

Agenda Item	13.
Report No	EDU/7/23

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education

Date: 15 February 2023

Report Title: Statutory Consultation: Torridon Primary School: Proposal to Proceed to Statutory Consultation for Formal Closure

Report By: Executive Chief Officer: Education & Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report seeks members' agreement to proceed to a statutory consultation, under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, for formal closure of Torridon Primary School.

2. Recommendations

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

3. Implications

3.1 Resource - The financial implications of the Proposal are set out at Appendix E.

3.2 Legal - The Proposal will be issued for statutory consultation as required by the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) - Equalities and rural issues are considered at sections 16 and 17 of Appendix A. There are no specific poverty related issues to consider.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – Appendix A 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 – None.

4. Overview

- 4.1 Torricon Primary School has been mothballed since April 2012, when the roll fell to zero. At the time of writing, there are five children of P1-7 age within the school catchment, plus one child attending pre-school nursery.
- 4.2 This proposal is being brought forward following extensive informal consultation with local parents and stakeholders over several years and, having examined viable alternatives that could be considered. Some local stakeholders had been reluctant to proceed with a formal closure proposal, arguing that the school should continue to be mothballed until a long-term solution could be found to the lack of children in the area. In the Council's view, it is not good practice to keep a school mothballed for as long as 10 years, and a statutory consultation process would allow a decision to be made on the future of the school. Officials wrote to local parents and the community council in November to advise of the possibility of a statutory consultation. The community council responded by indicating their support for a statutory consultation. Further details are provided in the Paper at Appendix A, which sets out the basis of the proposal, and related information, including the educational, community and transport implications.
- 4.3 The Proposal Paper recommends re-allocating the Torricon PS catchment to that of Shieldaig Primary.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to a Committee decision to proceed to statutory consultation, a public meeting will be held in Torricon to discuss the Council's proposal. There will be considerable opportunity for stakeholders to submit views to the Council in advance of any final decision being made. At this stage, it is expected the statutory consultation timeline would see a final recommendation being considered by this Committee in November 2023, though this may be subject to change to ensure the Council has sufficient time to consider and respond to matters arising from the consultation.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Education

Date: 2 February 2023

Author: Ian Jackson, Education Officer

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Torrison Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Shieldaig 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 Torrison Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Shieldaig Primary School. (Maps of the current catchment areas are at **Appendices B - Bi**).
- For the avoidance of doubt, it should be assumed that the related Pre-School provision is included within any reference below to a Primary School. In particular, any reference to Torrison Primary School should be taken as a reference to both the primary and nursery classes that operated prior to the mothballing of the school
- The proposed changes, 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:

- Torricon Community Centre
- Shieldaig Primary School
- Gairloch Community Library
- West Ross Mobile Library

and published on the Highland Council website:

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

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

Business Support Team
Highland Council
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7NE
E-mail: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please also contact the Business Support Team, Camaghael Hostel, Fort William PH33 7NE.

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

Formal notice of the Proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- (i) Parents of pupils attending Shieldaig Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) The Parent Council of Shieldaig PS.
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
- (iv) Staff of Shieldaig Primary School;
- (v) Trade union representatives;
- (vi) Torricon and Kinlochewe Community Council
- (vii) Shieldaig Community Council;
- (viii) Garve and District Community Council
- (ix) Education Scotland;
- (xxii) Highland Youth Convenor.

Advertisement in Local Media

A notice announcing the public meetings 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 Monday 27 February 2023 and will end on Friday 21 April 2023. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held, the detail of which are set out below:

Torrison Community Centre, 28 March 2023 at 6.30pm.

Anyone wishing to attend the public meeting is invited to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Council, will be chaired by a senior elected councillor, and will be addressed by officers of the Education Service.

The meeting will be an opportunity for the public to hear more about the proposal; to ask questions about the proposal; and to have the views of all stakeholders recorded so that they can be taken into account. A note will be taken at the meeting of questions asked and views expressed. This note will be published on the Council website. The meeting will also be recorded.

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

Meetings with Pupils and Staff

School staff will arrange to discuss the proposal with pupils (who are considered to be of a suitable age and maturity) in the affected schools. A record of questions, responses and views will be taken and this will be published in the Consultation Report.

Responses to the Proposals

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

Ian Jackson
Education Officer (Resources)
Camaghael Hostel
Fort William
PH33 7NE
Email: Education. Consultations@highland.gov.uk

When responding, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “parent of child in the area”, “carer”, “relative”, “former pupil”, “teacher in local 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 April 2023 at 5.00pm.

Involvement of Education Scotland

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will also be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 9 May 2023, a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period, as well as 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, to be completed not later than 3 weeks after they receive the consultation papers – 29 May 2023. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries of people there as they consider appropriate.

Review of Consultation Exercise

Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meeting. It will then prepare a Consultation Report. This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website as well as at the affected schools and local library, free of charge. The Report will include a summary of the written and oral representations made during consultation and a copy of the Education Scotland Report, together with the Council's considered response to the issues raised. The Report will include details of details of any alleged inaccuracies and/or omissions and how these have been handled. The Consultation Report will be published at least 3 weeks prior to being submitted to the People Committee, who will make a recommendation to the full Highland Council.

In publishing the report the Council will invite any person or party to make further representations to the Committee prior to its meeting. A notice to this effect will also be published on the Highland Council website.

At the present time the Council intends to publish its Report in November 2018, prior to submission to the Council's People Committee on 6 December 2018. However, this timescale may change depending on the nature of issues raised during consultation, and the need to give full consideration to those issues. In the latter event, the Report may not be submitted until a later Committee meeting.

Any proposal approved by the People Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

Scottish Ministers Call-in

In the event that the Council decides to close the school at this stage, it is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of that decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Document and Consultation Report in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 within 6 working days of the decision being made, and to publish on its website a notice that it has done so, detailing the opportunity to make further representations within 3 weeks. The Scottish Ministers have an 8-week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel. Within the first 3 weeks of the 8-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Until the outcome of the 8-week call-in process has been notified to the Council, the Council will not proceed to implement the proposal.

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 Torridon Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the special regard required for rural school closures. The Council has considered the school roll projections for Torridon Primary (see Section 3 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 5-9 below); to the educational benefits arising from closure (Section 10 below), to the effect of closure on the community (Section 14 below) and to the impact of differing travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Torridon catchment (Section 12 below) but who currently attend Shieldaig Primary.

Reasons for the Proposal/Chronology

- 2.1 The proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
 - Torridon Primary School has been mothballed since the end of session 2011-12, and no children have attended the school since that time.
 - Current population figures within the school catchment indicate a maximum school roll of either 5 or 6 pupils over the next 5 years.
 - A school roll of this size provides significant impediments to the successful implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence (details below).
 - A school roll of 5-6 pupils hampers social interaction opportunities for children, who conversely benefit from attending larger schools amongst more children of their own age.
- 2.2 At the time the school was mothballed, there was a tenanted schoolhouse which formed part of the overall property (i.e., the school and schoolhouse had a shared external entrance, and were joined by an internal door). The resolution of the tenancy was a protracted process.
- 2.3 During 2019 the Council began informal discussions with the community about the status of the school – see details at paragraph 2.4 below. Queries were raised about the legal title to the land on which the school sits, and to the adjacent land used as a children's play park. These queries also took time to resolve. In addition, some members of the community did not favour a closure proposal, arguing instead for continued mothballing whilst attempts were made to find a longer-term solution for the school. Lastly, the sudden arrival of the COVID19 pandemic in the UK in March 2020 led to a postponement of action, due to the diversion of Council resources to address the outbreak.

- 2.4 During 2019 and 2020 several informal discussions were held with parents and with the local community council, concerning the future of Torridon School. Notes of these discussions have been appended as follows

Appendix C – Highland Council note of an informal meeting with parents held on 12 June 2019

Appendix Ci – Minutes of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council meeting of 12 June 2019. The Highland Council does not agree that these minutes are an accurate record of the discussion regarding Torridon Primary School.

Appendix Cii – Highland Council record of the discussion at the Community Council on 12 June 2019.

Appendix Ciii - Highland Council note of an informal meeting with parents held on 11 November 2020.

Appendix Civ – Highland Council note of a discussion with Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council on 8 December 2020.

- 2.5 Highland Council again contacted each of the parents in Torridon via email on 24 November 2022, to explain that the Council was considering moved to a formal closure consultation and to invite further comments. A similar email was sent to the local Community Council, who responded by indicating support for a statutory consultation exercise, particularly since the school buildings have been left empty for a long time and are deteriorating.

Current Details – Torridon Primary School

- 3.1 Torridon Primary School is situated within the village of the same name. It is classed by the Scottish Government as a “very remote” rural school. The area historically served by the school includes the village of Torridon and the communities on the north side of Loch Torridon, as far as and including Lower Diabaig. The school has been mothballed since the end of session 2011-12.
- 3.2 When the school was first mothballed, pupils from Torridon attended either Shieldaig Primary or Kinlochewe Primary, although the majority attended Shieldaig. Kinlochewe Primary was mothballed in the summer of 2022, after the school roll dropped to one following a number of placing requests.
- 3.2 For the 2022-23 school session, there will be five pupils of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school. There is one pre-school child in the catchment, who would enter P1 in August 2024.
- 3.3 The above figures suggest that, were Torridon School to re-open with 100% of catchment pupils attending the school, the P1-7 roll figures for the forthcoming few years would be:
- 2023-24 – 5
- 2024-25 – 6
- 2025-26 – 5
- 2026-27 - 5
- 3.4 The school has one classroom plus a further room, which when the school last operated was set up as a nursery.

- 3.5 The school has a permanent capacity of 25. Based on the permanent capacity available, the notional 2023-24 roll of 5 pupils would represent 20% use of capacity.
- 3.6 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). Torridon Primary School is currently rated as "B" for educational suitability and "C" for building condition.
- 3.7 Given the length of time the school has been mothballed, there is no current HMIE Report.
- 3.8 The P1-7 pupils from Torridon who attend Shieldaig PS travel on school transport, at a cost of £155 per day, or £29,450 per school year. Were Torridon Primary to re-open, only one of the current pupils would be entitled to school transport over a distance of 2.5 miles. The potential annual cost can be estimated at £5 per day, or £950 per school year.

Current Details – Shieldaig Primary

- 4.1 Shieldaig Primary School is situated within the village of the same name. It is classed by the Scottish Government as a "very remote" rural school. The area served by the school includes the village of Shieldaig and the area from Balgy to Cuaig along Loch Torridon. Since the mothballing of Torridon School it has, for practical purposes, also taken pupils from that school's catchment. Since the mothballing of Kinlochewe PS in June 2022, it has also taken some pupils from that school's catchment.
- 4.2 The school building dates from well over one hundred years ago, but has recently undergone extensive modernisation with the conversion of the school house into a purpose-built Nursery accommodation. There are two classrooms, a Nursery room, a school kitchen, an office and several toilets. Adjacent to the school, there is an enclosed grassy playground, plus the Community football pitch and multi-use games area, which are located directly behind the school. These areas are all used by the children during outdoor breaks and P.E. The local church hall is also used for P.E. and as a performance venue.
- 4.3 For session 2022-23, the school has a roll of 25 pupils, with represents a significant increase on the typical school roll for Shieldaig earlier in the century. The current roll includes five pupils from within the Torridon catchment and three from within the Kinlochewe catchment. There are a further 7 children in the nursery class, including one from Torridon and two from Kinlochewe.
- 4.4 The Council publishes roll projections for each of its currently operational schools. The latest forecast for Shieldaig PS is attached at **Appendix D**, whilst a copy of the Council's methodology for calculating the forecasts can be found at **Appendix Di**. The projected roll forecast suggests the roll will continue to rise to 34 pupils by 2026-27, and thereafter stabilise.
- 4.5 The school has a permanent capacity of 50. The 2022-23 roll of 25 pupils represents 50% use of capacity.

- 4.5 Shieldaig Primary is currently assessed as “C” for Suitability and “B” for Condition.
- 4.6 No current HMle report is available.

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 Torridon PS with its current catchment area.
 - iii. To re-open Torridon PS with an expanded catchment area.
 - iv. To re-open Torridon PS as a form of specialist facility
- 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. The school has now been mothballed for 10 years and it is necessary to decide on its future.
- 6.2 A further period of “mothballing” would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the 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.
- 6.3 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. The status of mothballed schools should be regularly reviewed. Having undertaken such a review, Highland Council does not see continued mothballing as a realistic alternative for Torridon Primary.
- 6.4 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.
- 6.5 A continuation of mothballing would have no impact on the community.

Option 2 - Re-Opening of Torridon Primary School with its Current Catchment Area

- 7.1 As set out in Section 3 above, if Torridon Primary were re-opened, it would therefore be as a single teacher school with a total roll in single figures. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching, particularly in terms of the requirements of the current curriculum. Further detail is provided at Section 10 below.
- 7.2 When Torridon Primary was last in operation, it was managed by a Head Teacher with class teaching responsibilities. Since then Highland Council has moved to an arrangement where small schools are managed as part of a “cluster” with other schools within the ASG. However, alternative management arrangements would not address the wider population issues within the Torridon area.
- 7.3 There has been no significant rise to the school age population of the Torridon area since the school was mothballed in 2012. Section 9 below discusses in detail the educational issues arising from the low local school roll figures.

Option 3 - Re-Opening of Torridon Primary School with an Expanded Catchment Area

- 8.1 The Torridon PS catchment is linked by road to two other primary school catchments. To the east the school catchment borders that of Kinlochewe PS, which is itself mothballed after the roll fell to one at the end of session 2021-22. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to alter this catchment boundary in favour of Torridon PS, nor would such a change achieve anything in terms of boosting the potential roll at Torridon Primary.
- 8.2 To the south the Torridon catchment borders that of Shialdaig, the receiving school for the Torridon children. The schools are located around 7 miles apart.
- 8.3 An analysis of the home addresses of the Shialdaig pupils reveals that there are no current pupils located in addresses to the west of Shialdaig village itself. Moving the Torridon boundary to the east would not therefore add any pupils to the Torridon catchment, without extending it into Shialdaig itself.
- 8.4 Altering the catchment of Shialdaig PS in favour of Torridon would of course require a statutory consultation in its own right. Taking all the circumstances into account, it would not be appropriate to alter this catchment boundary in favour of Torridon Primary School.

Option 4 – Re-Opening Torridon Primary as Specialist Facility

- 9.1 This was something suggested by local parents at an informal discussion held with Council officials in June 2019 – see Appendix C. Some parents expressed an interest in an educational facility in the village that would concentrate on Gaelic, music, and cultural education. Officials advised that in terms of school provision, Highland Council officials advised at the meeting

that, in operating its schools, the Council does not deviate from the Curriculum for Excellence, but that parents could develop a private facility if that were financially sustainable. There were no firm proposals about what sort of facility might be offered, but Council officials indicated that all options could be considered. It was agreed that parents would work on their proposals over the course of the next year, and that officials would return for a meeting in the summer term of 2020.

- 9.2 At the meeting between officials and parents in November 2020 – see appendix Ciii – it was noted that there had been no further developments on this suggestion.
- 9.3 Given the very small numbers of children in the Torridon area, the very limited facilities available at the school building, the lack of detail, and the need for Highland Council to follow CfE, the Council does not see this suggestion as a reasonable alternative to closure. The formal closure of Torridon Primary as a local authority school could however allow local parents to further develop such a proposal.

Educational Benefits

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 With the above aim in mind, Highland Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing its school estate:
1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
 2. Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
 3. Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.
 4. Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
 5. Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary) although it is recognised that this may not always be possible in a rural Council area such as Highland.
 6. School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
 7. School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
 8. Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
 9. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
 10. The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
 11. Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built-up community.

- 10.3 It is Highland Council's view that the pupils from the Torridon Primary catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at Shieldaig Primary School.
- 10.4 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.
- 10.5. Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the modern 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. The children at Shieldaig Primary School are able to work collaboratively on various topics and activities.
- 10.6 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.
- 10.7 Very small learning groups have a number of disadvantages. They are not only limited in size but also static, since there is no possibility of changing the membership. Very small rolls 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.
- 10.8 A healthy school roll of pupils at varying ages allows opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. This applies even to individual sports, where successful learning of skills is helped by talking and sharing of experiences. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices.
- 10.9 As with sports, larger rolls provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities. School shows, plays and public performances are events that that are much more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers. Larger pupil numbers also provide more opportunities for after school activities.
- 10.10 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.
- 10.11 In summary, a number of positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Torridon Primary with Shieldaig Primary.

Re-Allocation of Catchment

- 11.1 Following the mothballing of Kinlochewe PS in the summer of 2022, Shieldaig Primary School provides the only reasonable option for re-allocating the Torridon PS catchment.

Effects on Differing Transport Arrangements

- 12.1 As there are currently no children attending Torridon Primary School, no differing transport arrangement would need to be applied in the event of the formal closure of the school.
- 12.2 For the 2022-23 school session, there are four primary age pupils and one nursery age child travelling to Shieldaig Primary, who have longer journeys than would be necessary if Torridon Primary School were still operational. Some of these pupils are within walking distance of Torridon Primary, and others would have a shorter car journey were the school to re-open.
- 12.3 The driving time between Torridon Primary School and Shieldaig Primary School is given as 16 minutes (source: Google Maps). It is appreciated that potential driving times from the extreme ends of the catchment would be longer.
- 12.4 Calculations of the additional emissions of greenhouse gases arising from the current transport arrangements from Torridon to Shieldaig Primary suggest that the mothballing, and by extension the formal closure of, Torridon Primary, is currently resulting in just over 17 tonnes per annum of CO₂ equivalent emissions. The figures can however only be estimates as emissions are affected by the type of vehicle used for the transport contract, the speed at which vehicles are driven and the type of road travelled.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 13.1 As Torridon Primary has not operated since the end of school session 2011-12, there will be no impact on staff and school management arrangements from a formal closure.

Effect on the Local Community

- 14.1 The village of Torridon has a first-class community centre located a short walk from the school building.
- 14.2 During informal discussions with local stakeholders, the Community Council in particular wished to have further information about the Title to the land currently occupied by Torridon Primary School and schoolhouse. In response the Council's legal team has undertaken extensive research to clarify the title and ownership aspects, which has taken time but which has ensured that whatever is ultimately decided, the path for any future use of the building is clearer. The Council's Title to Torridon School (including the school grounds and schoolhouse) is a Feu Charter by Duncan Darroch of Gourock and Torridon in favour of The School Board of the Parish of Applecross recorded in the Division of the General Register of Sasines applicable to the County of Ross and Cromarty on 23rd August 1875. It is believed that The National Trust for Scotland is the current owner of the surrounding Torridon Estate.
- 14.3 From an examination of the title it would appear that there is nothing in terms of the Council's title which would prevent the Council transferring the property to another party. Any application for a Community Asset Transfer, following

any future closure of the school, would need to demonstrate a level of community benefit commensurate with the value of the site.

- 14.4 The school playground is an amenity for local children. The land occupied by the playpark is owned by the Council and is classed as Housing Revenue Account Land. This means any transfer of the site would require the consent of the Council as well as the Scottish Government. There is, additionally, a clause of pre-emption which prevents any sale without first having offered the same to the National Trust for Scotland.

Financial Consequences

- 15.1 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.
- 15.2 The table does not include property costs that would arise if Torridon PS were to become operational once more. At the present time this figure can only be a very rough estimate.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 16.1 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
- 16.2 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 schools provision.

Rural Impact Assessment

- 17.1 Both Torridon Primary School and Shieldaig Primary School are classed by the Scottish Government as "very remote rural schools". Although the proposal involves a formal closure of service, the service itself has not operated since June 2012. In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position.

- 17.2 The relocation of service (which in practical terms has already taken place) involves moving local school provision from Torridon to Shieldaig, a distance of 7.5 miles.
- 17.3 As set out in Section 11 above, the Highland Council believes that the proposal offers educational benefits.
- 17.4 The maximum additional travel time for school pupils from the Torridon PS site to Shieldaig is 16 minutes (source: Google Maps). As school transport is provided by the Council for pupils aged P1 and above, the proposal would not be expected to have any significant impact on fuel poverty.

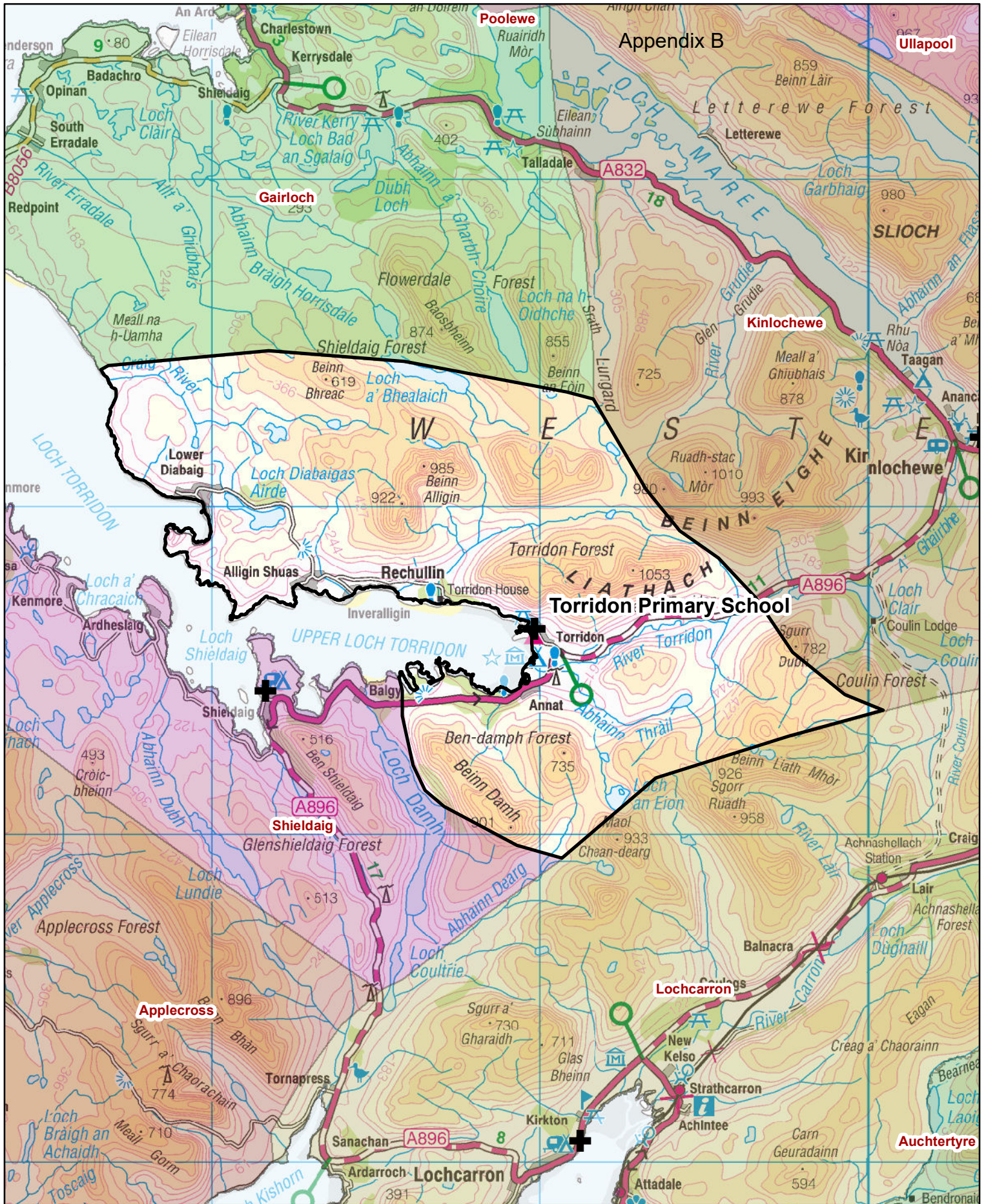
Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 18.1 The main adverse effect for children is the additional travel from Torridon to Shieldaig, details of which are provided above. In practice this is already taking place and has done since 2012. Funded school transport is and will continue to be provided to P1-7 pupils from the Torridon catchment who attend Shieldaig Primary School.

Recommendation

- 19.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Torridon Primary School, currently “mothballed,” is closed and the catchment area assigned either to Shieldaig Primary School.
- 19.2 The Council must formally consult on changes to provision. This consultation paper is issued in terms of the authority’s agreed 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.

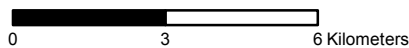
END OF PROPOSAL PAPER



Torridon Primary School

**Primary School
Catchment Boundary
March 2013**

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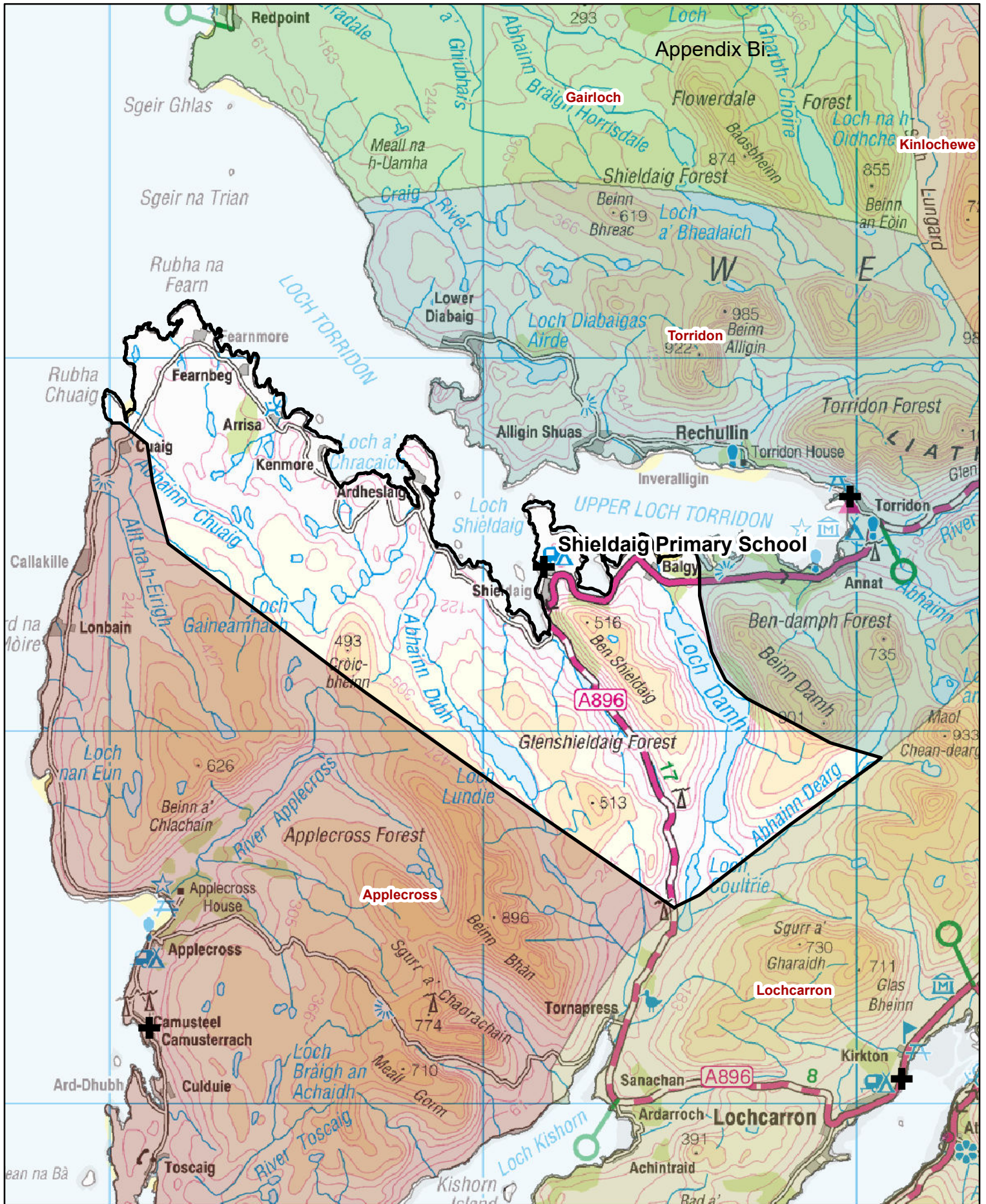
1 cm = 1,490 metres

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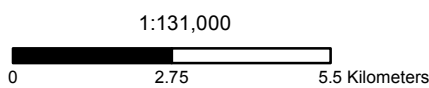


Planning & Development Service



Shieldaig Primary School

**Primary School
Catchment Boundary
March 2013**



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Planning & Development Service

Note of an Exploratory Meeting with Parents in Torrington held at Torrington Community Centre at 5pm on 12 June 2019, to discuss the Future of Torrington Primary School

Norma Young, Area Care and Learning Manager (West)

Ian Jackson (Education Officer – Resources)

Felix and Sarah von Racknitz

Clare Thorburn

Joanne Mitchell

Sally Cook

Local parents had been invited to the meeting by individual letter, and Ms Cook had been invited as HC staff had been advised she was the parent of a pre-school child, who was likely to move to the area.

The invite letter specified that the meeting was with local parents. A separate meeting had been arranged with the Community Council. However, 3 community representatives, Terry Doe, Anne Macrae and Andrew Peacock, sought entry to the parents' meeting. NY advised them that only parents had been invited to the 5pm meeting, but undertook to discuss their request with the parents.

NY explained to the parents that several community representatives wanted to join the meeting. She advised that she had no objection to this but that, as the meeting had originally been arranged for parents, she wished to know whether this was acceptable to them. The parents advised they would rather have an initial discussion between themselves and THC, with the community representatives joining in 30 minutes' time. NY advised the community representatives of this decision. Both NY and IJ checked outside several times between 5.30pm and 5.45pm to invite the community representatives in, but there was no-one in sight.

NY introduced the meeting by explaining the purpose, and the difference between mothballing and formal closure. There was an extensive process around the latter, which IJ could outline.

IJ commented that there were only 4 children of P1-7 age in the Torrington catchment at present, and one of those would be moving to S1 in August 2019. THC did not consider that a roll of 3 was enough to justify re-opening Torrington PS. Another factor for the Council to consider was the very small roll at Kinlochewe Primary. Currently it had only 4 pupils in P1-7, of whom two were from Torrington. A closure proposal for Torrington was one option and he could explain the process, but first of all he sought the views of parents.

One parent commented that Torridon was centrally located between Kinlochewe and Shieldaig, and on that basis there might be less reason to close Torridon. NY acknowledged the geography although noted that the Kinlochewe catchment included Achnasheen, which was a long journey from Torridon.

All the parents confirmed they had no intention of taking the current P1-7 pupils out of their current schools. There would be no pupils to enrol in Torridon in Aug 2019. The intention was to look at a longer-term solution. In the meantime the parents thought that the school should continue to be mothballed.

IJ asked about pre-school children in the community. There were two 3 year-olds plus a younger child, with a possibility of two more children currently aged 2-3 years, should planned moves to the area take place. There was thus a possibility of 4 children entering P1 for August 2021 or 2022, though only two of these were currently in the community.

One parent suggested that a community with an attractive school would be a draw to people from elsewhere. Without disagreeing, others commented that the availability of employment and housing were also significant issues.

Some parents were interested in an educational facility in the village that would concentrate on Gaelic, music, and cultural education. NY advised that THC does not deviate from the Curriculum for Excellence, but that parents could develop a private facility, if that were financially sustainable.

It was agreed that parents would work on their proposals over the course of the next year, and that NY and IJ would return for a meeting in the summer term of 2020.

As yet there were no firm proposals about what sort of facility might be offered, but all options could be considered.

It might be the case that THC would undertake a statutory consultation to close the school, on the basis of its replacement by a community facility. Parents asked about the nature of the lease for the school site and whether “reversionary rights” would apply if the building were no longer used for educational purposes. IJ undertook to enquire about this with HC legal staff.

Concerns were expressed about the condition of the Torridon PS building, and parents asked for assurances that the building would be maintained.

One parent asked whether the school building could be used for a Parent and Toddler Group, or as a pre-school nursery. Highland Council did not offer transport for nursery, so it was difficult for parents to access pre-school provision. NY commented that THC was not opening any new nurseries. In terms of a Parent and Toddler Group, the village already had a community centre that could be used for this purpose.

Parents commented that the Community Centre was not a good location for the group, as the Centre would not allow the parents to place displays of artwork, or to store equipment.

IJ undertook to send his contact details to those parents who didn't have them.

**Minutes of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council Meeting held in Torridon Hall on Wednesday 12th June
2019 from 7pm - 8.15pm**

Our thanks to Celtman for allowing us space and time in the main hall when they had already booked it and for trusting us with their supplies.

Present : Terry Doe (Chairman) Anne Macrae (Secretary) Margaret Smith , Colin Stevenson, Carol MacIver,

Cllr. Alex MacInnes, Seamus MacNally - NTS Manager , 5 Members of the public, Ian Jackson - Education Officer , Norma Young - Area Education Manager West.

Apologies : Andrew Peacock, Jonnie Petrie, Cllr. Derek MacLeod

1. Welcome from the Chair.

Terry welcomed all to the meeting, getting going swiftly

2. **Financial Report** As Andrew was not able to return to the hall no financial update was available.

3. Correspondence

Minutes from other Ward 6 Community Councils continue to be circulated by Kenny MacLean.

E mails to and from Alistair Christie regarding the planned Joint CC Meeting on Saturday 8th June at Inverness HQ which has now been cancelled.

E mail regarding proposed Windfarm at Kirkan. Any comments need to be in by 14th June.

E mails to and from Ian Jackson regarding meeting up to consult on future options for Torridon School.

4. Updated Minutes of the May meeting, including Wester Alligin Grazing Committee's comments of concern over wild camping were agreed and signed.

5. **Matters arising**

Roads

Jonnie had been unable to contact Ian MonCrieff in order to set a date for him to come out to visit Kinlochewe regarding proposed traffic calming measures. Cllr. Alex MacInnes will try to speak to him.

The poor condition of cattle grids close to Glen Cottage is continuing to cause concern.

Three bars are now loose and drivers are advised to go round through the open gates if possible. We need to find out if there are plans to fill the grids in or repair them.

Memorial Bench

As we have now been waiting over nine months for a reply on whether the Hickman Trustees are willing to contribute towards the cost of a new memorial bench by the Kinlochewe War Memorial , Terry took the opportunity to ask Fiona Price , the Chair of the Trust if any decision had been made by the four Trustees.

Fiona replied that no decision had been reached though the Trust were not saying no.

She would now like the Community Council to present a quote of how much would be needed before the Trustees made any decision.

Fiona referred to an e mail she had sent our Chair at the beginning of September 2018, questioning the use of how a £500 donation we had received from a film company working in the area was to be used and in which she had falsely accused the Community Council of misappropriating funds. Our Chairman, Terry had responded immediately confirming that the £500 was banked. There were no stipulations on how the money would be used but it would be for the good of both Torridon and Kinlochewe. At our last meeting in May it had been agreed that £250 would be donated to the Out West Community Trust to help towards improvements planned for Kinlochewe Toilets including baby changing facilities and a new hot water boiler. NB. Our Treasurer keeps a detailed account of all money coming in and out and all Community Councils publish audited accounts on an annual basis.

6. **Future of Torridon School and Play Park** Living in the Schoolhouse , Anne declared an interest.

For a number of years there has been growing concern that there has been no review of Torridon School as promised in 2012 when mothballed and at the lack of any maintenance to the building by Highland Council. Earlier this year parents approached Norma Young, Area Manager (West) wishing to make use of the school for Playgroup sessions and to have the Nursery reopened. Mrs Young had not responded to a Nursery

Placement request but an apology was later made by the Acting Director of Education, Mrs Campbell, who promised it would be looked into. (NB. Mrs Campbell has since resigned and is still to be replaced.)

At our March meeting held in Torridon, a parent had attended to bring up the subject of reopening the Nursery in Torridon School and ask for our support. We had noted her concern, also keen to review and discuss the use of Torridon School and Play Park with Highland Council officials.

Mr Ian Jackson then wrote to parents to arrange a meeting at 5pm on 12th June to discuss future options for the school saying that he was also informing locally elected members which we took to be The Community Council. Mr Jackson then contacted us by e mail, confirming the 5pm meeting and saying that he and Mrs Young were willing to stay on to attend the Community Council meeting at 7pm to meet the public and to help facilitate this, we had moved our meeting from Kinlochewe to Torridon. As this was seen as a follow up to our March meeting when parents had requested support, it was agreed that Terry our Chair and other Office Bearers Anne and Andrew would attend the 5pm meeting to have an accurate picture of parents' wishes and options being proposed by education officials for the future of Torridon School.

The meeting held between the previous Community Council and Mrs Young in 2012 had been behind locked doors with members of the community, staff and parents refused entry. Seven years on we still seek clarification on many points raised then and promises made but not kept to, so we had welcomed the chance for open honest discussion regarding the school and future options for its use.

Parents had indicated that with older children settled in both Shildaig and Kinlochewe Schools now for most of their years, they were content to continue till leaving in p7 but that there was a wish to make use of the building for preschool and nursery education.

Currently families with children in both school and nursery are required to make up to three 20 mile return journeys a day due to different times for starting and stopping. New families have indicated their wish to move into the area if the school or nursery were reopened.

It was with some shock therefore, that on arriving at the hall with parents for 5pm, Community Council Officials found themselves refused entry to the building by Mrs Young and the Centre Manager who locked the door in our faces stating we were not welcome. Mrs Young then returned to open the door stating she would speak to us in first 5 minutes, then 90mins then 30. Disgusted at the rude reception and being told we were not welcome, Community Councillors left to return at 7pm for the usual monthly meeting. Terry outlined how members had given up their own time earlier in the hope of a productive open discussion and had been left wondering what was going on and what could be so secret about the options being outlined by Education Officials. Having given up work to attend at 5pm Andrew was unable to return at 7pm but Terry stated that like others Andrew himself may be a parent in the future and the Community Council felt let down that any discussion had been far from open. Seven years on and Mrs Young was once again meeting behind locked doors.

Mrs Young denied this, saying that it had been a surprise to her that locally elected members had turned up and that then had not waited outside for the next half hour. She claimed parents were unanimous in saying they wanted a private meeting, however this was later denied by parents who felt a deliberate wedge was being driven to separate the community with which we agree. It was noted that doors were locked on our arrival, prior to Mrs Young even speaking to parents who had a good relationship with Community Councillors. Once again the community were left wondering what the situation was.

No formal minutes were taken but Ian Jackson agreed to send on a record of his notes.

Sally Cooke who attended the meeting, had also taken notes and would share them once written up.

It was Mrs Young's opinion that it would be detrimental to other local schools to reopen Torridon and she stated that Highland Council did not intend to open any new nursery units, She considered preschool provision could be made at the village hall. However it was pointed out that Torridon School already accommodates a Nursery class with excellent space and resources, including child sized toilets. Previous Playgroup resources at the Torridon Centre had been thrown out by the hall manager, into an old container and damaged to make room for larger more profitable functions such as Weddings and Celtman.

The play park by Torridon School offers attractive surroundings for young children to enjoy play and learning whereas the hall is surrounded by roads with the danger of cars coming and going by all doors. Current

management also restrict use of the extended Centre rooms and toilet facilities are not as appropriate for little ones to use. Play equipment and displays could not be set up for prolonged periods as they can be within the school building where facilities and resources are more appropriate for young children.

It was pointed out that families wishing to move to the Torrison area have been put off by the lack of education facilities. Lack of affordable housing is a problem for the area but there are plans to build more family houses. Mrs Cooke was a perfect example of someone ready to move to Torrison now if there was nursery provision for her child. Far from being 'new', Nursery provision had existed in Torrison School since the idea was established in the 1990s with children from Shialdaig and Kinlochewe also attending sessions. There were now concerns over lack of available space in Shialdaig School due to rising number of children.

In 2012 we were led to believe that Torrison catchment area was to be included in that of Shialdaig School. Mr Jackson clarified that as Torrison School is not officially closed the catchment area remains the same as it was for all surrounding schools. Since 2012 parents have been given no option but to transport their children to Shialdaig or Kinlochewe or to home school. Any family in Diabaig would be required to make at least two 36 mile round journeys each day which with winter maintenance cuts had proved not to be sustainable. Anne asked why parents transporting children to Shialdaig were being paid but those taking children to Kinlochewe were not being refused any allowance towards cost of fuel, expensive if having to make three 20 mile journeys a day. Mrs Young claimed to be unaware of the situation and said the parents should get in touch with her to sort this out.

A member of the public who had previously been Chair of Torrison Primary when mothballed in 2012 asked for clarification on required maintenance of the school building, pointing out that Torrison School was one of the best maintained when mothballed and the fabric was suffering since due to neglect, despite assurances made by Highland Council in 2012 that the building would be cared for. Mrs Young acknowledged that all heating had been turned off and she would ask for this to be looked at. She felt the storage heating was not financially viable within the classroom though no mention was made of the overhead fan heaters which are most needed by the toilets in the old wing, nor that the school is connected to twenty solar panels placed on the Schoolhouse roof generating power that could be used.

Mrs Young stated her intention that the school continue to be mothballed for another year before further discussion in June 2020 to allow for any changes in population, housing etc.

There was the possibility the building could be transferred to the community as a Community Asset in the future but it would need to be formally closed first, a process that can take up to a year.

Colin asked how this tied in with Duncan Darroch's wishes in the 1910 Deed Charter stating that the building should only be used for teacher housing and educational use. It was Mrs Young's view that Highland Council might be able to get round this using a Scottish Government Act from 2001 but neither she nor Mr Jackson knew more about this when asked to clarify.

Mrs Young then asked Seamus MacNally, NTS Ranger whether he knew anything about the Act or the Estate affirming interest in the Feu Charter stipulations but as this was the first he had heard of such an Act, he was of course not in any position to answer her.

Anne pointed out that it was Highland Council themselves who had presented the Charter which both educational officials agreed.

There then followed a discussion on the high number of vacancies and changes within senior management of Highland Council and who we should get in touch with for information. Following the resignation of Shialda Campbell, there is no current Director of Education but Mrs Young indicated any queries can be addressed to Donna Manson, Chief Executive or James Vance, Interim Head of Education.

She said Robert Campbell, Estates Manager and Robbie Bain, Ward Manager can give advice on building or infrastructure issues.

Eight new Chief Executive posts are to be filled with a salary of £91,500 each.

We will await notes from Ian Jackson and Sally Cooke before consulting the community and Council further as we wish to have open, honest discussion as promised and see the building maintained properly and used productively now instead of being left to deteriorate further.

6. Any Other Business

Mess at Glen Docherty Viewpoint Bin

There continues to be a problem with mess and litter spread at the Glen Docherty Viewpoint Car Park. There is currently one small green bin with a hole in the lid to deposit small articles. People are leaving bags of rubbish by this bin which then get spread by wind and birds. Discussion on what to do included suggestions of more regular collections on a weekly basis, having a bigger bin or no bin there at all. It was noted that one of the new style funnel bins has been placed at Inverewe Garden Car Park which is wider and might be better in windy conditions but it is not thought this can be emptied into the Council lorries. Cllr. Alex MacInnes will look into options available across the area.

Noise from Clay Pigeon Shooting at Torridon Hotel

Terry will contact the Hotel regarding residents concerns about increased noise from Clay Pigeon Shooting.

Kinlochewe Toilets

It was noted that the donations tin by the toilets had been broken into on the same night that the Gairloch Golf Course Café was broken into. It is not thought that much would have been gained as the tin is emptied on a regular basis throughout each day. A new stronger box will be put in its place.

A member of the public, Tom, recalled the ground where the picnic tables are situated being handed over for £1 many years ago and he thought it should be recorded in past Community Council minutes. We will try to find out whether this was the case and if so who is responsible for the picnic area.

Road Safety

A member of the public, Alan, let us know that he still has a supply of pamphlets detailing how to drive safely. It was suggested some could be dropped off at the shop and that car hire should also give them out.

Overhanging trees and bushes are needing trimmed so that road signs can be clearly seen, especially the blue ones giving advice on using passing places. Road verges by Cromasaig remain a concern to the residents there with soft ground beginning to collapse alongside the fence.

A Torridon resident commented on the number of camper vans parking, worrying that caravans or campers might use the campsite. It was confirmed that the campsite, run by Highlife Highland is for tents only. Some do park by the junction, still close to the toilet facilities which include showers.

More advice needs to be available to campervan drivers on where within the area it is acceptable to park, fill up with water and discharge waste. Diabaig saw to its cost the results of damage caused by wildfire last year.

It was pointed out that the sign saying Annat 1 mile is too close to the junction when approaching from Kinlochewe, leading some people to turn right expecting Annat to be 1 mile down the Torridon road. Colin will look at seeing if it can be shifted.

7. Date of next meeting

It was agreed we would continue with the schedule of dates noted at our AGM.

14th August and 9th October in Torridon and 11th September in Kinlochewe.

As there will be no meeting held in July our next meeting is planned for Wednesday 14th August 2019 at 7pm in Torridon Hall.

Note of a Discussion during the meeting of Torridon and Kinlochewe CC at 7pm on 12 June 2019, to discuss the Future of Torridon Primary School

Norma Young, Area Care and Learning Manager (West), and Ian Jackson (Education Officer – Resources) attended the above meeting of the Community Council. An earlier meeting had been held with parents (see separate note).

The Chairperson, Terry Doe, expressed anger and dismay at how CC representatives had been denied entry to what he termed the “secret” meeting with parents at 5pm. He suggested that NY had described the meeting as “secret” and asked what it was that was discussed, that could not be shared with the Community Council.

NY advised that, when conducting informal consultation, it was standard practice for THC to meet separately with parents and with the CC, often on the same evening. She dismissed as false the allegation that she had described the meeting as “secret” and challenged Mr Doe over this claim. She made it clear that it had been the parents’ own decision to initially meet with Highland Council officials without the CC being present. The CC representatives had been invited to the parents meeting at 5.30pm.

NY said she wished to have the above paragraph recorded. She was content that the CC record their own interpretation, as long as the HC’s reply was also recorded.

Anne Macrae asked whether they could see minutes from the meeting with parents, and this was agreed.

A member of the public asked whether the school was to be re-opened, adding that people needed to know why it had closed in the first place. NY responded that HC was not in attendance at the meeting to discuss the historical issues around the mothballing of the school.

NY advised that parents had asked that the school continue to be mothballed, and that HC had agreed to this. NY and IJ would return for a meeting in the summer term of 2020.

A member of the public commented that HC should have consulted with the community before now. The school has been mothballed for 7 years.

The CC asked about the nature of the lease for the school site and whether “reversionary rights” would apply if the building were no longer used for educational purposes. IJ undertook to enquire about this with HC legal staff, and to liaise with the National Trust for Scotland.

Concerns were expressed about the condition of the Torridon PS building, and the CC asked for assurances that the building would be maintained.

The CC asked whether the school building could be used for a Parent and Toddler Group. NY advised the village already had a community centre that could be used for this purpose, and THC would not wish to undercut the Community Centre.

Several persons commented that the Community Centre was not a good location for the group, as the Centre would not allow the parents to place displays of artwork, or to store equipment.

NY commented that the school building was not presently available for hire or rent.

A question was raised about the future of the play area adjacent to the school. NY advised this should be taken up with Robert Campbell, Head of School Estates.

Note of an Exploratory Meeting with Parents in Torridon held via Microsoft Teams at 7pm on 11 November 2020, to discuss the Future of Torridon Primary School

Ian Jackson (Education Officer – Resources)

Don Esson, Area Education and Learning Manager (West)

Claire Thorburn

Joanne Mitchell

Sally Cook

Louise Gray

Felix von Racknitz (joined towards the end of the meeting)

Ian Jackson began by referring to the meeting in June 2019. Norma Young had retired in July 2020 and Don Esson had just taken up post (on Monday 9 November) as her replacement. Don had asked Ian to chair the meeting, given his knowledge of previous discussions.

Don explained his appointment was an interim one until the end of the 2020/21 school session, as the Council was presently restructuring.

Ian commented that Torridon School had now been mothballed for 8 years. This was an unusually long time for mothballing. A school should not be kept in a “mothballed” condition indefinitely. Eventually we should come to a decision, either to re-open or to close.

Ian continued by referring to last year’s discussion. He and Norma had advised that the Council considered there were insufficient children in the Torridon catchment to justify re-opening the school. The parents who had been present had asked for another 12 months to work on their own ideas for making Torridon a viable school again. Ian asked whether any proposals had emerged from that.

Joanne Mitchell commented that at last year’s meeting it was Felix and Sarah who had put forward the idea of a community led proposal to retain the school in some form. She hadn’t heard anything since.

Louise Gray introduced herself as someone who was looking to move to Torridon. She had a daughter who was coming up to two years old, and she was very keen on the idea of re-opening the school.

Ian and Don advised that the Council considers there are some disadvantages in having very small schools. Put simply, the Education Service thinks that children benefit from being with other children their own age. The skills learned by children through social interaction are very important throughout life. Aside from the social side, cooperative learning and working between pupils is an important part of classroom work today, and very small numbers have obvious disadvantages for team sports, choirs etc.

Claire Thorburn agreed that the social side of things was very important. Her oldest daughter was in P7 at Kinlochewe PS. She had been enrolled there when the numbers at Kinlochewe had been higher, but since then a number of families had left and her daughter was now the only girl in the school. She was desperate to get to High School.

Sally Cook commented that last year she had been in the position Louise is in, but now she was a permanent resident of the area with a daughter in Shieldaig Nursery. She made the point that Shieldaig was a school bursting at the seams.

Don Esson advised that the Council is currently planning an extensive refurbishment of Shieldaig Primary School, which includes converting the existing schoolhouse to create a new Nursery with ancillary accommodation, allowing the existing Nursery classroom in the main school building to become additional Primary education space to meet future capacity needs. Once completed, the Primary school will have the potential to accommodate up to 45 pupils. Work is expected to be completed for the new school year in August 2021. There should therefore be no concerns about the long-term capacity of Shieldaig PS. Don also noted that Shieldaig Nursery was scheduled to go to 1140 hours provision from August 2021.

Sally continued by commenting that as a parent, she was continually forced to transport her daughter to Shieldaig for after-school events. There were never any reciprocal visits to Torridon, despite the fantastic environment that Torridon has. It's also the case the Shieldaig School has a lack of outdoor space. Could there be opportunities to use the Torridon School building as a base for outdoor education?

Don commented that a new Head Teacher, Thomas O'Halloran, had just been appointed to take over the Shieldaig and Kinlochewe cluster, and that he was very keen on outdoor education and links with the community. The parents were unanimous in welcoming Thomas' appointment and the prospect of more outdoor based education, but were still concerned that there was a one-way flow of traffic, with children from Torridon attending Shieldaig but never any sign of Shieldaig children visiting Torridon.

Sally asked about our school roll projections, and whether these took account of the impact of the COVID pandemic. There was much talk in the media about home working, and people moving from the cities out to the countryside. How might that affect our projections?

Ian said he had seen those discussions, and whilst the ideas sounded plausible there was no hard evidence about whether the changes would actually happen. The Council does calculate future school rolls for schools, and the methodology for the calculation is on the Council website. He would forward the relevant links. However, there was no current projection for Torridon, as the school had not been operational for 8 years.

Sally asked whether the Torridon school building could be used as an outdoor centre for schools across Highland. Ian and Don commented that decisions on school trips and excursions were taken by individual Head Teachers, and the Council did not direct HTs into using particular locations for excursions. In normal times schools use outdoor facilities frequently, but there are plenty of existing centres in Highland, such as “Outward Bound” centres; the Abernethy Trust; Lagganlia; and Loch Insh Watersports. There’s also a privately-run outdoor centre in Dalguise in Perthshire, which seems to be used a lot by schools. There would no problem with setting Torridon up as an outdoor centre aimed at school excursions, but it’s a crowded market.

Louise Gray commented that Felix and Sarah were world class musicians and that music could be another option to be delivered from the Torridon School building.

Joanne commented that, whilst she agreed with the aim of having more activity in Torridon, the community already had a very good facility in the Village Hall. She questioned why there would also be a need to keep the school building.

Ian added that if Torridon PS was re-opened as a school, we would expect it to follow the Curriculum for Excellence, and for children to be taught in the same way as in any other school. He didn’t have the impression that this was what was being suggested. The discussion seemed similar to that held in June 2019, and he was concerned that things had not moved on since then. Sally Cook and Felix von Racknitz both commented that the COVID outbreak had clearly disrupted the community’s ability to work together.

Sally asked about maintenance to the Torridon building, which had been raised at the 2019 meeting. What had been done since then, and what work was planned? Ian undertook to seek advice from colleagues in the Council’s Estates Team.

There was extensive discussion about the possibility of Torridon School becoming a community facility in the event it was closed as a school. Ian advised that when a Council service such as Education declares it has a building that is surplus to requirements, the first step is to check whether any other Service wishes to make use of the building or the site. If not, it might be possible for the community to arrange a Community Asset Transfer (CAT). He wasn’t familiar with the process in detail, although he understood the community would need to prepare a business plan. He would forward contact details for the Council’s Community Engagement Team, who could provide advice.

Louise observed that, given its small size, the local community would need support in preparing a bid for a CAT. Was there any deadline? Ian responded by explaining that a CAT could only happen after the school were closed. However, if the community were working on ideas it would be best to keep the Council informed. If we didn't hear anything we might assume no work was being undertaken. Ian added, that, if a CAT bid was not made or was unsuccessful, the building would be sold on the open market.

Ian asked Sally about meeting the local Community Council. There had been a rather fraught meeting in 2019, at which the CC members had been unhappy that he and Norma had met separately with parents. Ian added that the Council made no apology for making sure the voices of parents were heard, but that we were also more than happy to discuss matters with the wider community.

Sally responded by advising that the CC membership had changed somewhat since 2019. She asked if the new CC could have the notes of the 2019 meeting. Ian undertook to send his own notes of that discussion, but added that these were not the formal minutes of the CC itself. The new CC should be able to obtain copies of past minutes from the Ward Manager.

Ian added that the members of the CC could be reassured about the formal process of closing Torriddon PS for good. That process would involve a statutory consultation in which all parents and staff from any affected school would be notified, and in which the local Community Council would also be a statutory consultee. We would also need to gather the views of the children. We would be required to hold a public meeting and to consult Education Scotland – the School Inspectors – who would assess the “educational merits” of the closure proposal and who would also want to talk to parents. After the completion of the consultation exercise the Council would respond to all points raised and there would be a 3-week window for people to make further representations. Lastly, if there were any concerns about the consultation exercise itself, there would be an opportunity to raise them with Scottish Ministers.

Louise asked that parents be given notice of the start of any formal consultation.

Sally suggested that Ian should contact the Chair and Secretary of the Community Council, once she had provided them with feedback from this meeting. The CC felt that the Torriddon community and environment had a lot to offer, and were keen to play a constructive part in discussions.

Ian summarised the discussion by saying that some parents had expressed a wish to retain a form of educational facility in Torriddon. This might not be a re-opened school but a commitment to use the building as a sort of annex to Shieldaig PS. Alternatively, if Torriddon School were closed, there should be a CAT to allow the community to take over the facility.

Ian and Don thanked everyone for attending and for their input.

The meeting closed at approximately 8.20pm.

Note of an Exploratory Meeting with Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council held via Microsoft Teams at 7pm on 8 December 2020, to discuss the Future of Torridon Primary School

Don Esson, Area Education and Learning Manager (West)

Ian Jackson (Education Officer – Resources)

Caroline Hamilton, Chair of TKCC

Chris Davies, Secretary of TKCC

Sally Cook, Member of TKCC

Matt Webster, Member of TKCC

Cllr. Ian Cockburn, Ex-officio member of TKCC

Cllr. Alex MacInnes, Ex-officio member of TKCC

Don Esson set out the background to the meeting, highlighting that Torridon Primary had now been mothballed for 8 years. It was highly unusual for a school to be mothballed for as long as a period as this, and in most cases the Council would have taken a decision on the future of the school after 4-5 years, either to re-open or to close. He referred to the meetings of June 2019, when Norma Young and Ian Jackson had met with parents and with the Community Council, at which it had been agreed to continue with mothballing for another year whilst the community developed further proposals for the use of the school building. Last month we had met with the parents again, and tonight's meeting was another in which the Council was seeking an understanding of local opinion.

Sally Cook advised that the Torridon community wished to retain the school as an educational facility, possibly in a partnership capacity with the NTS. Ideas that had been suggested were around its use as a forest school, for music, and for arts and crafts. Since the meeting in November, the Torridon parents had formed an unofficial association, and had started reaching out to other organisations about a potential future for the school. Would we consider using the school building as part of Shildaig School, for the provision of education for one or two days per week?

Don thought that a number of issues could arise, particularly around transport and staffing. It might be difficult to obtain staff for a school on this basis. Shildaig PS does not have a minibuss, so there could well be logistical issues with transporting pupils to Torridon. At the very least it would be expensive to do so. He doubted that the footfall and usage of the school building would be sufficient to justify keeping it as an annex to Shildaig PS.

Don added that Pablo Mascarenhas, the Council's Community Engagement Manager, would be a good contact for the parents/community, in terms of other possible uses.

Matt Webster commented that, in his view, the community really wanted to see something done with the building. At the moment the building and grounds were being neglected and that was the key concern of local residents,

Questions were raised about whether the play park adjacent to the school was part of the Title to the school, and also about the "reversionary rights" question which had been raised in 2019, and to which the community had not received an answer. Ian Jackson commented that he had made enquiries internally last year but hadn't been entirely clear about the response. He undertook to follow this up. The community representatives also expressed concern about the level of maintenance in the building. Don explained that the Council was required to keep the property wind and watertight, and he was aware of several recent visits by staff of the Council's Property Service.

Sally also asked whether there was any possibility of the schoolhouse being used as key worker housing, pending any longer-term solution. Don and Ian both commented that the schoolhouse would need considerable investment to bring it to the level required for re-letting. Cllr. Cockburn agreed and suggested that was no prospect of the Council agreeing to such investment for a property that would only be let for the short-term.

Don asked Ian to run through the process of statutory consultation. Ian advised it would involve a statutory consultation over a period of 6 weeks, which must include 30 school days. All parents and staff from any affected school would be notified, and the Community Council would also be a statutory consultee. We would also need to gather the views of the children. This would probably be done through the class teachers as the children would be more comfortable working with them. We would be careful to ensure that questions were put to the children in a neutral way. We would also be required to hold a public meeting and to consult Education Scotland – the School Inspectors – who would assess the "educational merits" of the closure proposal and who would also want to talk to parents. After the completion of the consultation exercise the Council would respond to all points raised and there would be a 3-week window for people to make further representations. Lastly, if there were any concerns about the consultation exercise itself, there would be an opportunity to raise them with Scottish Ministers.

Caroline Hamilton asked why we would consult only about closure. Why not a consultation on re-opening the school? Ian replied that, as Torridon PS was mothballed, there would not need to be a formal consultation on re-opening it. If the Council had concluded that the school were viable, it would simply be a case of re-opening it on an agreed date. A statutory consultation was required in any case where the Council were proposing to create a brand-new school, and we carried out such a consultation in relation to a new school in Inverness in 2018.

The statutory consultation, if approved, would set out a proposal from the Council, in this case a school closure. However, anyone could submit views that suggested another course of action, and these would be given full consideration.

The CC representatives saw potential in the idea of a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) after the closure of the school, but they felt it would be vital to establish the details of the Title and in particular whether the local Estate possessed “reversionary rights”. There would be no point in the community putting in huge amounts of work for a building they might not get access to. This was a crucial point.

Matt Webster asked for an outline of the possible timetable for a statutory consultation. Ian advised that the Scottish Government were currently advising that the public meeting required had to be face to face. For this reason, the Council were thinking of waiting until the Education Committee meeting in May before seeking permission for a statutory consultation. That might allow for a public meeting in August. If the vaccine programme was underway by then it might allow a better chance of a safe public meeting.

Statutory consultations normally took around 12 months to complete.

Cllrs Cockburn and MacInnes both described examples of successful CATs that have taken place elsewhere in Highland. One was at the former Achiltibuie Schoolhouse, which was adjacent to the still-operating school but where the building had been turned into 2 self-contained flats. Another was the former Diabaig School which had been turned into a restaurant. Members could put the CC in touch with other development associations, who could provide information.

Cllr. Cockburn felt it was time to come to a decision on the school. Cllr. MacInnes agreed, commenting that it would be useful to retain the building for use by the community. There was general agreement to this suggestion, and that the building could no longer afford to be left idle. The main aim would be to maximise the local benefit.

There being no other questions, Don thanked everyone for attending and for their input.

The meeting closed at approximately 8.20pm.

School Roll
Forecast
Gairloch High School
Gairloch High School

Appendix D.

5139120	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	2036/37
S 1	20	17	12	22	23	17	22	26	17	14	16	16	17	17	17	18
S 2	18	20	18	12	23	23	18	22	26	17	14	16	16	17	17	18
S 3	12	18	21	18	13	23	23	18	22	27	17	14	16	17	17	17
S 4	28	12	19	21	18	13	23	24	18	22	27	17	14	16	17	17
S 5	18	24	11	16	18	16	11	20	20	15	19	23	15	12	14	14
S 6	11	14	18	8	12	14	12	8	15	15	12	14	17	11	9	11
Total Roll	107	105	99	97	107	106	109	118	118	110	105	100	95	90	91	95
Total Capacity	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340	340
Tot Roll - Tot Cap	-233	-235	-241	-243	-233	-234	-231	-222	-222	-230	-235	-240	-245	-250	-249	-245
(Tot Roll/Tot Cap)%	31%	31%	29%	29%	31%	31%	32%	35%	35%	32%	31%	29%	28%	26%	27%	28%

School Roll Forecast

Gairloch High School

Gairloch Primary

5153425	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	2036/37
P 1	9	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
P 2	7	9	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
P 3	6	7	10	3	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
P 4	8	6	8	10	4	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
P 5	9	8	7	8	10	4	5	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
P 6	6	9	9	7	8	10	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
P 7	7	6	10	9	7	8	11	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	7
Total Roll	52	48	51	47	44	42	40	36	37	42	42	42	42	42	49	49
Total Capacity	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124	124
Tot Roll - Tot Cap	-72	-76	-73	-77	-80	-82	-84	-88	-87	-82	-82	-82	-82	-82	-75	-75
(Tot Roll/Tot Cap)%	42%	39%	41%	38%	35%	34%	32%	29%	30%	34%	34%	34%	34%	34%	40%	40%

School Roll Forecast
 Gairloch High School
 Poolewe Primary

5117429	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	2036/37
P 1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
P 2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
P 3	6	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
P 4	3	6	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
P 5	1	3	6	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
P 6	1	1	3	6	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
P 7	5	1	1	3	6	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Total Roll	19	15	15	15	14	9	8	8	7	7	7	7	14	14	14	14
Total Capacity	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Tot Roll - Tot Cap	-31	-35	-35	-35	-36	-41	-42	-42	-43	-43	-43	-43	-36	-36	-36	-36
(Tot Roll/Tot Cap)%	38%	30%	30%	30%	28%	18%	16%	16%	14%	14%	14%	14%	28%	28%	28%	28%

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

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Row 1	Table 1			
	Current revenue costs for school proposed for closure			
		Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)	Additional financial impact on receiving school Shieldaig Primary School	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 3)
Row 2	Name of School Torridon Primary School			
Row 3	School costs			
Row 4	<i>Employee costs - note 1</i>			
Row 5	teaching staff	101,218	31,280	69,938
Row 6	support staff	9,784	612	9,172
Row 7	teaching staff training (CPD etc)	268	18	250
Row 8	support staff training	-	-	-
Row 9	Supply costs - note 2	2,428	1,210	1,218
Row 10				
Row 11	<i>Building costs:</i>			
Row 12	property insurance	173	-	173
Row 13	non domestic rates	797	-	797
Row 14	water & sewerage charges	349	-	349
Row 15	energy costs	14,184	-	14,184
Row 16	cleaning (contract or inhouse)	2,910	-	2,910
Row 17	building repair & maintenance	107	36	71
Row 18	grounds maintenance	-	-	-
Row 19	facilities management costs - note 6	1,924	-	1,924
Row 20	revenue costs arising from capital	-	-	-
Row 21	other	-	-	-
Row 22				
Row 23	<i>School operational costs:</i>			
Row 24	learning materials	1,440	333	1,107
Row 25	catering (contract or inhouse)	11,199	1,261	9,938
Row 26	SQA costs	-	-	-
Row 27	other school operational costs (e.g. licen	-	-	-
Row 28				
Row 29	<i>Transport costs: note 3</i>			
Row 30	home to school	-	28,500	- 28,500
Row 31	other pupil transport costs	-	-	-
Row 32	staff travel	83	49	34
Row 33	SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL	146,864	63,298	83,566
Row 34				
Row 35	<i>Income:</i>			
Row 36	Sale of meals	-	-	-
Row 37	Lets	-	-	-
Row 38	External care provider	-	-	-
Row 39	Other	-	-	-
Row 40	SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL	-	-	-
Row 41				
Row 42	TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHD	146,864	63,298	83,566
Row 43				
Row 44	UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	146,864	63,298	83,566

	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
Table 2			
Capital costs		School proposed for closure	Receiving school
Capital Life Cycle cost - note 7			
Third party contributions to capital costs			

Table 3	
Annual Property costs incurred (moth-balling) until disposal	
property insurance	173
non domestic rates	797
water & sewerage charges	64
energy costs	102
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	-
security costs	-
building repair & maintenance	-
grounds maintenance	-
facilities management costs	-
other	-
TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL	1,136

Table 4	
Non-recurring revenue costs	
TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS	

Table 5	
Impact on GAE - note 5	
GAE IMPACT	