

COMMUNITY SERVICES

**REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL ESTATE –
CONSULTATION PROCESS**

25 November 2010

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to bring forward for consideration by Members the details of the consultation approach that will be taken by Education in relation to the School Estates Strategy.
- 1.2 Before Councils can consider any school closure they must adhere to statutory guidance and to this end Argyll & Bute Council in accordance with The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 must carry out the following:-
- 1) Publish a proposal paper ensuring that the educational benefits are at the heart of the proposal.
 - 2) Set a consultation period of at least 6 weeks of term time.
 - 3) Let parents and the parent council know about the consultation and invite responses.
 - 4) Consult with young people by involving them and ensuring that they have an opportunity to have their say.
 - 5) Consult with staff members from all schools involved in the proposal.
 - 6) Hold a public meeting.
 - 7) Invite Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) to prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal.
 - 8) Publish a consultation report.
 - 9) As our schools are all rural then we must demonstrate that we have considered all viable alternatives and assessed the likely community implications of closure before we have even proposed closing any of our schools.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Council is asked to agree the consultation approach as outlined in Section 3 of this report.

3. DETAIL

- 3.1 It is proposed that the public consultation period will commence on 13 December 2010 and end on 25 February 2011. We will adopt a robust and transparent framework for the consultation process actively involving all our stakeholders and this will take place via a number of routes:-
- (1) Consultation summary papers will be issued to a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties.

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- (2) Notices will be placed in all local press, libraries and places of interest.
- (3) Public meetings will be held for each proposal and these will be open to all interested parties including pupils, staff, parent councils, community groups and anyone else with an interest in the proposal.
- (4) HMIE will be asked to prepare a report on the educational aspects of each proposal.
- (5) Questionnaires will be distributed to get feedback from staff, pupils and other interested parties.
- (6) Meetings will be arranged with staff from all establishments concerned.
- (7) Meetings will be arranged with all pupil councils from all establishments concerned.
- (8) A dedicated webpage will be established where all proposal papers, correspondence and other documentation relating to the consultation process can be posted and viewed.
- (9) There will be a comment sheet available at all meetings and on the website for people to air their views.
- (10) A consultation report will be issued after the end of the consultation period.

4. LOGISTICS

4.1 Once the proposal papers have been approved by the Council to go ahead with the consultation then the following steps will be implemented:-

- (1) Meetings will be held with all head teachers of the establishments concerned and copies of the consultation papers issued. They will then roll out the information to ALL staff within their establishments including cleaning, janitorial and catering staff. Consultation papers will also be issued to all chair persons of the concerned parent councils along with local members.
- (2) A press release will be prepared for each area concerned giving an overview of what is proposed and giving details of where public meetings will be held. An advert will be taken out in local press, giving at least 10 days notice, to state where and when the public meetings will be held. A list of all local libraries and other community buildings will be established so that the press release can be distributed accordingly.
- (3) A let will be taken out for a given night at each hosting school and a public meeting held. It is envisaged that these meetings will be chaired by an independent person (ie not an Argyll & Bute employee) and should last

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approximately two hours. The meetings will be open to anyone with an interest in the school from parents, staff, parent councils, community groups etc and an accurate Minute taken by two members of staff. The Executive Director of Community Services or Head of Service for Education or her representative, along with other education specialists, will be in attendance at each meeting to take questions and give any information required. A record of each meeting will be published on the consultation page of the website.

- (4) Letters shall be prepared and sent to HMIE asking them to prepare a report on the educational aspects of each of the proposals that is being submitted. A representative from HMIE may well attend the various public meetings also.
- (5) Questionnaires are being made up to get an accurate overview of the opinions of all stakeholders and these will be issued. A letter will be issued to all parents, staff and pupils informing them of the situation pertaining to their school and a questionnaire will accompany this letter. The letters will be sent out on the first day of the consultation process in order to let all stakeholders have the full consultation period and it will be important to have the documentation prepared centrally and issued in plenty of time for the schools to issue on the same day.
- (6) The authority meeting with staff will take place in the same venue and on the same day as the public meetings for each proposal but straight after the school day outwith the public meeting so that staff can put forward their views freely. These meetings will also be minuted and recorded as part of the consultation process.
- (7) Pupil councils at each of the schools involved in the school estates strategy will be met in their school by an educational representative on the same day as the public meeting will be held in their cluster.
- (8) Elected members may want to have representation from Education at Area Meetings to go over the proposals put forward for their Wards. This will be dealt with as and when a request comes in but the dates of the Area Committees will be noted in advance so that diary space is available. Should an elected member wish to discuss a proposal then this will be addressed.
- (9) A section within the education website will be dedicated to the consultation process with links to this from the main council website. There will be a dedicated person responsible for feeding all the information on to this site and ensuring that the information is updated. It is anticipated that there will be a FAQ section for people to get answers quickly. A comment sheet that is easy to complete will be available within this section for anyone should they wish to make comment.
- (10) All minutes, questionnaires, comment sheets, objections etc will be compiled by education and available at the end of the consultation period.

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5. An indicative timescale for the full statutory process required to comply with the terms of the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010 is:
- 6 December 2010 – Publish proposals and provide notice to all relevant consultees
 - 13 December 2010 – Commencement of statutory consultation period in terms of the Act (this proposal provides in excess of the statutory six week period and takes into account in service days where certain schools are closed throughout the authority)
 - 24 February 2011 – End of consultation period
 - 10 March 2011– Forward to HMIE copies of the Proposals, record of written and oral submissions from consultation process and other relevant documents
 - 7 April 2011 – HMIE submit their report to the Council on all Proposals
 - 28 April 2011 – Council publishes the Consultation Report. Consultation Report addresses written and oral representations made during the consultation and matters raised in the HMIE report
 - 19 May 2011 – Authority can make formal decision to accept or reject proposals. 6 week period commences to allow representations to the Scottish Government (3 weeks) and for the Government to decide whether to call in the Proposals or not (3 weeks).
 - 30 June 2011 – Period for representations to the Scottish Government and possibility of call-in by the Scottish Government ends. Council can now implement any decisions taken with regard to the Proposals.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The consultation process would only be necessary should agreement be given to go ahead with the various proposal documents.

7. IMPLICATIONS

<i>Policy:</i>	None at present
<i>Finance:</i>	None at present
<i>Personnel:</i>	None at present
<i>Legal:</i>	None at present
<i>Equal Opportunities:</i>	None at present

Cleland Sneddon
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