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain. Uile gu lèir, thug 31 neach cloinne seachad am beachdan mun mholadh. Bha a' mhòr-chuid den chloinn dhen bheachd gum bu chòir dhan chomhairle leantainn orra a' cumail na sgoile mar a tha i. Bha beagan chloinne ag aontachadh ris a' mholadh an sgoil a dhùnadh agus bha beagan dhen bheachd gum bu chòir do Bhun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh fosgladh às ùr. Bha uallach air clann gum biodh buaidh air càirdeasan a tha ann an-dràsta aig Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain nam fosgladh Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh às ùr. Tha iad a' cur luach air gum faod iad leantainn orra a' cluich ann am pàirc-chluiche Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh.

### 3. Taobhan foghlaim a' mholaidh

3.1 Tha Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd a' cur an cèill àireamh de bhunnachdan foghlaim a dh'fhaodadh a bhith sa mholadh gu Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh a dhùnadh gu tur. Chruinnich a' chomhairle fiosrachadh gu neo-fhoirmeil bho luchd-ùidh. Tha am fiosrachadh seo a' comharrachadh nam fosgladh Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh a-rithist gum biodh an clàrachadh a' fantainn glè ìosal. Tha buannachdan deimhinneach air a thighinn bhon aonadh obrachaidh eadar Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh agus Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain on a chaidh Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh a dhùnadh ann an 2017. Bidh clann ag obrachadh gu cunbhalach ann am buidhnean ionnsachaidh co-obrachail de mheudan diofraichte. Tha a bhith mar phàirt de bhuidheann chomhaoisean de dh'aois iomchaidh agus de mheud cuibheasach, a' ceadachadh do chlann com-pàirteachadh ann an raon de dh'eadar-obrachaidhean sòisealta agus ann an raon farsaing de ghnìomhan curraicealaim. Their development of skills for learning, life and work benefits from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age and stage. Tha an cothrom air com-pàirteachadh ann an gnìomhan spòrs, ciùil agus ealain air àrdachadh. Tha na h-ullachaidhean làithreach ga dhèanamh comasach do chlann gluasad gu furasta bhon chlas ro-sgoile gu P1. Ann an coimeas ri togalaichean làithreach Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh, tha comas aig Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain àrainn ionnsachaidh nas fheàrr a thabhann. Tha seo a' gabhail a-steach cothrom air goireasan mar phàirc mhòr spòrs. Tha Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh ag aontachadh gu bheil sochairean foghlaim comasach ma thèid moladh na comhairle air adhart. Tha am moladh a' toirt taic do dhleastanas na comhairle gu dèanamh cinnteach às an luach as fheàrr.

3.2 Nochd am beagan phàrantan a bhruidhinn ri Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh gun robh bròn orra mun chall a bha san amharc a thaobh na sgoile san Drochaid Ruadh. Thog iad iomnaidh mu shàbhailteachd còmh-dhail sgoile le clann air an togail agus air am fàgail faisg air rathad trang anns an Drochaid Ruadh. Bha beachdan measgaichte ann co-dhiù an clàradh iad an leanabh ann am Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh nam fosgladh i a-rithist. Bha a' chlann a bhruidhinn ri Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh deimhinneach mun fhèin-fhiosrachadh a thog iad aig Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain. Chomharraich iad cho cudromach 's a bha e a bhith a' cumail suas chàirdeasan a chaidh a stèidheachadh ann a-cheana. Thug a' chlann iomradh air na buannachdan a bha an lùib cothrom a bhith aca air raon de ghnìomhan agus de chluabaichean aig àm lòn. Is toil leotha gu sònraichte a bhith a' cleachdadh pàirc mhòr spòrs na sgoile. Bhruidhinn an dà chuid pàrantan agus clann air na buannachdan deimhinneach an lùib cothrom a bhith aca air an talamh timcheall Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh airson cur-seachad spòrsail. Tha iad dhen bheachd gu bheil seo a' tabhann raon cudromach, sàbhailte far am faod clann a bhith a' cluich, a' spèileadh agus a' falbh le baidhsagail, gu sònraichte leis nach eil slighe baidhsagail shàbhailte eadar an Drochaid Ruadh agus Drochaid an Aonachain.

3.3 Tha luchd-obrach a bhruidhinn ri Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh a' toirt taic don mholadh Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh a dhùnadh. Tha iad ag aithneachadh na buaidhe a tha aig a' chrìonadh anns an rola agus a' faireachdainn nach biodh e seasmhach an sgoil fhosgladh a-rithist. Tha a' chlann a tha a' frithealadh Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain airson an solar ro-sgoile air socrachadh gu math, le pàrantan a' taghadh seo a chumail suas tron ghluasad air adhart gu P1. Chomharraich an luchd-obrach gum feumadh mu leth den àireamh chloinne ann an sgìre-sgoile Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh, còmh-dhail sgoile nam fanadh an sgoil fosgailte. Bha iad den bheachd nach robh an t-àm siubhail a bharrachd de chòig no sia mionaidean ro mhòr.

3.4 Leis gu bheil am moladh a' leantainn gu dùnadh sgoil dhùthchail, ghabh Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh cunntas de bheachdachadh na comhairle air na h-eileamaidean dham bu chòir dhaibh aire shònraichte a thoirt. Tha a' chomhairle air na h-adhbharan a chomharrachadh gu soilleir, a tha aca airson am moladh a chur ri chèile. Ann a bhith a' dèanamh seo, bheachdaich iad air àireamh de roghainnean eile seach dùnadh na sgoile mus deach iad gu co-chomhairleachadh mun

mholadh. Bha na roghainnean eile a' gabhail a-steach leantainn orra leis an t-suidheachadh làithreach a thaobh an togalach a bhith dùinte, ath-fhosgladh leis an sgìre-sgoile a tha ann aig an àm seo, no fosgladh às ùr le sgìre-sgoile nas motha. Thàinig a' chomhairle chun a' cho-dhùnaidh nach tigeadh buannachdan nas motha an cois gin sam bith de na roghainnean eile. Sheall cho beag ùidh 's a tha aig pàrantan ann an cur an leanaibh gu Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh gus a dhèanamh comasach dhi fosgladh às ùr, nach eil comas obrachaidh an lùib na sgoile fhosgladh.

3.5 A thaobh còmhaidhail, is e glè bheag de bhuidh a dh'fhaodadh a bhith aig seo air an àrainneachd agus air a' chloinn. Tha a' chomhairle ag aithneachadh nach eil slighe coiseachd no rothaireachd shàbhailte eadar An Drochaid Ruaidh agus Drochaid an Aonachain. Bheir e còig gu sia mionaidean dràibhidh bho Bhun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh gu Bun-sgoil Dhrochaid an Aonachain. Dh'fhanadh na h-ullachaidhean siubhail a tha air a bhith nan àite on a chaidh an sgoil a dhùnadh ann an 2017, mar a tha iad. Tha ùidh mhòr aig a' choimhearsnachd ionadail anns an fheum a thèid a thoirt à togalach Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh, nan deigheadh gabhail ris a' mholadh. Bu mhath leis na daoine a tha a' fuireach san sgìre ionadail nam fanadh an togalach mar sho-mhaoin coimhearsnachd.

3.6 Tha an dùnadh seo a thathar a' moladh a thaobh sgoil tro mheadhan na Beurla aig a bheil sgìre sgoile a tha mar phàirt de sgìre sgoile foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig ann am Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar agus Àrd-sgoil Loch Abar. Tha a' chomhairle air soilleireachadh nam biodh iarrtas gu leòr san àm ri teachd airson Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig, gun leanadh iad reachdas gus an fheum air solar ionadail a dhearbhadh. Bu chòir do dh'aithisg dheireannach na comhairle an soilleireachadh seo a gabhail a-steach agus mion-fhiosrachadh air an dòigh anns an adhartaich iad Foghlam tro Mheadhan na Gàidhlig le pàrantan. 'S e dleastanas reachdail a th' ann an seo.

3.7 Tron àm co-chomhairleachaidh, chomharraich an luchd-co-chomhairleachaidh mearachdan no dearmadan a bha iad a' meas a bha sa mholadh. Feumaidh a' chomhairle dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil iad a' gabhail nan ceumannan iomchaidh airson dèiligeadh ris na mearachdan no dearmadan sin a bha air am meas. Anns an aithisg co-chomhairleachaidh dheireannaich, feumaidh a' chomhairle na gnìomhan a tha iad air a gabhail gus dèiligeadh ri mearachdan no dearmadan a chaidh innse dhaibh, a chur an cèill.

## 4. Geàrr-iomradh

Tha Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh a' creidsinn gu bheil an comas aig moladh Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd air buannachdan foghlaim iomlan a libhrigeadh. Tha an oidhirp a rinn iad air gealltanais fhaighinn bho àireamh iomchaidh de phàrantan gu an leanabh aca a chur gu Bun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh gus a dhèanamh comasach a fosgladh às ùr, air a bhith neo-shoirbheachail. Tha an aithisg a' toirt soilleireachd do phàrantan agus don choimhearsnachd a thaobh solar foghlaim san sgìre san àm ri teachd. Dh'fhaodadh gu bheil buannachdan foghlaim ann do chlann gu sòisealta agus a thaobh foghlam. Bidh clann ag obair gu dlùth ri buidheann nas motha de chomhaoisean a bhios nas dlùithe dhaibh a thaobh aois agus ìre. Bidh barrachd chothroman aca air an sgilean a leasachadh ann an raon de ghnìomhan nach eil furasta am faighinn aig an làrach sa bheil iad an-dràsta. Bidh barrachd chothroman aca com-pàirteachadh ann an gnìomhan spòrs, ciùil agus ealain agus ann an clubaichean.

Nan deigheadh am moladh air adhart, bu chòir dhan chomhairle obrachadh leis a' choimhearsnachd gus sgrùdadh a dhèanamh air an fheum as fheàrr a ghabhadh a dhèanamh de Bhun-sgoil na Drochaid Ruaidh. Bu chòir dhaibh rannsachadh a dhèanamh còmhla ris a' choimhearsnachd mu an rùn a thaobh leantainn air adhart le cothrom air an raon-cluiche shàbhailte, a tha air a thabhann le fearann na sgoile. Bheir am moladh taic don chomhairle an 'Luach as Fheàrr' a libhrigeadh tro bhith a' dèanamh an fheum as tàbhachdaich agus as

èifeachdaich de an stòrasan. San aithisg co-chomhairleachaidh dheireannaich aca, feumaidh a' chomhairle na gnìomhan a tha iad air a ghabhail a chur an cèill gus dèiligeadh ri mearachdan no dearmadan a chaidh a thogail.

## **Luchd-sgrùdaidh na Banrigh Gearran 2022**

Mrs Catherine MacKinnon  
Cul a' Bhile  
Bohuntin  
Roy Bridge  
PH31 4AH

Head of Care and Learning  
Resources: Brian Porter  
Contact: Ian Jackson  
Direct Dial: 07435 982 557  
E-mail: [ian.jackson@highland.gov.uk](mailto:ian.jackson@highland.gov.uk)  
Our Ref: IJ/  
Date: 9 February 2022

Dear Catherine

I write further to my letter of 21 January 2022, in which I acknowledged your response to the recent public consultation on the proposed closure of Roy Bridge Primary School.

Normally, Highland Council does not respond in full to representations made during public consultations exercises until after the consultation has been completed. At that point all of the representations are reviewed, along with the assessment made by Education Scotland, and a report issued with the Highland Council's views on the matters raised. This is in line with the requirements of the legislation that applies to School Statutory Consultations. Those who responded to the initial exercise in writing are invited to submit further representations during a 3-week period leading up to the Committee meeting that makes the decision on the Proposal, and these and the original responses are put before the elected councillors of the Education Committee who will be taking the final decision. All of the comments I make below are therefore subject to the views that will be taken in due course by elected councillors.

I appreciate though, that your representation suggests an alternative to closure, based around the idea that Roy Bridge Primary might become a school offering Gaelic Medium Education, and that such a proposal might require time to be further developed. I write therefore, to provide further advice, without prejudicing any future consideration of the issue by the Education Committee.

Currently, there are less than five children from the Roy Bridge PS catchment attending Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, (we do not normally provide details of children when numbers are less than five). Based purely on the current numbers of pupils, and their ages, it would not be viable to offer GME in Roy Bridge Primary School.

Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education has been published by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which lays down a process by which parents can request an assessment of the need for Gaelic medium primary education (GMPE) in their local area. Given the current numbers from Roy Bridge attending Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, it may be that an



assessment of the level of demand from pre-school children would be an alternative way of pursuing the suggestion of GME at Roy Bridge. The link below contains more information.

[Making a request for Gaelic Medium Primary Education in your local area | Gaelic medium education | The Highland Council](#)

Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comann nam Pàrant (Naiseanta) might be further sources of advice.

Lastly, I would highlight that a proposal to turn Roy Bridge Primary School into a school offering only GME would still necessitate a statutory consultation on closing Roy Bridge PS to English Medium pupils.

I hope you find the above helpful.

Yours sincerely

Ian Jackson  
Education Officer

cc. Don Esson, Area Education Manager  
Emily Brown, Head Teacher, Spean Bridge and Invergarry Primary Schools  
Lena Walker, Gaelic Education Manager  
Pamela Adamson, Education Scotland

**Financial Template - Roybridge PS Closure**

Appendix 7.

Table 1	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
<b>Forecast revenue costs for Roybridge PS</b>			
Roybridge PRIMARY SCHOOL	<b>Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)</b>	<b>Additional financial impact on receiving schools</b>	<b>Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 1)</b>
<b>School costs</b>			
<i>Employee costs:</i>			
teaching staff	91,216	0	-91,216
support staff	8,566	0	-8,566
teaching staff training (CPD etc)	259	26	-233
support staff training			0
Supply costs	2,367	0	-2,367
<i>Building costs:</i>			
property insurance	320	0	-320
non domestic rates	0	0	0
water & sewerage charges	1,149	0	-1,149
energy costs	5,121	0	-5,121
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	2,548	0	-2,548
building repair & maintenance	200	0	-200
grounds maintenance			0
facilities management costs			0
revenue costs arising from capital			0
other			0
<i>School operational costs:</i>			
learning materials	1,366	178	-1,188
catering (contract or inhouse)	7,674	0	-7,674
SQA costs			0
other school operational costs (e.g. licences)			0
<i>Transport costs:</i>			
home to school	0	36,195	36,195
other pupil transport costs			0
staff travel	198	0	-198
<b>SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>120,984</b>	<b>36,399</b>	<b>-84,585</b>
<i>Income:</i>			
Sale of meals			
Lets			
External care provider			
Other			
<b>SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL</b>	<b>120,984</b>	<b>36,399</b>	<b>-84,585</b>
<b>UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR</b>	<b>120,984</b>	<b>36,399</b>	<b>-84,585</b>

**Note:** As Roybridge PS is currently mothballed, the costs in column1 of table 1 above reflect the estimated costs of running the school if it were to reopen. As the school is currently mothballed,these savings are already being realised.

**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	320
non domestic rates	0
water & sewerage charges	339
energy costs	1,210
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	0
security costs	0
building repair & maintenance	0
grounds maintenance	0
facilities management costs	0
other	0
<b>TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL</b>	<b>1,868</b>

**Table 4**

Non-recurring revenue costs	
none	0
<b>TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 5**

Impact on GAE	
none	-7,825
<b>GAE IMPACT</b>	



## Teaching Staff

Roll Entitlement 3

	FTE	£
Head Teacher	1.00	68,997
Main Grade	0.30	16,664
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.30</b>	<b>85,661</b>

HT Costing		Main Grade Costing	
Basic	51,207	Basic	41,412
NI	5,756	NI	4,404
SA	11,778	SA	9,525
AL	256	AL	207
<b>Total</b>	<b>68,997</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>55,548</b>

### CCR

FTE 0.10 30 mins per day = 0.1 fte per week for 1 fte **5,555**

**Teaching Staff Total 91,216**

## Non Teaching Staff

hours of clerical support 16

Clerical @ HC03

Hrly rate 9.5  
Weekly Hours 16  
Annual Hours 755

Clerical Support Costing

Basic	7,168
NI	-
SA	1,362
AL	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,566</b>

Nursery Staffing no nursery pupils expected

Basic

NI

SA

AL

**Total -**

**Non Teaching Staff Total 8,566**

## Training/CPD

Fixed Amount per School where roll less than 50 250

Roll based allocation (£2.84 per Pupil based on estimated allocation for 21/22) 9

**Training/CPD Total 259**

## Supply

1.00 fte entered into 21/22 budget working paper for Roybridge gives allowance of

**2,367**

## Cumulative Savings

Doesn't apply where roll is less than 50

Clerical Assistant allocation based on Roll;

<b>Roll</b>	<b>Clerical Hours</b>
01-15	16
16-19	16
20-47	17
48-71	18
72-96	19
97-120	20
121-145	26
146-171	28
172-198	30
199-225	32
226-252	34
253-279	36
280-306	38
307-333	40
334-360	46
361-387	48
388-415	50
416-442	52
443-469	54
470-496	56

## Building Costs

### property insurance

CLASS	PROP REF	LOCATION	1st Half	2nd Half	SUM INSURE	£
A	HC 00215	ROYBRIDGE PRIM	PH31	4AH	£1,146,452	£320.03

Extract from Colin MacKenzie insurance spreadsheet

### non domestic rates

Based on current rates charge - no charge as attracts rural rates relief confirmed AB 06.10.21 **0** check this have emailed AB

### water & sewerage charges

Cost Centre	CC Description	Exp Head	EH Descript	Glcode	Year	Period	Budget Full Current Year	Actuals Period	Actuals YTD	mmitments	Actuals YTD plus Commitments	Variance
1010098000	Roybridge P.S. ND	BE1000	Water Char	1010098000	2021	12	1,938	50	339	0	339	(1,599)

Estimate based on average of last 3 years when operational

15/16	953
16/17	998
17/18	1,496

**1,149**

### energy costs

Cost Centre	CC Description	Exp Head	EH Descript	Glcode	Year	Period	Budget Full Current Year	Actuals Period	Actuals YTD	mmitments	Actuals YTD plus Commitments	Variance
1010098000	Roybridge P.S. ND	BB2000	Electricity C	1010098000	2021	12	2,375	125	1,210	0	1,210	(1,165)

Estimate based on average of last 3 years when operational

15/16	6,934
16/17	5,559
17/18	2,869

**5,121**

### Cleaning

#### Cleaning Operative (Living wage)

Hrly rate	9.5
Weekly Hours	5 Assumed 1 hour per day
Annual Hours	224.4

Basic Pay	2,132
NI	-
SA	405
AL	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,548</b>

### building repair & maintenance

Entered roll of 3 into Roybridge in per capita workings **200**

Spean Bridge Repairs covered within PPP contract so no impact for a change of 3 pupils **-**

**Per Capita allocation @ Roybridge Primary**

Amount based on Roybridge with roll of 3 **£1,366**  
Allocation per 21/22 per capita working papers

**Per Capita Allocation @ Spean Bridge**

Current budget 6,162  
Current budget adjusted for 3 less pupils 5,984  
Impact on receiving schools **£178**

**Per Capita allocation @ Roybridge Nursery**

Amount based on Roybridge with roll of 0 **£0**

**Catering****Cook 2 @ HC0337**

Hrly rate 9.5  
Weekly Hours 15  
Annual Hours 673.2

Basic Pay 6,395  
NI -  
SA 1,247  
AL 32

**Total 7,674**

Nursery Groceries Budget **no nursery**

## School Transport

Details of all the existing transport routes and the additional cost of providing transport to the receiving feeder routes from Tulloch, Fersit etc and then a bus from Roy Bridge itself to Spean Bridge. I would like to see a route from Roughburn Cottages, Tulloch, Fersit, Murlaggan to Roybridge Square. We agreed the feeder route would exist even if Roy Bridge were re-opened. There will be some additional cost to the route from Fersit to Roybridge. This is a public service. School journey - £190.50 per day - £36,190

## Staff Travel

1.30 fte entered into 21/22 budget working paper for Roybridge gives allowance of

Receiving school impact is nil as there's no change to the teaching allocation

ing school. You advised over the phone that there are  
be grateful if you could provide all the details. 1 x route  
tes involved no additional cost to the Council since they  
Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge, although limited by the fact  
15 per school year.

36,195

198

0

**Primary School Teaching Staff**  
2021-22

<b>95.6%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>Total (£000s)</b>
<b>Primary Sector Pupils</b>	<b>Pupils in Small Schools</b>	<b>£902,523</b>

Local Authority
Aberdeen City
Aberdeenshire
Angus
Argyll & Bute
City of Edinburgh
Clackmannanshire
Dumfries & Galloway
Dundee City
East Ayrshire
East Dunbartonshire
East Lothian
East Renfrewshire
Falkirk
Fife
Glasgow City
<b>Highland</b>
Inverclyde
Midlothian
Moray
Na h-Eileanan Siar
North Ayrshire
North Lanarkshire
Orkney Islands
Perth & Kinross
Renfrewshire
Scottish Borders
Shetland Islands
South Ayrshire
South Lanarkshire
Stirling
West Dunbartonshire
West Lothian
<b>TOTAL</b>

Indicator (number)	Effect (£000s)	Indicator	Effect (£000s)	Share	GAE (£000s)
14,048	30,493	0	0	3.4%	30,493
21,103	45,807	2243	5,850	5.7%	51,657
8,551	18,561	554	1,446	2.2%	20,007
5,628	12,216	1360	3,547	1.7%	15,764
30,784	66,821	31	81	7.4%	66,901
4,004	8,691	46	119	1.0%	8,811
10,169	22,073	1967	5,130	3.0%	27,204
10,438	22,657	0	0	2.5%	22,657
9,335	20,263	95	249	2.3%	20,511
9,286	20,157	50	129	2.2%	20,286
8,557	18,574	281	734	2.1%	19,308
9,392	20,387	0	0	2.3%	20,387
12,343	26,792	138	359	3.0%	27,151
28,629	62,143	671	1,751	7.1%	63,894
41,856	90,854	0	0	10.1%	90,854
16,923	36,734	2657	6,930	4.8%	43,664
5,315	11,537	0	0	1.3%	11,537
8,004	17,374	59	153	1.9%	17,526
6,944	15,073	457	1,191	1.8%	16,264
1,788	3,881	262	683	0.5%	4,564
9,935	21,565	281	733	2.5%	22,298
27,333	59,330	200	522	6.6%	59,852
1,553	3,371	400	1,043	0.5%	4,414
10,346	22,457	860	2,242	2.7%	24,699
13,302	28,874	65	169	3.2%	29,043
7,971	17,302	896	2,337	2.2%	19,639
1,869	4,057	195	509	0.5%	4,566
7,825	16,985	329	857	2.0%	17,842
25,111	54,507	688	1,795	6.2%	56,301
6,538	14,192	480	1,251	1.7%	15,443
6,913	15,006	0	0	1.7%	15,006
15,496	33,636	133	346	3.8%	33,982
<b>397,289</b>	<b>862,369</b>	<b>15,395</b>	<b>40,154</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>902,523</b>

Number of pupils in small schools	2657
GAE Allocation Unrounded	6,930,434
GAE Value per pupil	2,608
Roybrided roll if re-opened	3
GAE impact from reduction of 3 pupils based	(7,825)

Notes:

- Pupil Numbers: Scottish Government Pupil Census 2020.
- Pupils in Small Schools: Pupils in primary schools of less than 70, in settlements in Scottish Government urban / rural classifications 5 and 6 (Source: Scottish Government Education Analytical Services Directorate)
- Percentage weightings are determined using regression, comparing the variables with latest spend data.

Cost Centre	CC Descripti	Exp Head	EH Descripti	Gcode	Year	Period	Budget Full Current Year	Actuals Period	Actuals YTD	Commitments	Actuals YTD plus Commitme nts	Variance
1010098000	Roybridge P	BB2000	Electricity Ch	1010098000	2021	12	2,375	125	1,210	0	1,210	(1,165)
1010098000	Roybridge P	BE1000	Water Charg	1010098000	2021	12	1,938	50	339	0	339	(1,599)



## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

### EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge 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 Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School. A map of the proposed merged catchment is at **Appendix B**.
- The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

## **SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

### **PUBLICATION INFORMATION**

#### **Proposal Paper Published**

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

- Fort William Public Library, 2 High Street, Fort William PH33 6EU
- Spean Bridge Primary School, Spean Bridge, PH34 4EU

and published on the Highland Council website:

[www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations](http://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations)

Copies of this Proposal Paper are also available on request from:

Area Care and Learning Office,  
Camaghael Hostel  
Fort William  
PH33 7NE  
Email: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please contact The Area Care and Learning Office, Camaghael Hostel, Fort William, PH33 7NE.

Email: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto: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/carers of pupils attending Spean Bridge Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) The Parent Council of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (iv) Staff of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- (v) Trade Union representative.

#### **Advertisement in Local Media**

A notice announcing the public meeting will be placed in the local press and on the Highland Council's Facebook page.

#### **Consultation Period**

The consultation for this Proposal will run from 24 November 2021 and will end on 21 January 2022. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

## **Public Meeting**

A public meeting will be held at 6.30pm on 12 January 2022 at Roy Bridge Village Hall. 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.

## **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. Questions, responses and views will be taken down and the results published in the Consultation Report.

## **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,  
Camaghael Hostel  
Fort William  
PH33 7NE

Email: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)

Or via an online form, to be found at:

<https://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, 21 January 2022 at 5.00pm.

## **Involvement of Education Scotland**

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 31 January 2022, a copy of any 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 18 February 2022. 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 and 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 Education Committee of Highland Council, 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 May 2022, prior to submission to the Education Committee in June 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 at the Education Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

As the proposal involves the closure of a school, Highland Council would be required to notify Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers would have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision 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.

**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 Education Scotland will be advised.

## **DETAILS OF THE 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 Roy Bridge Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (the school is classed as "accessible rural") 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 Roy Bridge PS, taking into account the current pattern of enrolments (see Section 7 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 5-8 below); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 12 below) and to the impact of travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Roy Bridge catchment (Section 10 below).

### **Reason for the Proposal**

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
  - Roy Bridge PS has been mothballed since Easter 2017, after the school roll fell to two. Consequently, no children have attended the school since that date.
  - The roll at Roy Bridge fell to very low numbers because the majority of parents decided to enrol their children at Spean Bridge Primary School. The drive time between the two schools is about 5-6 minutes.
  - Evidence gathered by the Council during informal consultation suggests that very few parents from Roy Bridge are interested in re-opening the school. Re-opening the school in such circumstances would have a negative educational impact on those pupils attending Roy Bridge PS, as well as possibly the pupils who remain at Spean Bridge PS. Further details on this are provided in Section 9 below.
  - The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below.
- 2.2 During 2019 and early 2020 three informal meetings were held with parents and members of the local community, to discuss the future of Roy Bridge PS. The first was a meeting of the Spean Bridge Primary School Parent Council on 7 May 2019. Only around 8 or 9 parents attended, but they were mostly from the Roy Bridge and expressed opposition to the closure of Roy Bridge PS. Council officials subsequently attended a Community Council meeting in Roy Bridge village hall on 3 September 2019. This was well attended although many of those in attendance were not parents of primary school age children. There was no support expressed at the meeting for closing Roy Bridge PS,

## Appendix A

and the Council was asked what it would take to re-open the school. The Council advised we would consider re-opening Roy Bridge PS if a sufficient number of parents committed in writing to moving their children from Spean Bridge to a re-opened Roy Bridge PS. In the event, only two parents wrote to so confirm, which would indicate that a re-opened Roy Bridge Primary School would have a roll of two children, were it to re-open.

- 2.3 A further meeting with the Parent Council took place on 12 March 2020. Six parents attended, three of whom were from Roy Bridge. The view of that meeting was that the closure of Roy Bridge PS was inevitable.
- 2.4 Further action was then put on hold because of the pandemic, but an additional meeting with the Parent Council was held on 1 September 2021. Only three parents attended, and all were in support of the proposal.
- 2.5 Notes of the above meetings can be found at **Appendices C-Cvi**. The Appendices include notes of the meetings taken by Council officers, as well as minutes from the Community Council or the Parent Council (as appropriate). We do not however, have the Parent Council minutes of the meeting of 1 September 2021.

### **Current Details – Roy Bridge Primary School**

- 3.1 Roy Bridge Primary School is located just off the A86 Trunk Road, at the eastern end of the village. The school is located close to the western edge of its large catchment, which extends eastwards along the A86 almost as far as Loch Laggan, northwards to encompass the whole of Glen Roy, and southwards to Corrou Station.
- 3.2 The school has been mothballed since Easter 2017 when the school roll fell to 2, and the pupils transferred to Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 3.3 Prior to the school being mothballed all the children were accommodated in a modular building which contained the P1-7 classroom, school office, staffroom, and toilets. A Horsa hut in the playground was used as the school canteen/general purpose area. There was in addition, the original school building which at one time was used as a classroom. The school has an outside seating area for the pupils, which was used in the summer months as an outdoor classroom. A Multi Use Games Area is sited in the playground, and was used by the pupils at break times and also for PE when the weather permitted. The school also has an outdoor grassy area and play equipment.
- 3.4 There was no nursery class at Roy Bridge PS prior to mothballing. A Gaelic Medium nursery was located for a period within the former schoolhouse, managed by a private provider under contract to the Highland Council. This had however ceased operating prior to the school being mothballed. When the school was last in operation, nursery education for English Medium pupils from Roy Bridge was provided at Spean Bridge PS, as it still is.
- 3.5 In 2015 the Highland Council opened a new Gaelic Medium primary school and nursery in Fort William, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, located about 20

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minutes' drive from Roy Bridge. The existence of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar makes it unlikely that there will be demand for another Gaelic Medium nursery in Roy Bridge.

- 3.6 The school has a registered permanent capacity of 50, based on the availability of two classrooms.
- 3.7 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). Prior to mothballing, Roy Bridge Primary School was rated as "B" for the educational suitability of the building and "B" for building condition.
- 3.8 As the school has not operated since session 2016-17, placing requests have not arisen.
- 3.10 No current HMle Report is available.
- 3.11 Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 the CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions from the Roy Bridge School building are estimated at 1.378 tonnes. This low figure reflects the fact the buildings are not in use, and would be much higher otherwise. During the year 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, the last year in which the school was in operation, the CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions from the Roy Bridge School building are estimated at 17.399 tonnes.

### **Current Details – Spean Bridge Primary School**

- 4.1 Spean Bridge Primary School is located just off the A86 Trunk Road, at the eastern end of the village. The school is located close to the eastern edge of its large catchment, which extends westwards to incorporate Achnacarry and Glen Arkaig, southwards to Achindaul, and northwards to Letterfinlay.
- 4.2 The school has excellent facilities. The main teaching area consists of four classrooms, a learning support room, storeroom and a large general purpose area which houses the school library and ICT suite. Two further classrooms are located in a new building beside the school. A large entrance hall leads to the administrative area, medical room, disabled toilet, boys' and girls' cloakrooms, toilets and showers, gym hall and main teaching area. The nursery classroom has a self-contained outside play area and a separate entrance. The gym hall has been built to satisfy the standards set by Sport Scotland and has staging facilities for assemblies and drama. The kitchen and dining area are connected to the gym hall by a sliding wall. There is a large playground with marked playground games and boxes of play equipment for each class. Lastly, the school has a large sports field with its own mountain bike track, a climbing wall and other outdoor play equipment, and a garden area.
- 4.3 The 2021-21 roll is 102 pupils within P1-7. There are a further 17 children in the nursery class.



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- 4.4 The school (excluding the nursery) has a registered capacity of 125. The 2021-22 roll of 102 therefore represents 82% use of capacity.
- 4.5 The registered capacity is based on 5 classrooms with a maximum of 25 pupils per class. As mentioned in paragraph 4.2 above, the school actually has 6 classrooms, with one not counted in the registration figure as it is used as GP room. This could however be used as a classroom if necessary, thereby permitting a capacity of 150. The Highland Council's formula for staffing primary schools requires six teachers once the roll reaches 121.
- 4.6 The Council publishes roll projections for each of its currently operational schools. The latest forecast for Spean Bridge PS is attached at **Appendix D**, whilst a copy of the Council's methodology for calculating the forecasts can be found at **Appendix Di**.
- 4.7 It can be seen from Appendix C that the roll at Spean Bridge Primary School is forecast to rise to 121 in session 2027/28 and to 126 in session 2030/31. The Council will carefully monitor the roll at Spean Bridge PS with a view to managing the accommodation issue if and when capacity issues arise.
- 4.8 The Spean Bridge Primary School building is rated as "A" for educational suitability and "A" for Condition.
- 4.9 There is no current HMle Report for the school.
- 4.10 Annual CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from Spean Bridge Primary School building from April 2020 to March 2021 were just under 68 tonnes. This figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School.

### Examination of Alternatives

- 5.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must give due consideration of alternative courses of action that could be considered. The following reasonable alternatives to closure have been considered:
- i. To continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement.
  - ii. To re-open Roy Bridge PS with its current catchment area.
  - iii. To re-open Roy Bridge PS with an expanded catchment area.
- 5.2 As part of the consideration of alternatives, the Council has investigated the long-term roll projections.
- 5.3 The detail of the Council's consideration of the reasonable alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and its appendices.

### Option 1 – Continued Mothballing

- 6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community. "Mothballing" would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the

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school and would prevent the community from developing options for the future use of the accommodation. The Council would also be burdened with the costs of maintaining a “mothballed” building.

- 6.2 Roy Bridge Primary School has now been mothballed since 2017, and it is appropriate to decide on the future of the school.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.

### **Option 2 - Re-Opening of Roy Bridge Primary School with its Current Catchment Area**

- 7.1 For the 2021-22 school session, there are 33 pupils of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school.
- 7.2 Roy Bridge Primary School would have remained a viable school had children from the catchment continued to attend. As detailed above in section 2, a large majority of parents within the Roy Bridge catchment have chosen to enrol their children at Spean Bridge PS instead. Information gathered during informal consultation would suggest that a very small number of local parents would be willing to enrol their children in Roy Bridge School, were it to be re-opened. In these circumstances, Roy Bridge PS would re-open as a single teacher school with a total roll of less than 10 pupils. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching. Further detail is provided at Section 9 below.
- 7.3 When the school was mothballed, it was managed as part of a “cluster” with Spean Bridge PS. The latter school is now managed as a cluster with Invergarry Primary School. For this reason, it is assumed that a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would be managed with a “standalone” Head Teacher
- 7.4 Were the school to re-open with as it was prior to mothballing, the staffing entitlements, as per the Council’s Devolved School Management policy are as follows:
  - Head Teacher – 1.00FTE
  - Management Time Teacher – 0.2 FTE
  - Class Contact Time Teacher 0.1 FTE
  - Clerical Assistant – 16 hours per week
  - Cook 2 – 9.5 hours per week
  - Cleaning Operative – 5 hours per week
- 7.5 Additional Support Needs teaching and non-teaching staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.

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- 7.6 As set out above, Roy Bridge Primary School did not have a school nursery prior to mothballing. As with the P1-7 stages, there is currently no information to suggest that a new pre-school nursery in Roy Bridge would be viable.
- 7.7 If the school were to re-open, pupils within Roy Bridge village would no longer require school transport. Pupils from the further reaches of the Roy Bridge catchment would continue to qualify for school transport and would have marginally shorter journey times to school than they do at present. However, Highland Council does not consider that the travel distance from Roy Bridge PS to Spean Bridge PS is excessive, as the two schools are located only a few miles apart along the A86 trunk road. Full details of the transport arrangements are set out at Section 10 below.
- 7.8 The re-opening of Roy Bridge PS would be unlikely to have a significant short-term effect on Spean Bridge PS, unless a larger number of pupils than expected moved to Roy Bridge PS.

### **Option 3 - Re-Opening of Roy Bridge Primary School with an Expanded Catchment Area**

- 8.1 This is not a realistic option, partly the two schools are located so close to one another. The Roy Bridge catchment could not be extended towards Spean Bridge without actually entering the village of Spean Bridge itself.
- 8.2 In the other direction the next school to Roy Bridge is Gergask Primary, located in the village of Laggan which is 28 miles from Roy Bridge. The current catchment boundary runs along the former boundary between Lochaber District Council and Badenoch and Strathspey District Council, and represents the historic boundary between two areas with a different geographical identity. Moreover, Gergask Primary is itself a very small rural school with a total roll in single figures. For both reasons, it would not be appropriate to alter this catchment boundary in favour of Roy Bridge.

### **Educational Benefits**

- 9.1 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. Some of the activities listed in the paragraphs below have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the educational benefits of the closure are considered in the longer term.
- 9.2 Highland Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing its' school estate:
- Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
  - Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
  - Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.

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- Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
- 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.
- School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
- School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
- Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
- Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
- The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
- Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built up community.

9.3 As mentioned above, evidence gathered by Highland Council to date suggests that a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would have a very small roll, and consequently there would be educational detriment to pupils from attending such a school. Pupils at Spean Bridge PS regularly work in co-operative learning groups of various sizes. The very small roll of a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static, since there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. A small roll would also limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.

9.4 A larger school roll makes it easier for the school to attract visiting speakers, tutors and other external partners to work with the children. In many cases external partners look for a certain threshold in the number of children they will be working with.

9.5 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.

9.6 The existence of the pre-school class at Spean Bridge PS enables a strong transition process for children moving into P1.

9.7 The language programme at Spean Bridge PS aims to develop listening, talking, reading and writing skills. Listening is developed by games, stories, radio & television programmes, music, and use of ICT. The school aims to develop fluency and clarity of expression and to extend vocabulary. Talking is

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developed by role playing, mime, reporting, interviewing etc. They are also used for the teaching of French and Gaelic, which are introduced to pupils as part of the 1+2 language initiative. Once again, the emphasis is on oral work and role play. In all cases, working with others plays an important role.

- 9.8 As part of the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce the aim is to develop increased awareness of the world of work, social skills and employability skills, including team working, leadership and working with others. Such knowledge and understanding and skills acquisition would very much benefit from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age/stage.
- 9.9 It is self-evident that an overall school roll in single figures restricts opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. 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.
- 9.10 As with sports, the larger roll at Spean Bridge provides a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of group musical and artistic opportunities, events that are more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers.
- 9.11 Larger pupil numbers also provide more opportunities for lunchtime clubs and after school activities. Spean Bridge PS has lunchtime clubs for knitting and Lego, though the latter has been restricted by the pandemic. There are plans to introduce a lunchtime clubs for young mechanics. There are after school clubs for dance and for the Lochaber Scouts. Lochaber shinty club work with the youngsters and the school hopes to restart netball.
- 9.12 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.
- 9.13 As described above, Spean Bridge PS has excellent facilities. Although there are also a range of facilities at Roy Bridge PS, they do not fully replicate those at Spean Bridge, where overall the accommodation provides a better environment for learning.
- 9.14 In summary, positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge Primary Schools. Collaborative working within the classroom, language learning, and artistic and sports activities have all benefited from the greater numbers available through the operational merger.

### **Effect of Differing Transport Arrangements**

- 10.1 Currently, pupils from the Roy Bridge PS catchment are transported to Spean Bridge PS at an annual cost of £36,195. This is however via a public bus which would continue to operate along the route even if Roy Bridge PS were

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to re-open, so the actual transport saving from re-opening would be less than the figure set out above.

- 10.2 As Roy Bridge PS is currently mothballed, the pupils from the catchment already travel to Spean Bridge PS and no differing transport arrangement would need to be applied in the event Roy Bridge PS is closed.
- 10.3 As set out above, the travel times involved are well within the normal range for the Highland Council area.
- 10.4 It is recognised that the larger merged school implies an increase in the number of pupils entitled to school transport compared to the number who can currently walk/cycle to school, should they choose to do so.
- 10.5 Since pupils are transported from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge in a single bus, and the return distance is only six miles, the additional CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions arising from the transport are negligible, and would in any case be set against the annual emissions of over 17 tonnes that could be expected from the Roy Bridge Primary School building itself were it operational (see paragraph 3.11 above).
- 10.7 Since the mothballing of Roy Bridge PS, there have not been any occasions on which the school remained open but where the education of the Roy Bridge children was disrupted due to unavailability of school transport between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge in bad weather. Given the short distance between the two schools this would be unlikely to arise.

### **Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements**

- 11.1 As the school is already “mothballed” there will be no impact on school management arrangements at Spean Bridge PS from a formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School.
- 11.2 A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements.
- 11.3 The staffing implications of re-opening Roy Bridge Primary School are set out at Paragraphs 7.3 – 7.6 above, whilst the financial implications are set out at Section 13 below, and the associated **Appendix E**.

### **Effect on the Local Community**

- 12.1 There is an existing village hall in Roy Bridge, which provides a public space for the local community.
- 12.2 Other suggestions have been made for the future use of the building in the event of the closure proceeding. Subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community over the future use of the building and site. Any such proposal would however have to be progressed within the terms of the Council’s current asset management policy.

## **Financial Consequences**

- 13.1 The Table at **Appendix E** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger. As the school is currently mothballed, the savings identified are already being made and no additional saving would arise to the Council from closure.
- 13.2 The table does not include property costs that would arise if Roy Bridge were to become operational once more. At the present time this figure can only be a very rough estimate.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 14.1 The proposal has been assessed as having no impact on the following Equality areas:
- Disability
  - 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
- 14.2 In respect of age equality, the proposal relates to 2 primary schools and as such primarily affects children in the 3-12 age group, and their parents. The proposal is advanced on the basis of educational benefit to the children in the area concerned. No negative age-related effects arise. Age is not a protected characteristic for the purposes of school provision.

## **Rural Impact Assessment**

- 15.1 Both Roy Bridge PS and Spean Bridge PS are classed by the Scottish Government as "accessible rural schools". Although the proposal involves a formal closure of service, the service itself has not operated since the summer of 2017. In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position.
- 15.2 The relocation of service (which in practical terms has already taken place) involves moving local school provision from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge, a distance of 3 miles.
- 15.3 As set out in Section 9 above, the Highland Council believes that the proposal offers educational benefits.

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- 15.4 It is recognised that pupils from Roy Bridge itself have less opportunity to walk or cycle to school than when Roy Bridge School was in operation, and that there is occasional inconvenience for parents who wish to take their child to or from school during the school day.
- 15.5 The maximum additional travel time for school pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment to Spean Bridge is 5 minutes (source: Google Maps). As school transport is provided by the Council, the proposal would not be expected to have any impact on accessibility to education or on fuel poverty.

### **Mitigation of Adverse Effects**

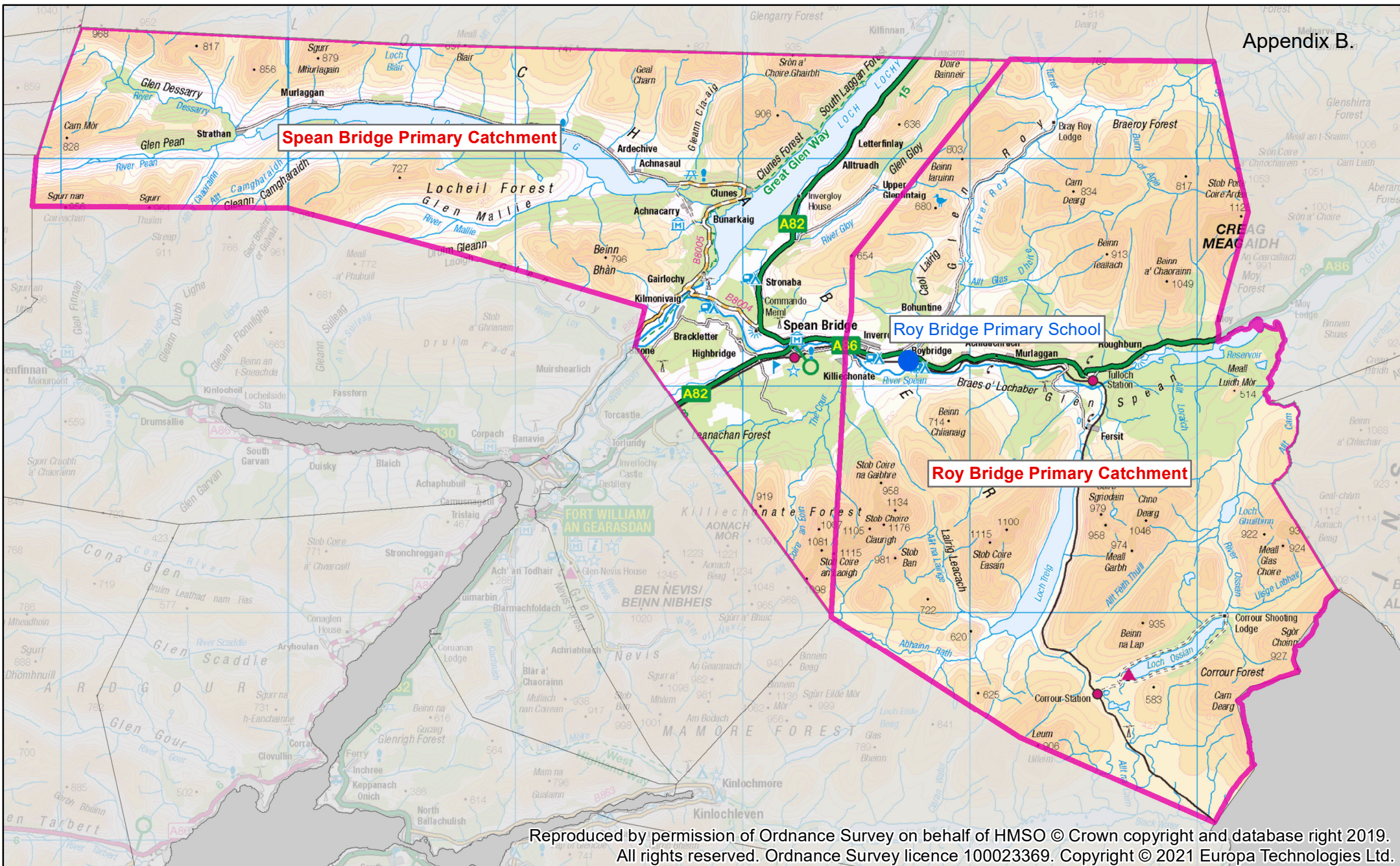
- 16.1 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the additional travel from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge, details of which are provided above. In practice this is already taking place. Funded school transport is and will continue to be provided to P1-7 pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment who attend Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 16.2 If the school re-opened, it would be on the same basis as it existed prior to mothballing, i.e., without a nursery class. Nursery pupils would continue to travel to Spean Bridge PS, as happened prior to the mothballing.

### **Recommendation**

- 17.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Roy Bridge Primary School, currently “mothballed,” is closed and the catchment area re-assigned to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 17.2 This proposal 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.

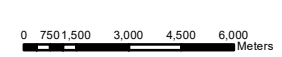
### **END OF PROPOSAL PAPER**





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# Proposed catchment Roy Bridge Primary School



1:216,068



Ref: gis2422  
Date: 09/08/2021

## **Note of an Informal Discussion at a Meeting of Spean Bridge PS Parent Council – 7 May 2019**

Only about 8 or 9 parents attended, but they were mainly from Roy Bridge and there was a definite view from those attending that the school should re-open. One parent said he had moved into the village the very day the school was mothballed and that he was appalled this had happened.

The arguments advanced against closure were:

- Parents wanted their children to be able to walk to school.
- The village had lost its shop and Post Office and losing the school would be “another nail in the coffin”.
- There were enough children in Roy Bridge to make a school viable.
- Future housing developments in Spean would make SBPS overcrowded.
- Roy Bridge PS could be used as additional accommodation for Spean Bridge PS, to cope with the overcrowding the parents were predicting. Classes could be split by stage, with nursery/infants at Spean and upper stages pupils at Roy Bridge

In respect of the third point above, I commented that Roy Bridge had been mothballed because parents had chosen to move to Spean. Parents expressed the view that this had happened because there had not been a EM nursery at Roy Bridge (there had been a partner centre GM nursery, which has now also closed). Once children went to the nursery at Spean and had made friends there, parents were reluctant to take them out of Spean for P1. I responded by advising that it would be more difficult for Roy Bridge to re-open with an EM nursery. That would be an addition to what was there before, rather than just a re-opening of the existing provision. We would need to look at whether there was sufficient accommodation for the purpose, as well as at the educational issues. (We are however obliged by the legislation to look at all viable alternatives to closure).

Cllr. Henderson added that, as we now had Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, it was very unlikely we would open a GM nursery at Roy Bridge.

On the fifth point above, I suggested that sending children from Spean Bridge to attend school in Roy Bridge might meet with considerable opposition in Spean itself.

Two parents expressed the view that we should not have allowed placing requests to Spean. I advised of the legal position around placing requests.

One parent from Spean spoke up against re-opening Roy Bridge, on the grounds this would overstretch the HT, who would be given a third school to manage. I added that if Spean were to lose 30 pupils to RBPS, then SBPS would drop a class. Parents from Spean Bridge had a legitimate interest in the issue.

A complaint was made about the lack of maintenance of the accommodation at RBPS. It was suggested that THC were deliberately allowing the buildings to deteriorate so as present the community with the argument that re-opening the

school would require too much investment. I commented that THC had limited resources and that a mothballed school was not as high a priority as an operational school. However, I undertook to pass on the complaint about lack of maintenance.

It was suggested that THC had not given sufficient publicity to the meeting. I explained that this was merely an exploratory meeting and of what the process would be if a closure proposal were advanced. I also advised that I have offered to attend the CC meeting scheduled for 4 June.

Cllr. Thompson asked whether there was a view in the community that the RBPS buildings might be used as a community hub. Parents said the building could be used whilst it was mothballed, but they still wanted it to re-open.

Ian Jackson

9 May 2019

## Spean Bridge Primary Parent Group Meeting

Tuesday 7th May 2019

**Apologies;** Rachel Stewart, Ruth Fitzsimmons, Eilidh Maitland, Martia Rowantree, Margaret Sargent, Fiona Davies, Allan Henderson (councillor) Ben Thompson (councillor) Kim Bentley, Ian Jackson (highland council), Mark Strachan, Kelly Strachan, Susan

**Present;** Annabel Loughray, Sandra Chisholm, Caroline Henderson.

1. **Roy Bridge Primary School:** Ian Jackson asked to attend the meeting to discuss the future of Roy Bridge Primary School. In summary - Roy Bridge Primary was 'mothballed' in March 2017 and the remaining pupils transferred to Spean Primary at this time. Scottish Government rules dictate a school can only be mothballed for three years, so a decision needs to be made in the next 10 months as to the future of the school. Either it reopens as a primary school or it is closed indefinitely. There is a procedure that must be followed for this, step one is to find out the initial view of parents whom this affects. There then has to be a statutory consultation, a public meeting, further consultation with Education Scotland, a review exercise and a report published before a committee decision would be made. Ultimately Holyrood make the final decision and there would be lots of opportunity for people within the Roy Bridge school catchment to make any comments on the matter before a decision was reached. Ian was keen to hear comments from within the room and opened it out to the group present.

Mark Strachan stated he was keen for the school to be reopened as it is part of the village community. He also mentioned the capacity of Spean school and the planned new houses for Spean village. What would the impact be on Roy Bridge children in the future if Spean school becomes full? Mark also added that a lot of money was spent on a new classroom for Roy Bridge school prior to it closing and this has not been maintained whilst mothballed - there will now be large costs for repair and maintenance if the school reopens.

Fiona D - discussed/clarified that English nursery provision has always been in Spean whereas Roy Bridge only offered Gaelic nursery in the village. Spean nursery fed into Spean school and Fiona asked would Roy Bridge parents have selected Roy primary if there had been an English speaking nursery there.

Margaret S stated that since Spean Nursery opened in 2001 it became harder for Roy Bridge parents to decide which school to send their kids to.

Ben T at this stage asked the Roy Bridge parents was a community hub more important than a school? Was it more about having somewhere at the centre of the village for the community to access or more about having a school for the children? An answer wasn't clear.

Allan H - Allan gave a summary of the history of the closure - Roy Bridge was scheduled for closure in 2007 but this decision was fought and the school stayed open, numbers began to

dwindle. Allan added it had been very difficult to source the £500,000 for the new classroom at Roy Bridge Primary and now it sits abandoned. Allan encouraged parents to speak out if they want Roy Bridge Primary to reopen. The group discussed and some of the parents present stated they have chosen Spean for their children and would NOT remove them from Spean school if Roy Bridge school reopened.

It was agreed that Ian will attend the community council meeting on Tuesday 4th June to discuss this and highlight it to the wider community. If a public consultation is to be held it will be held in Roy Bridge Hall and it would be well advertised to the wider community so all could attend.

The nursery situation was discussed and it was stated that Roy Bridge won't have its own nursery provision even if the school does reopen, the nursery for Roy Bridge children would continue to be in Spean Bridge.

Kelly asked if Roy Bridge primary could be used as a second campus for the current kids enrolled at Spean Bridge, this was discussed among the group but unclear if this could be a viable option. It was asked why Spean Bridge had become an option for Roy Bridge parents in the first place and the following summary was given by Eilidh and Allan. When Roy Bridge primary was for planned closure in 2006/7, the children eligible for school enrollment that year enrolled at Spean school. Roy Bridge school was then saved and didn't close but the children who had already started school in Spean were allowed to continue there as were their siblings. A bus was provided to transport the kids and other parents applied for placing requests alongside this and it snowballed from there. There have in the past been children in Roy Bridge who attended school in Spean and there are currently children in both Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge who attend school in Fort William.

The placing request system was then discussed among the group and Fiona gave an explanation of how they work/don't work in England. Ian clarified that within Highland Council children are automatically enrolled into their catchment school unless parents submit a placing request. Placing requests can only be refused if allowing that child to attend would put the class size over the maximum number.

The cost of running buses from Roy to Spean would be compared to the costs of reopening the school in Roy Bridge as well as the fact it would be adding a third school to Kims cluster and that would have an impact on her workload. Although the 'cluster' in its beginning was always the three schools, Roy Bridge has now been closed for two years and it would divide Kims time further. The proposed new houses in Spean were mentioned and it was asked what impact would be felt by Spean school if Roy school reopened? Would Spean's budget see a cut?

Ben Thompson started a conversation about what the school building in Roy Bridge could be used for if it's not a school. Ian stated if there was an active movement within the Roy Bridge community then it could be considered. If a closure goes ahead the property could be offered round council departments. Ian stated the building would remain a council building unless not wanted at which time it might be offered to the community. There would be a discussion over how this might happen.

Ian left the meeting at this time as did Margaret, Mark, Kelly and Susan.  
The planned agenda for the meeting continued.

**2. Minutes - Accuracy.** Occasional spelling mistakes noted by secretary.

**3. Minutes - matters arising** - Eco Garden. No volunteers but lots of gardening going on this term. 3 of the p1/2's cleaned out the polytunnel with Mrs Fitzsimmons in their lunchtimes and have planted herbs. The whole school now plan to get involved. Kim will put out a dojo post asking for summer holiday cover/help with garden.

The effectiveness of Dojo was discussed - Kim reports only 2 families not registered to use the app and over 40 views per post on average which is approx half the families.

**4. Head Teachers Report** - see attached for full report. The following were discussed:

Changes to nursery provision - as of August 2019 Spean nursery will offer the 30 hours a week free to all 3 and 4 year olds. (Between 8.30 - 3.30pm) No changes need to be made to the nursery to accommodate this change but the school kitchen is due to be reviewed as these nursery children are entitled to a free school meal. Not a big impact on staffing. Hours can be split between two nurseries.

Staffing - PSA allowance for 2019/20 yet to be confirmed, classes have not yet been allocated to teachers within the school. Kim did confirm that Mindy Ogilvie would remain the p2/3 teacher until July this year.

**5. ASN provision:**

Ben T hoped that the PSA allocations for next school year would have been declared by now but they have not. There are meetings in the coming weeks to discuss and decide allocation. Group discussed outcome of Parent group meeting and what the plan was going forward - how do we channel parent views? Ben stated there is an issue with the way the highland council assess for ASN and an issue with people tying money to attainment. Highland council is actually spending the average amount of money on ASN compared to other councils despite the high statistics.

It was agreed that the Spean Bridge Primary Group should write to Donna Masson asking her to attend a meeting inviting every spean parent. The group then discussed the highland councils code of conduct and how this restricted some parents from attending these meetings even though they are also parents. Fiona voiced her concerns over allocation, the highland council have a legal obligation to provide support for pupils with level one and two needs, the training of class teachers has been unclear and the support that will be provided for these teachers has not been made clear.

Ben encouraged us to contact our MSPs as they dictate how the council spend money and could influence the direction any extra income takes. Ben also reminded the group that rurality isn't taken into account when money is allocated to councils, we are compared to other schools/districts such as the borders but our staff cover many more miles.

**6. Fundraising:** Report and spreadsheet read out by Rachel (see attached), Fundraising bank account balance is sitting at approx £6000 (pre fun night). Kim once again thanked the fundraising group for all their hard work and how great their total so far was. A parent had emailed in asking for her email to be read out at the meeting, it was surrounding money allocated to the school at the Jan PG meeting and how this had been spent, what was leftover etc. Kim provided the group with a rough spreadsheet of what she has spent since given the £4250 following the meeting in Jan 2019, Eilidh to compose a table showing what the money was given for, what/how much was spent for each request, and attach to these minutes.

Requests for funding from Parent Group;

- Transport cost for Forest Schools (6 sessions at Nevis range) unsure of cost
- Transport for school trips £1000 approx
- Garden items such as plants £200 approx but will accept anything
- Maths resource (numicon) £2000
- Reading resource £500
- Panto costs in December £1000 requested - £500 approved

It was noted that not every teacher was made aware in Jan - April term that the group had donated £200 per class and so this has not been spent.

The maths resource had been discussed at the Jan meeting and kim/Michelle were to discuss with the staff about this which has not been done. Group discussed if staff let the group know exactly what they sets they want and the price of these through schools procurement and group can price online and see if its cheaper elsewhere.

The reading resource (p3/4 core readers) were again discussed at the Jan meeting and was included in the £4250 that Kim was given. Group agreed to look into costs of books and discuss with class teachers further.

The above requested transport costs are to be discussed with the community council as they hold the pot of money donated by local landowner to be used for school transport costs which could be accessed for the forest school trips and glen nevis trip planned for this term. Class attending forest school sessions yet to be decided, Kim proposing the p4 class, parent group felt p2/3 class should go.

It as agreed that more parents should be encouraged to attend the Parent Group meetings especially when financial decisions are being made so as to ensure the parent group dont feel responsible for justifying decisions made.

Netball group requested new Netballs, cost is £110 for 12 balls, group approved (Eilidh, Fiona and Ruth approved)

School trips were discussed. P5-7s have requested the trampoline park in Inverness which has been costed at approx £420 for the bus hire and £10 per child entry fee. The P1-4 trip has been suggested as Kincaig Wildlife Park which will cost around £840 for two buses and £6 per child entry fee. The group agreed to donate £1000 initially to put towards the costs f the school trips but this was later discussed in more detail and the parent group agreed to

give the school £2500 which would cover the entire cost of both planned trips including bus hire and entry fees. This would allow the trips to be free to all pupils.

The upcoming sponsored walk money will go into the school funds account NOT the fundraising groups account.

The outdoor class committee would like to 'pitch' to the fundraising group for some money for their outdoor day on June 7th.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm - Ben was thanked for his attendance. The group discussed the school trips as documented above at this time and then emailed round the remaining parent group committee members who were absent to ensure all agreed to decision.

Next Parent group meeting to be held on Tuesday 3rd September at 6.30pm



## **Note of an Informal Discussion at a Meeting of Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council – 3 September 2019**

There was a good crowd of people present. Cllr. Ben Thompson and Cllr. Denis Rixson were there, as was Kim Bentley (Head Teacher of Spean Bridge and Invergarry Primary Schools)

I explained that the Council was required, under statutory guidance, to keep the status of mothballed schools under review. I started to talk about the possible future of the school and about the possibility of closure, but all the suggestions from the audience were about how the school might be re-opened, and how that could be achieved. I advised that within Highland Council I was not a level that could make a decision on such an outcome. However, I acknowledged that we had come to listen to the community's views, and commented that we would only consider re-opening the school if we had very good evidence that there was sufficient demand from parents, who would have to commit in writing to taking children out of Spean Bridge PS and re-enrolling them in Roy Bridge. I suggested that any such requests should be made to Kim, who would collate them and send them to ourselves (Kim advised me afterwards that only two of the people who spoke at the meeting were parents of children currently at Spean Bridge PS. Most of the speakers were people who had historical links to the school).

I was asked what number we would need to re-open Roy Bridge but responded by saying there were no set number. We would consider the evidence if and when it arrived.

I highlighted that prior to being mothballed, Roy Bridge PS had not had a nursery class, and that if the school were re-opened it would be as it was before mothballing, with no nursery.

There were a few questions about refurbishing the former schoolhouse, which was used for a time by a partner centre nursery, and using it as classroom accommodation for a re-opened school. I advised that the modern demountable had been perfectly good accommodation and I saw no need for any additional accommodation. There had also been a classroom in the old building which could be used as a second classroom if necessary. The Council would not wish to create any more accommodation than was required.

A question was asked about whether there was a time limit on mothballing. I advised there was no set time limit, just that it be kept under regular review. I commented that it obviously wasn't good for a building to be kept empty for an extended period. This led onto questions about maintenance. I said the Council had a duty to keep the building wind and watertight, but beyond that the Roy Bridge building was not a priority for investment, for obvious reasons.

There were quite a lot of questions about the potential roll at both schools. I commented that the issue with sustaining Roy Bridge was not due to a lack of children in the catchment, but because the parents had chosen to send their children to Spean. I was asked whether, if Roy Bridge re-opened, the parents of Roy Bridge children would be required to send their children to that school, as the catchment

school. I advised that in my opinion they would not, since they had enrolled their children in Spean on the basis it was the local school at the time, and it would be “changing the goalposts” to order them to Roy Bridge. I also highlighted the right of parents to make placing requests, which THC are required to grant unless there are particular legally defined reasons for refusing them.

Views were expressed that likely housebuilding in both communities would lead to capacity issues at Spean and that it was therefore a “no-brainer” to re-open Roy Bridge. I disagreed with the comments about capacity issues at Spean but acknowledged that roll projections were “crystal ball gazing”.

Cllr. Thompson asked whether the parents at Spean Bridge had a say. I responded that re-opening Roy Bridge could happen without any consultation, since it was merely opening the doors of a school that already exists. If a closure proposal was advanced, we had to consult parents at any “affected school”, which would include Spean Bridge PS. A re-opening of Roy Bridge would potentially affect Spean PS, since a substantial move of pupils to Roy Bridge could result in Spean losing a teacher. Also it might affect the HT arrangements.

The CC Chair summarised the meeting by saying there was no community support for closure, and that THC should either re-open the school, or at least continue to mothball it. That was a fair summary of the meeting. I asked for a copy of the minutes, when they are produced.

Ian Jackson  
4 September 2019

**Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council**

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Council held at 7.00 pm on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019 at Roy Bridge Village Hall.**

**Present:** John Fotheringham, Ross MacLennan, Liz Fotheringham, Brian Donald and Highland Councillors Ben Thompson and Denis Rixson, and 36 members of the public.

**Statement by the Chairman:** At our last meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> July the meeting was disrupted by two members of the public who seem to believe that a Community Council Meeting is an open forum in which everyone can express their views however offensive. May I respectfully remind the public that under the Community Council Constitution I as Chairperson shall determine the order, relevance, and competency of all questions or contributions from the public, and if there is any repetition of such disgraceful scenes I will adjourn the meeting to a time and place I see fit.

**Apologies:** Councillor Allan Henderson

**Conflict of interest Declarations:** Ross MacLennan, Ian Langley and John Fotheringham are Members of the Stronelaig Wind Farm Community Fund Panel, and Trustees of Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO. Brian Donald is a Trustee of the SCIO. John Fotheringham is also a Community Director with the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust.

**Previous Minutes:** The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> July were approved.

Proposer: Ian Langley

Seconder: Brian Donald

**Highland Council's Update on the Future of Roy Bridge Primary School:**

Ian Jackson from Highland Council Care and Learning explained that when schools were mothballed, it was proper to examine periodically whether mothballing was still relevant or whether they should move to closure. Even then it was still a complex procedure and every school closure had to be approved by the Scottish Government.

The Community Council supported by many at the Meeting asked about the criteria necessary to reopen the primary school now that the number of pupils attending Spean Bridge Primary School from Roybridge was on the increase, and Spean Bridge itself had over 90 units available for development which may lead to an increase in demand from there. Mr Jackson explained that parents who wanted their children to return to Roy Bridge Primary School should approach the head teacher in the first instance and if there were sufficient numbers they would consider it. Such a proposal if adopted could lead to a staff reduction at Spean Bridge but the Nursery would not be a part of any transfer, nor would any pupils currently attending the Gaelic Medium School be forced to return. Parents have a right of choice regarding placement even in school catchment areas.

Assurances were given that the school building will continue to receive care and maintenance to ensure it doesn't deteriorate whilst further consultation takes place.

The Community Council's position is to support parents if sufficient come forward requesting the re-opening of Roy Bridge School, and if it is sustainable in the long term. If insufficient numbers request change we would support continuing with mothballing, but we are not willing to consider formal closure at this time.

The Chairman thanked Ian Jackson for his patience, and for the detailed explanation of the various complexities involved in each proposal.

**Reports;**

From 27 August 2019 Mobile Working will be introduced across Highlands and Islands Division of Police Scotland.

Mobile Working means that police officers will be operating mobile devices as part of their operational duties.

They will now be in possession of mobile devices which may be secured to their body armour / jackets adjacent to their radio.

This means that officers will be able to use their mobile devices to remotely access police systems which will increase officers' time working with the public and on incidents - or conducting patrols and preventing crime.

PC Scott Williamson gave the meeting an update on local occurrences,

**Matters Arising:**

**Highland Council** – Highland Council have confirmed that they will be clearing the vegetation from around the street lights on the path between the A82 and Altour Gardens in Spean Bridge.

The broken drain cover in Bohenie Road near to its junction with the A86 has still not been replaced and we will ask the Councillors to intervene on our behalf as repeated requests by us have failed to secure results.

We would like to thank Mrs Jenny Hastings and Highland Council for acting promptly in clearing the mess created by corralled horses at the Commando Memorial on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> August.

As our correspondence with Stuart Black and Donna Manson relating to consistent errors by Highland Council's Planning Department continues to be ignored we have written to both Kate Forbes and Kevin Stewart Minister for Local Government, Housing, and Planning in the earnest hope that someone will accept responsibility, and ensure no further mistakes.

Members of the public asked that we thank Highland Council for recent pothole repairs and the Chairman will pass on the appreciation.

**BEAR and Transport Scotland** – The Chairman met with Kate Forbes MSP last week and raised the long delayed A86 Inverroy Safety Report with her. He had subsequently written to both Transport Scotland and BEAR giving them 14 days to produce the Report or he would ask Kate to intervene again.

Resurfacing of the A82 at Altrua, some 6 miles North of Spean Bridge is scheduled to take place between Sunday 15 September to Thursday 19 September (both nights inclusive) between 20.00 and 06.00. The road will be closed throughout these times with an Amnesty every two hours at 22.00, 24.00, 02.00 and 04.00 hrs. Emergency vehicles will be able to access at all times.

**Recycling Tailings and Scalpings** – Following the outburst by a local Landowner at our Meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> July the Chairman contacted the Data Protection Commissioner and BEAR Scotland. An examination of the circumstances found that the Roads Sub Contractor had consistently breached SEPA's rules and that recipients would need an exemption certificate for every location which many did not have. The Data Protection Commissioner was happy to take a formal complaint, and Transport Scotland were not amused about the contractor's conduct on a government contract. We have received assurances about the procedures to be followed on forthcoming local contracts and we will be monitoring adherence.

This is not a problem confined to one recipient but seems to have been widespread, but reselling such waste product is specifically outlawed as end use must be agreed with the producer.

**Community Council Elections** – The notice of Election for Candidates wishing to serve Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council for the next four years will be published on Monday, 23 September 2019 on the Highland Council Website. The deadline for submitting nomination papers is 12noon on Tuesday, 8 October 2019.

The new Community Council will be formed if 9 or less candidates apply on 8th October.

If more than 9 apply the election day will be on the 19th November and the existing Community Councillors will remain till that date.

The Code of Conduct for Community Councillors is based largely on the Code of Conduct for Local Authority Councillors and relevant public bodies as provided for in The Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Act 2000. As elected representatives of their communities, they have a responsibility to make sure that they are familiar with, and that their actions comply with, the principles set out in the Code of Conduct. Its principles, shall apply to all Community Councillors and those representing the Community Council wherever and whenever they are acting in an official capacity as Community Councillors. These principles are Service to the Community (Public Service), Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability and Stewardship, Openness, Honesty, Leadership and Respect.

The key principles of the Code, especially those that specify integrity, honesty and openness, are given further practical effect by the requirement for you to declare interests at meetings which you attend. The rules on declaration of interest are intended to produce transparency in regard to interests which might influence, or be thought to influence, your actions as a community councillor. In such circumstances you will be required to withdraw and refrain from any discussion where you or family member could be deemed to have a conflict of interest.

#### **Correspondence:**

1. A letter was received from a local landowner who no longer resides in the area. It made certain inaccurate allegations about the Community Council's involvement in a street name change, the 23 conditions imposed on Planning Application 16/05283/FUL, and our unwillingness to support the plans for a fenced off area in Spean Bridge. After due consideration and with the unanimous approval of the Community Councillors the Chairman had replied. It was clear that she had been misinformed that any street change was premature to say the least, Highland Council Planning Department never consulted us indeed often ignored our contribution, and the comments about the fenced off land would have had more credibility if there had not immediately been an attempt to sell the land to a neighbour.
2. Highland Council had relayed British Telecom's latest consultation on removal of the Telephone Boxes at Gairloch, Tulloch and Stronaba. For some unknown reason the box at Bohuntin has disappeared from the consultation. Nothing has changed in the last three years, and we will resist their removal. The Chairman will write to Highland Council informing them of our decision, and the Chairman will circulate the consultation to any interested parties.
3. The Scottish Land Reform factsheet provides Scotland's Community Councils with advice about how local communities can have more of a say in how land is owned, used and managed. It also outlines the ways in which communities can use legislation to seek to become the owners of land, even where the owner of the land does not wish to sell the land to the community. The factsheet also provides an update on other land reform activities that will be of interest to community councils. We have passed the information to the Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO that have the financial capability to pursue such land ownership, and have already identified potential sites.

The Community Councillors agreed to note:

- a) An invitation to attend the Fort William 2040 Annual Workshop on 25<sup>th</sup> September.
- b) Highland Council's Amended Core Paths Plan West Highlands and Islands.
- c) Latest News and Opportunities from Local Energy Scotland.
- d) An invitation to the West Highland Community Rail Partnership AGM 2019 on 21<sup>st</sup> September.
- e) An invitation to the Highland Small Communities Housing trust Conference and AGM in Inverness Town House on 13<sup>th</sup> September.
- f) The Transport Forum's August Minutes.
- g) An invitation to the Resilient Communities Conference 2019 which takes place on 11<sup>th</sup> September at SFRS Cambuslang.
- h) The Asset Transfer of the land Spean Bridge Community Centre is built on including the Car Park from Highland Council to the Community Centre SCIO.

**Treasurer's Report:**

The current balance is £3960.82 following the receipt of our annual administrative grant. £1518.82 is Community Council Funding and £2442 is the balance left over for further allocation of Micro awards. As we are required to balance the books by 30<sup>th</sup> September in election year all current expenditure should be forwarded to the Treasurer by that date.

We are required to protect our SSE Micro Award funding and are discussion with SSE about transferring any funding left over in case the Community Council doesn't form

It is noted that a 'top up' grant application to help meet the administration costs of the Community Council has to be submitted by 7<sup>th</sup> October, but will only be paid if the Community Council can demonstrate that they will run out of their grant funds by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Only Highland Council could run such a process in the middle of the Community Council elections as no one knows what is likely to happen until they know how the new Community Council intends to spend their funds.

**Any Other Business including Date and Venue of Next Meeting:**

The final Meeting of this 4year cycle will be at 7.00pm on Tuesday 1st October in Kilmonivaig Church Hall.

Killiechonate Woodlands are currently harvesting timber in the plantation bordered to the north by the railway to the west by Corriechoille Road and to the south by the River Spean which will involve temporary closure of the popular riverside walk. It is anticipated that the harvesting will take two months, warning notices will be posted, and clambering over stacked timber is dangerous, and should not be undertaken.

**Licensing;**

Notification of a Major Variation Application in respect of the Stronlossit Inn, Roy Bridge. As there was no concerns expressed from the Meeting the changes were approved.

**Planning:**

The Community Council monitors Planning Applications weekly to ensure we are able to respond within the 14day deadline.

During the last two months we have raised one objection relating to a proposal to build four camping pods in the Fort William Hinterland which we believe is contrary to the Supplementary Guidance in the Wider Countryside Siting and Design.

We noted that there had been a change at Tigh Aran but in the absence of any complaint from residents we were happy to allow it to proceed.

It has been our policy for some years to automatically object to applicants that put in retrospective Planning Applications. We will not reward those that fail to use pre planning or carry out approved plans. Two applications fell into this category this month.

Three Applications were approved.

**Meeting closed at 21:00.**

**Dana MacLennan  
Secretary**

**Note of an Informal Discussion at a Meeting of Spean Bridge PS Parent Council – 12 March 2020**

Norma and I met with the PC yesterday evening. The PC had invited us to provide an update on the position with Roy Bridge PS.

There were only about 6 parents present. The person leading calls for Roy Bridge to re-open was not present. Three of the parents were from Roy Bridge though.

We advised the PC that Roy Bridge PS would not re-open for August 2020, as there had been only very limited interest expressed by parents.

The future of the school therefore came down to a choice of (i) continued mothballing, but we would likely be revisiting the closure issue in 18 months' time, or (ii) moving to a formal closure proposal. The PC Chair had some reservations about closure, on the grounds of the impact on the community of Roy Bridge. However, the overall view was that we should move to a formal closure consultation.

Ian Jackson  
13 March 2020



Spean Bridge Primary School Parent Group Meeting

12th March 2020

Present - Norma Young, Iain Jackson, Lindsay, Ruth, Rachel S, Eilidh, Ali B, Kim B.

Apologies - none

Previous Minutes - approved

Community Benefit - Mitie have said that the school would need to take responsibility for any equipment installed which SSE wouldn't approve. Group agreed not to submit an application at this time. The hall committee may apply for something themselves. It was agreed this item can be removed from the agenda for future meetings.

RoyBridge Update - Iain recapped the meeting from September 2019 held in RoyBridge Hall when people were encouraged to contact him. He has had very few people contact him and with that number so low it has been decided Roy Bridge Primary will not open in August this year. There are now 2 plans.

A - Roy Bridge school is mothballed further.

Plan B - there is a formal closure consultation which takes one year. Local council members who were supportive of RB staying open in the past are now supportive of a closure.

Currently Dorothy Gibb (estates dept) is looking after RB.

A community group have informally approached the highland council about transferring the use of the school buildings for community purpose but this couldn't happen until after the closure consultation.

Parent consensus seems to support closure. There have not been high numbers wishing to reopen it. The group discussed should Spean's projected population increase be considered - current pattern is approx 15 kids per primary with nursery numbers gauging the same. Including house building underway and those projected numbers we would be looking at a school roll of 120 pupils (current roll is 110) Projected roll for 2029 is 120+. By 2027 the highland council will own Spean Primary outright and they have already reviewed the ground available at Spean for possible expansion in the future.

It was highlighted that properties in the Roy Bridge catchment were still selling despite the schools mothballing so lack of school not impacting growth of village.

The group discussed Spean school borrowing some of the resources currently sitting unaided in RoyBridge to benefit the children and could be returned if needed but this would need to be discussed again in further detail.

All present at the meeting tonight we're in favour of moving to a formal closure consultation. Support was vocalised for community transfer if possible. In place of the community council the local SCIO would be consulted.

Iain and Norma left the meeting at 7pm.

Fundraising - A healthy bank balance of approx £9000 at this time. Bingo planned for next week but will likely be cancelled - the group will make that call on Monday and notify everyone. Plans ongoing for a summer raffle and fun night. There will be another meeting in April when the schools go back to discuss this further. The group will send Kim a list/plan. The shed beside the container is to be cleaned out and used by the fundraising group to store items.

Unclear if £5000 donation to the school cheque had been cashed and the SCIO still have not been sent invoices for the Aug-Dec 2019 term. These should be sent to Brian Donald. Kim will check the money is in the school account. It was discussed that perhaps the SCIO should type up something formal for the arrangement/donation offered for transport costs. The donation is for £3000 per year for two years.

Financial Requests -

£5000 cheque given - Kim to check if cashed

No other requests submitted. This cheque will include the costs for school trips. Kim's planned transport spends total £3170 with £3000 expected from SCIO.

A parent suggested the Rural Complex 'seed to supper' project would be a great activity for the P1/2 class. There are 10 sessions in total held at the complex. The group discussed how this might work eh sending half the class at a time or p1 for 5 and p2 for 5. Kim to discuss further with staff.

Discussed canteen supervision - Kim currently covering lunches and nursery breaks daily which is now impacting the running of the school. Clear need for additional staff cover but this isn't available.

A suggestion was made for the school to ask parents to support transport for trips like swimming lessons to alleviate pressure on staff.

SB13 - Ali B has applied for funding through Arkaig Forest Trust for an art project for P4-7 in Sept. Ali asked for a donation of £500 from the fundraising group to help with this. Approved by 3 members.

Headteachers Report - Kim will attach to the minutes.

Meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Next meeting scheduled for June 2020, date to be confirmed

## **Note of an Informal Discussion at a Meeting of Spean Bridge PS Parent Council – 1 September 2021**

I attended a meeting of the Spean Bridge PC last night, to talk about a statutory consultation proposing the closure of Roy Bridge. Only 3 parents turned up at the meeting, and all were in agreement with the proposal. I was told that the one parent from Roy Bridge who had previously expressed strong opposition to the closure has now moved away. I hadn't previously been aware of that.

I advised that I was hoping to put a paper to the November Education Committee, proposing a statutory consultation exercise on the closure. The only concern expressed was that, due to the low attendance at the meeting, parents might not know of the proposed consultation. I said I was keen that the statutory consultation did not come as a surprise to parents, so I would prepare a statement to notify parents of what was underway, which the HT and the Parent Council could circulate on social media. The statement would make it clear that the consultation was yet to be approved by the Education Committee.

Ian Jackson  
2 September 2021

**School Roll Forecast**  
 Lochaber High School  
 Spean Bridge Primary

5134420	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36
P 1	12	20	14	13	17	17	17	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 2	12	13	21	14	13	17	17	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 3	13	13	13	21	15	13	17	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 4	19	14	13	14	22	15	14	17	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 5	10	20	14	14	14	22	16	14	18	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 6	19	11	20	15	14	15	22	16	14	18	18	19	19	19	20	20
P 7	18	20	11	21	15	15	15	23	16	15	18	19	19	19	20	20
<b>Total Roll</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Total Capacity</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>
Tot Roll - Tot Cap	-22	-14	-19	-13	-15	-11	-7	-4	-5	-2	1	8	8	8	15	15
<b>(Tot Roll/Tot Cap)%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>106%</b>	<b>106%</b>	<b>106%</b>	<b>112%</b>	<b>112%</b>

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This background paper describes the high level approach taken in preparing school roll forecasts for primary and secondary schools in Highland. It describes the basic methodology used and changes introduced to the processes to improve transparency and ease of use of the forecasts.
- 1.2 The existing school roll forecasting methodology has been iteratively developed over several decades with improvements and adjustments to account for circumstances in Highland. Given the school capacity pressures experienced in recent years, Highland Council's Development and Infrastructure - Information and Research department, together with Care and Learning, took the opportunity to look afresh at the forecasting process. This research has informed the 2017/18 School Roll Forecasts and the preparation of the draft Developer Contributions Supplementary guidance (consultation 2018).
- 1.3 It has been recognised that there is a need for a simplified approach to determining the effect of residential development on the school estate. In preparing the forecasts, a key consideration was the usability of these forecasts to easily identify all anticipated residential developments which feed into the forecasts and undertake development scenario modelling. This information is critical for effective planning of the school estate and assessing Local Development Plan site allocations as well as individual development proposals.
- 1.4 An integrated primary and secondary school Excel spreadsheet based approach has been developed to give confidence in school roll forecasting. A baseline forecast is updated and published annually, which also acts as a template that can now be used for modelling future school rolls based on testing various potential development and school estate management scenarios.

## **2 Input Datasets and Factors**

- 2.1 A key factor in school roll forecasting is a detailed and accurate assessment of the likely residential build-out timescales for new developments. The annual Housing Land Audit (HLA) provides this base information. Since 2016, the HLA has been prepared in parallel with the creation of the annual School Roll Forecasts. In addition to programmed build out rates for Local Development Plan site allocations, allowance for smaller scale 'windfall' development sites is also applied to the forecasts. This windfall rate is based on the prevailing average for the primary school catchment in the previous two years. The build out and delivery of multiple residential developments, which often take place within a similar timeframe, contribute to cumulative pressures on the school estate.

- 2.2 The ratio of additional pupils expected to derive from newly constructed housing (the Pupil Product Ratio or PPR) is the major influence on increasing school rolls. The rates used in Highland are 0.3 primary pupils and 0.13 secondary per new home. These figures are comparable with those used across many Scottish Local Authorities and have been found to be accurate and reliable as recently assessed and reported in the School Pupil Product Ratio Review, prepared by The Highland Council - Information and Research, September 2017.
- 2.3 Forecasts are informed by an annual school pupil census, combined with information on current school capacities to provide the baseline and start point for forecasting and roll pressure analysis. These are provided by Care and Learning and are updated regularly to comply with the latest legislation and regulatory requirements.
- 2.4 Pre-school year group values are populated using GP registration figures supplied by the NHS, to identify children which are not yet of school age. These will be included in the calculation of future P1 intakes for Primary Schools.
- 2.5 A significant exercise was undertaken in 2017 to increase the accuracy of pupil flow modelling. We analyse the current flow of pupils attending schools outwith their catchment area school to determine future roll adjustments from Placing Request applications, as well as calculate intake numbers for Gaelic and Denominational schools.

### **3 Methodology**

- 3.1 Once the input datasets have been refreshed with the latest values, the spreadsheet can be used to forecast school rolls for the next 15 years. As a baseline, each projection sheet shows the number of pupils in each year group for the current school year.
- 3.2 For every additional year to be forecast, the number of pupils expected in each year group will be updated to take account of the influences from the various input datasets, including additional pupils from new housing development completions.
- 3.3 Using the residential development information, estimated build out rates are aggregated by primary catchment and an updated windfall contribution is added to give a year by year additional housing count for each. These values are combined with the Pupil Product Ratios to predict the number of additional pupils expected per school for each year forecast.

- 3.4 These anticipated new housing yields are combined with expected Placing Request numbers and are used to adjust the pupil numbers moving through the education system. Primary School P1 rolls are based on the Pre-school figures collected from the NHS and Secondary School S1 rolls use the product of last years Primary P7 pupils. All other Primary and Secondary year groups are based on the number of pupils expected to progress through from the previous school year. Adjusted year group figures for each projected year are displayed alongside baseline roll figures.
- 3.5 Total school rolls forecasted are reported against school capacities to highlight current and future school's capacity constraints or where schools have excess capacity.

## **4 Outputs**

- 4.1 Forecasts are aggregated into a single summary sheet for each Associated School Group (ASG) and published annually via the Highland Council's Website. From 2018, we will also be publishing mid-year update sheets to reflect any significant changes to the school estate.
- 4.2 The published School Roll Forecast is used internally as a baseline to enable effective management of the school estate and forms an essential part of the Council's evidence base for informing planning decision making.

END

The Highland Council - Information and Research  
Development and Infrastructure  
September 2017

Financial Template - Roy Bridge PS Closure

Appendix E

Table 1 Forecast revenue costs for Roybridge PS			
	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Roy Bridge PRIMARY SCHOOL	Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)	Additional financial impact on receiving schools	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 1)
<b>School costs</b>			
<i>Employee costs:</i>			
teaching staff	91,216	0	-91,216
support staff	8,566	0	-8,566
teaching staff training (CPD etc)	259	26	-233
support staff training			0
Supply costs	2,367	0	-2,367
<i>Building costs:</i>			
property insurance	320	0	-320
non domestic rates	0	0	0
water & sewerage charges	1,149	0	-1,149
energy costs	5,121	0	-5,121
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	2,548	0	-2,548
building repair & maintenance	200	-7,825	-8,025
grounds maintenance			0
facilities management costs			0
revenue costs arising from capital			0
other			0
<i>School operational costs:</i>			
learning materials	1,366	178	-1,188
catering (contract or inhouse)	7,674	0	-7,674
SQA costs			0
other school operational costs (e.g. licences)			0
<i>Transport costs:</i>			
home to school	36,195	0	-36,195
other pupil transport costs			0
staff travel	198	0	-198
<b>SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>157,179</b>	<b>-7,621</b>	<b>-164,800</b>
<i>Income:</i>			
Sale of meals			
Lets			
External care provider			
Other			
<b>SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL</b>	<b>157,179</b>	<b>-7,621</b>	<b>-164,800</b>
<b>UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR</b>	<b>157,179</b>	<b>-7,621</b>	<b>-164,800</b>

**Note:** As Roy Bridge PS is currently mothballed, the costs in column1 of table 1 above reflect the estimated costs of running the school if it were to reopen. As the school is currently mothballed,these savings are already being realised.

Table 2

Capital costs	School proposed for closure	Receiving school
Capital Life Cycle cost		
Third party contributions to capital		

Table 3

Annual Property costs incurred (moth-balling)	
property insurance	320
non domestic rates	0
water & sewerage charges	339
energy costs	1,210
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	0
security costs	0
building repair & maintenance	0
grounds maintenance	0
facilities management costs	0
other	0
<b>TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL</b>	<b>1,868</b>

Table 4

Non-recurring revenue costs	
none	0
<b>TOTAL NON-RECURRING REV</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 5

Impact on GAE	
	-7,825
<b>GAE IMPACT</b>	<b>-7,825</b>