

OPTIONS APPRAISAL FOR THE FUTURE OF ASHFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The main purpose of this report is to provide detail of the options appraisal process and the options identified for the future of Ashfield Primary School. This information will enable committee to determine the basis under which any statutory consultation will proceed.
- 1.2 The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 makes special arrangements in regard to rural schools establishment that is in effect a presumption against the closure of rural schools. There is a requirement to have special regard to the rural schools factors prior to formulating a proposal to close a rural school. In particular it is necessary to consider any reasonable alternatives before considering closure. It is also necessary to consider the impact on the wider community of a potential closure and the impact of any different travel arrangements. These factors have been considered in this options appraisal.
- 1.3 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:
- a) Note the options identified through the preliminary consultation process into the future of Ashfield Primary School
 - b) Agree that Education Officers begin the formal consultation process as detailed in the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.
 - c) Note that papers produced for the public should be readily available.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 On 10 March 2016 Community Services Committee approved the mothballing of Ashfield Primary School. Committee agreed that if there are no registered pupils by the commencement of session 2017/18 the school be considered for formal closure through the statutory process. <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s107409/Ashfield%20Primary%20School%20v3.pdf> Ashfield Primary School has not had any pupils enrolled in the school since elected members approved its mothballing.
- 2.2 Following the mothballing of Ashfield Primary School Primary School, the pupils from Ashfield Primary catchment area are currently designated to attend Tayvallich Primary School which is 8.58 miles (RAC Route planner) from Ashfield Primary. Some pupils also have placing requests for Lochgilphead Primary School which is 9.76 miles (RAC Route planner) from Ashfield Primary.
- 2.3 The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 makes special arrangements in regard to rural schools establishment that is in effect a presumption against the closure of rural schools. There is a requirement to have special regard to the rural schools factors prior to formulating a proposal to close a rural school. In particular it is necessary to consider any reasonable alternatives before considering closure. It is also necessary to consider the impact on the wider community of a potential closure and the impact of any different travel arrangements. These factors have been considered in this options appraisal.
- 2.4 On 14th December 2017, Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the required preliminary consultation for Ashfield Primary school. Community Services Committee received a report on 15th March 2018 presenting and outlining details of the consultation <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s124759/Pre%20Consultation%20for%20Ardrachattan%20Ashfield%20Primary%20Schools.pdf>
- 2.5 To meet the preliminary requirements the Education Service has, following consultation with the local community, prepared the options appraisal which includes the following:
- Context
 - The local area and communities around the schools
 - Detail on individual schools involved
 - Community engagement

- Options for consideration regarding reasonable alternatives
- Analysis of options
- Detailed analysis of reasonable options including educational benefit statements, financial impact and environmental impact
- Conclusion

2.6 Preliminary consultation events were held in Ashfield Primary on 29th March 2018 and 9th April 2018 to seek the views of the community on the future of Ashfield Primary School which were well attended.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Community Services Committee

- a) Note the options identified through the preliminary consultation process into the future of Ashfield Primary School
- b) Agree that the Education Offices begin the formal consultation process as detailed in the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.
- c) Note that papers produced for the public should be readily available.

4.0 CONTEXT - EDUCATION IN ARGYLL AND BUTE

4.1 Argyll and Bute is geographically the second largest authority in Scotland. Education is delivered in a range of settings including schools, partnerships and youth services. The size of schools varies significantly across the authority with primary school rolls ranging from less than 10 pupils to around 400, and secondary school rolls ranging from less than 30 to over 1300. There are 22 primary schools with a roll of under 20 pupils. The needs of most pupils, even those with significant and complex needs, are met within mainstream classes or in learning centres situated within mainstream schools. A very small, and reducing, number of children and young people are educated in day and residential schools out with Argyll and Bute.

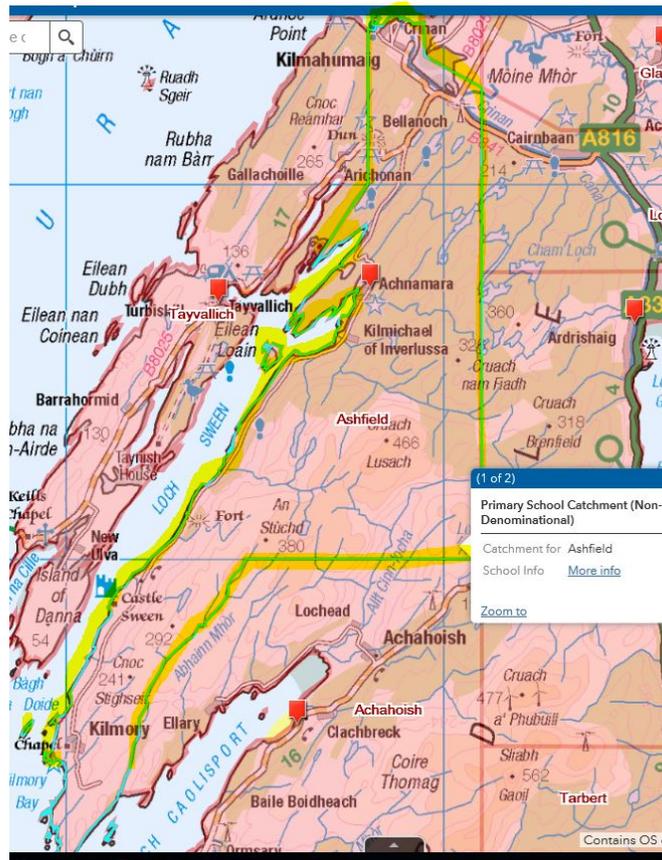
4.2 Argyll and Bute is an area of outstanding natural beauty sitting within an ancient landscape with a strong cultural identity. Today, the culture of Argyll and Bute is reflected in its traditional industries of fishing, farming and crofting, sports such as shinty and in its world class musicians and artists as well as its modern commercial industries such as wind turbine production and fish farming.

4.3 The Argyll and Bute Corporate Plan identifies Argyll and Bute as an area of Scotland with outstanding places, people and potential for a prosperous future for everyone. Our Council along with our Community Planning Partners, is committed to ensuring that Argyll and Bute's Economic Success is built on a Growing Population.

- 4.4 Within the Corporate Plan, the agreed priorities includes *the education we provide meets the needs of all our young people and their families*. This priority is underpinned and strengthened by Our Children, Their Future, Education Vision and Strategy. The priority actions within the strategy are to
- *Raise educational attainment and achievement for all*
 - *Use performance information to secure improvement for children and young people*
 - *Ensure children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed Equip young people to secure and sustain positive destinations and achieve success in life*
 - *Ensure high quality partnership working and community engagement*
 - *Strengthen leadership at all levels*
- 4.5 Councils, as an Education Authority, have a statutory duty in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. Councils also have a statutory responsibility in terms of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 to achieve best value. The Community Services Asset Management Plan provides a review of the property assets used to deliver Education services and the plan for capital investment. This reflects the local implementation of Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future, the national school estate strategy developed by the Scottish Government in conjunction with local authorities. The aspirations, guiding principles and objectives contained within Building Better Schools are reflected throughout Education Services Asset Management Plan for schools and public buildings, both in the management of the existing assets and in the design and construction of new developments.
- 4.6 In addition, the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) Act 2015 sets out a new right for community organisations to request the transfer of local assets into local community ownership/management. Public bodies including councils must consider such requests and respond within a reasonable timescale to them.

5.0 LOCAL AREA AND COMMUNITY

- 5.1 **The Ashfield Primary School Setting**
Ashfield Primary School was built in the 1956 and is situated in the attractive village of Achnamara on the shore of Loch Sween in Mid Argyll. The village was formally used as a basis for work in relation to the Forestry Commission. The school is co-educational and non-denominational and has a catchment area extending along Loch Sween and part of the Crinan Canal. The map below shows the catchment area for the school.



Ashfield Primary School building is in good operational order. The school is co-educational and non-denominational. Before mothballing the school covered Primary 1 to Primary 7 in one classroom and had the benefit of a large hall for PE, drama etc. It is set in excellent grounds, with a generous playground and has the advantage of substantial playing fields. A floor plan of the building can be found in Appendix 1. An area plan can be found in Appendix 2.

- 5.2 The Scottish Government's Rural School List 2016 classifies Ashfield Primary School as 'very remote rural'. This is defined as an area with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more. Ashfield Primary is one of a group of 9 primaries associated with Lochgilphead High School.
- 5.3 The village of Achnamara has just over 20 dwellings. The catchment area also includes the Crinan Canal, Bellanoch, Archonan and Knapdale. The area also boasts a holiday park and Castle Sween, which are popular with visitors. Castle Sween is one of the earliest stone castles in Scotland, having been built sometime in the late 12th century. The Forestry Commission was the main employer historically, but this has been in decline within the village. There was also a popular outdoor centre for children situated in Achnamara as the area lends itself beautifully to outdoor pursuits but this closed down in 1997.
- 5.4 Ashfield Primary School was viewed by many as the hub of the community and when open the community was very active within it. The local community supported many school events and the children used the local area for a number of studies. There are not many public buildings within the community.

The hall within the village of Achnamara is available for community use. While the local Church is still active, the building itself is currently up for sale. Concern has been raised locally at the recent closure of the community shop.

- 5.5 Argyll and Bute has an average population density of just 0.13 persons per hectare. This coupled with the changing demographic profile of the area presents one of our greatest challenges. The table below refers directly to the Ashfield area showing the changing population from census 2001 to census 2011.

Table 1: Population information

Ashfield Area Census Ref : 60QD000059			
2001		2011	
Total Resident Population	160	Total Resident Population	119
% under 16	24.38	% under 16	10.1
% 16 – 64 (pensionable age)	58.75	% 16 – 64 (pensionable age)	65.9
% pensionable age and over	16.88	% pensionable age and over	24.4

- 5.6 The current Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in March 2015. A new Local Development Plan (LDP2), which will set out planning and development proposals for the next 10 years from 2020 and a vision for 20 years, is currently being prepared. The Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan provides the local planning framework for the Council area, excluding the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park area. The Plan is divided into the written statement and proposals maps. The written statement provides the general policy context against which planning applications for new development proposals should be assessed. This is supported by the proposals maps which show the range of development opportunities and constraints within the area, for example:
- the key development areas i.e. the allocations for housing, industry and business, community facilities and infrastructure;
 - the potential areas for future development (Potential Development Areas);
 - areas requiring actions such as environmental improvement or regeneration (Areas for Action);
 - and environmental designations such as national Scenic Areas, Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas and Local Nature Conservation Sites.
- 5.7 As a small settlement Achnamara is not identified for growth in the Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan (2015). There are no 'housing allocations' or 'potential development areas' identified in the plan in connection with the settlement, so any development opportunities would be confined to 'windfall' sites within the settlement boundary identified in the plan. Appendix 3 shows the Local Development Plan for Achnamara. Appendix 4 shows the Local Development Plan for Tayvallich which identifies six potential development areas. Appendix 5 provides a key for the Local

Development Plans.

- 5.8 There have been no planning permissions granted for dwellings within the settlement during the last three years, which is indicative of the lack of growth potential. There may be some isolated opportunities for dwellings in the countryside within reasonable travelling distance of the school site, but to satisfy settlement strategy policy these would need to be on appropriate sites within defined 'rural opportunity areas'. These are very limited in both distribution and extent and would not be likely to afford many credible opportunities within the wider area.
- 5.9 Pupil projections, and data for 2017 - 2018 are based on data from the 2017 pupil census, a return prepared annually for the Scottish Government. Past pupil numbers are historic data from past pupil censuses. Pupil projections for future P1 intakes are from NHS data taken from children registered with GP practices in the area. This data is anonymised.

Table 2 shows the historic and current and pupil numbers for both Ashfield and Tayvallich primaries from August 2005-June 2014. It also highlights the current pupil numbers for Tayvallich Primary from August 2014-June 2018.

Table 2	Ashfield PS	Tayvallich PS
	Roll	Roll
Capacity	38	33
2005/06	9	28
2006/07	10	23
2007/08	8	26
2008/09	6	21
2009/10	4	28
2010/11	8	28
2011/12	11	25
2012/13	13	20
2013/14	10	21
2014/15	6	28
2015/16	0	27
2016/17	0	22
2017/18	0	24

Table 3 shows projected roles for Tayvallich Primary School and approximate numbers of pupils in the Ashfield Primary School catchment area according to figures held by Argyll and Bute.

Table 3	Ashfield PS	Tayvallich PS
	Roll	Roll
Capacity	38	33
2018/19	-	21
2019/20	-	21*
2020/21	-	24*

*Prediction based on information available May 2018.

5.10 Tayvallich Primary School is a small school, built in 1894, on a hill overlooking a secluded bay round which lies the picturesque and peaceful village of Tayvallich. There is a very strong community spirit and the school plays an integral part in the life of the village. While outside space is limited, the school comprises of one main stone-built classroom and a very recent, purpose built, spacious Pre-5 building. There are current plans in place for the a-joining cottage to be converted to a teaching area.

5.11 The school is an important part of Tayvallich and the wider community. The school regularly integrates the work of local groups into the curriculum and use local partnerships to enhance learning. The school works closely with Tainish Nature reserve, Scottish National Heritage, Historic Scotland and Kilmartin Museum to promote their work and enhance learning. Pupils have opportunities to take part in wider-curricular activities through Mid-Argyll's Active Schools Network.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Meetings were held in Ashfield Primary on Thursday 29th March 2018 (2pm – 7pm) and Monday 9th April 2018 (5pm-6pm) to seek the views of the community on the future of Ashfield Primary School. The meetings were attended by 30 people, including 5 pupils. The Council are grateful to the Community Council for its assistance in the planning and publicity for these meetings. It also appreciates the additional information in relation to the Achnamara Village Survey, provided by the Community Council. There were also discussions with the 8 pupils within the Ashfield catchment area currently attending Tayvallich Primary School and Lochgilphead Joint Campus.

6.2 Attendees to the sessions were given an overview of information that the Council would be using in this options appraisal, including pupil projections, future development, local services and facilities. They were asked to respond to a series of questions related to the options appraisals and to provide comments on the information presented. The questions were as follows:

- Over the past two years, what has been the effect of mothballing Ashfield Primary School to you, your family and community?
 - What do you think should happen next? Specifically, in your view what are the pros/cons of the following options?
 - Continue with mothballing
 - Re-open the school (current catchment)
 - Close the school
 - Re-open the school but widen the catchment
 - Other points or information that should be sought in the options appraisal.
- Attendees also noted questions regarding the future of the school.

6.3 Details of the feedback are contained in Appendix 6 and are referred to in relation to the individual outcomes. The feedback from the sessions has been sent out to the attendees at the sessions who provided contact details. A copy has also been sent to the Community Council and members of the community who were unable to attend the meeting but requested the feedback.

6.4 There was a range of viewpoints on the future of Ashfield Primary School. There were three main opinions offered by members of the community:

- Some families felt strongly that the school should reopen as a school with Pre-5 provision for local children.
- Some parents who felt that the current arrangements of their children attending Tayvallich was more than satisfactory and that the use of the school building should now be developed for the future.
- Members of the community who felt that they would like to work with the authority should the school continue to be mothballed or closed to organise a purposeful use of the building that would be of benefit to the community. There was strong opinion that the community did not want the school to fall into a state of disrepair.

7.0 OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

7.1 The options considered were

- a) Re open Ashfield School with existing catchment area.
- b) Continue the mothballing of the school with pupils travelling to Tayvallich Primary School and Lochgilphead Joint Campus (as a placing request).
- c) Re-open Ashfield School and realign the catchment area.
- d) Close Ashfield School and realign the catchment area of Tayvallich Primary School to include Ashfield catchment area.

7.2 Option A: Re-open Ashfield Primary School with its existing catchment area

Community Feedback

There was a variety of views from the community expressed at the pre-consultation meetings:

“If there are children living locally, the school should open for them. The option should be there for a school – if parents want their children to be educated here,

then it should open again. More families are moving here.”

“School should open again to local families – there are plenty of children who would attend. Fantastic facilities and outside grounds. Feels safe. Children love the playground and the space that other schools cannot provide. School at the heart of the community.”

“There are children who are living locally that would attend. One parent has identified that she has 3 children that she would register if the school was open.”

7.3 Pupil Numbers - If the school were to reopen in August 2019, the maximum pupil numbers, including Pre-5 children from the catchment would be 9 pupils, taking into account the placing requests submitted before and since the school was mothballed. Pupils currently within the catchment area attend Tayvallich and Lochgilphead Primary Schools. In addition pupil numbers in the area over the next four years are not predicted to rise significantly. Some families have indicated they would not move their children back to Ashfield Primary as the children are established at Tayvallich Primary; however some have indicated they would want their children to attend Ashfield Primary if it were an option.

7.4 Travel Arrangements - The travel distance from Ashfield Primary to Tayvallich Primary is 8.58 miles via the B8025. Travel time is approximately twenty minutes. The travel distance from Ashfield Primary to Lochgilphead Primary (Joint Campus) is 9.76 miles via B841. The travel time for this journey is approximately twenty minutes. The point was made at the pre-consultation meeting that travel arrangements have been in place for two years now and have been successful. Others indicated that should there be families that move into the far end of the catchment area, then it would take considerably longer to travel to Tayvallich, approximately 30-35 minutes. Adverse weather can be a factor, however this is the same for other local schools and areas.

7.5 Community Impact – Feedback

Details of the feedback are contained in Appendix 6 and are also referred to below in relation to individual options. The feedback from the sessions have been sent out to visitors/meeting attendees who provided contact details and to the Community Council representatives.

There was a range of viewpoints on the future of Ashfield Primary School:

- It was viewed by some that the travel distance to Tayvallich is considerable for young children to make.
- The school should re-open as there are families who would send their children to a local school.
- Having an operational school in the village would attract more families to the area.
- There needs to be Pre 5 provision offered in the village and the school could be used for this.
- The current arrangements for education for sufficient – local children are happy at Tayvallich.

- If the school does not re-open for educational purposes, the community would like to look at plans on how the building could be used effectively to support the community.
- Concern expressed that another local service has been lost – reflecting the recent social decline in the geographical area.
- Consider extending the mothballing period to evaluate demand for local schooling further and to allow the local community to put plans in place for possible community ownership of the building.
- Alternative uses for the building needed to be looked at, should mothball continue or school closure take place.

- 7.6 Option A: Reopen Ashfield Primary School with its existing catchment area
Pupil numbers for the school if it reopened would be 6 pupils and 2 Pre-5 pupils (taking into account placing requests) as per the September 2017 census. Without placing requests there would be 10 pupils and 2 Pre-5 pupils. Some families have indicated they would not move their children back to Ashfield Primary as the children are established at Tayvallich Primary; however some have indicated they would want their children to attend Ashfield Primary if it were an option. The travel distance from Ashfield Primary to Tayvallich Primary is 8.58 miles via the B8025. The travel distance from Ashfield Primary to Lochgilphead Primary (Joint Campus) is 9.76 miles via B841. The travel time for this journey is approximately 20 minutes for both journeys. The current travel arrangements have been in place for two years. Based on the above, careful consideration needs to be given in terms of whether the school should open for some local children and this would be considered to be a reasonable option.
- 7.7 Option B: Continued Mothballing of Ashfield Primary School with the pupils zoned to Tayvallich Primary School:
The school has been mothballed for 2 years. The Statutory Guidance for the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, in relation to mothballing, states “the maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote.”
- 7.8 Pupil numbers are not projected to increase over the next 4 years, as per paragraph 7.3 above. In 2014/15, the last full year that the school was open, annual running costs for electricity, water and oil are outlined in Appendix 7. Repair costs which included emergency, planned repairs, statutory inspection and testing have been £8,588. Estimated costs for the school to be continued to be mothballed are £5,591.
- 7.9 There was a strong feeling from some families that the continued mothballing of Ashfield Primary with pupils attending Tayvallich Primary should continue:
“I am happy with current arrangement for my children to attend Tayvallich PS. unless there was a drastic improvement in provision as a school, I would not consider sending my children here, as a parent.”
“Tayvallich PS offers a good learning experience.”
“.....we need to send pupils to Tayvallich, which is fine.”
“Consider mothballing for another 5 years and re-evaluate. Hard to attract

families.”

- 7.10 There was a view at the community meetings that mothballing the school for another shorter period of time could be an option as it gives the community time to assess next steps in the development of a plan to take community ownership of the school building, should it not re-open for educational purposes.
- 7.11 There were many ideas for the future of the building offered at the Pre-consultation sessions, as indicated in Appendix 6.
- 7.12 Option B in summary -
The school has been mothballed for 2 years and pupils have settled well into other schools, some parents are happy with this arrangement. The population within the area is not projected to increase significantly.

Some members of the local community made it very clear that the community would like to work with the authority to assume some access to the school building and develop to the advantage of local residents, should the school continue to be mothballed.

Based on the above, careful consideration needs to be given in terms of whether the school should continue to be mothballed, with pupils being re-zoned to Tayvallich Primary School and this would be considered as a reasonable option.

- 7.13 Option C - Re-open Ashfield Primary School and realign the catchment area
As part of any future consultation it would be proposed that there will be discussions with the parent body of Tayvallich and Lochgilphead Primary Schools regarding the future of Ashfield School. There was no representation from the Tayvallich or Lochgilphead Parent Councils at the public meetings. It was felt by some attendees that moving the catchment area was not an option due to the remote nature of the location, the roads around the area and accepted direction of travel. However, some residents through the Community Council have indicated they would like this to be considered.
- 7.14 Option C in summary –
There were a mixture of views expressed by the community meetings in favour of re-opening Ashfield Primary School and re-aligning the catchment area. Therefore this may be a reasonable option to take forward to formal consultation.
- 7.15 Option D - Close Ashfield Primary School and zone any pupils to Tayvallich Primary School and realign the catchment area.

The following table identifies the projected roll for Tayvallich Primary School.

	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
<i>Tayvallich Primary</i>	20	21	21	24
<i>Approved</i>	33	33	33	33

<i>Capacity (not including the Pre-5 Unit)</i>				
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The capacity for the Tayvallich Pre 5 Unit is 32.

Some members of the community felt a decision needed to be made regarding the school and that current arrangements for the local children to attend Tayvallich Primary were meeting their needs more than adequately. Full comments can be found in Appendix 6.

- 7.16 There was a strong sense from the attendees to the pre-consultation sessions that if the school were not to re-open for educational purposes, it should be retained for community use and not allowed to fall into disrepair. Some of the community asked for specific information in relation to the building to enable them to assess whether they could feasibly take over the running of the building. Officers have been assembling information requested and feeding back to the community, as appropriate.

“Would be good to put the school building at the heart of the community as a multi-functional building.”

“Village Hall is old and tatty – would be great to use as community, as a hostel, a business, a café, art gallery – need to attract visitors.”

“Don’t agree with mothballing – use the building as soon as possible – give community access?”

“Feel that the children get a better education when in schools with higher numbers of pupils.”

- 7.17 Option D in summary

Tayvallich Primary and those children with placing requests to Lochgilphead Primary currently provide an education service successfully. Pupil numbers are not projected to increase significantly. Both schools have the capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers.

Based on the above, careful consideration needs to be given in terms of whether the Ashfield Primary is closed permanently, with pupils being re-zoned to Tayvallich Primary School and the catchment area amended. Consideration and further support should also be given to the community in their pursuit of assessing the long term possibilities and responsibilities of assuming community control of the building. This would be considered a reasonable option.

- 7.18 Additional suggestion – Community Option - The community suggested that the school is mothballed for another period of time with a view to the Community working on a plan to assume long term community ownership of the building. Then subsequently, at an agreed time a review of the mothball would take place in the future.

- 7.19 Across the whole community, almost everyone who attended the sessions, felt

strongly that the building should be used in a positive way. As part of the pre-consultation process a further suggestion from some members of the local community included a further extension of the mothballing period in order for the community to gain further information and secure commitment to assuming community ownership of the building. The community members requested that the mothballing continues for an agreed amount of time and then is reviewed after they have been able to put together a formal plan for use. They were keen to work with the authority in terms of providing information and exploring future potential for the extended use of the building.

7.20 Community suggestion in summary

There was an extremely strong opinion that the building should not be allowed to fall into disrepair. There were some members of the community who were very keen to agree to an extended mothball period so that the community could explore future possibilities in terms of obtaining community ownership, should the school not re-open for educational purposes. Based on the above, careful consideration needs to be given in terms of whether the mothballing period should be extended. Further support should also be given to the community in their pursuit of assessing the long term possibilities and responsibilities of assuming community control of the building. This would be considered as a reasonable option.

7.21 The outcome of the options appraisal is summarised below:

Option	Option Description	Outcome
A	Re-open Ashfield Primary School with its existing catchment area	Accepted as a reasonable option.
B	Continued Mothballing of Ashfield Primary School with the pupils zoned to Tayvallich Primary School	Accepted as a reasonable option.
C	Re-open Ashfield Primary School and realign the catchment area of Tayvallich School.	Accepted as a reasonable option.
D	Close Ashfield Primary School and zone pupils to Tayvallich Primary School	Accepted as a reasonable option.
Community suggestion	School is mothballed for another period of time with a view to the Community working on a plan to assume long term community ownership of the building, A review of the mothball status would take place in the future.	Accepted as a reasonable option.

8.0 EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT STATEMENTS

8.1 The statement is focused on Tayvallich Primary School as the majority of children from Ashfield Primary School catchment area have been attending the school since 2015-16.

8.2 Learning and Teaching

The curriculum includes a broad range of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, to help every child and young person to develop knowledge, skills and attributes for success in learning, life and work.

- 8.3 Tayvallich Primary School offers a learning environment that encourages sound levels of achievement and provides a wide range of opportunities for children to achieve their full potential as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.
- 8.4 There is a continual challenge for all schools to deliver a school improvement agenda and deliver effectively the principles and outcomes of curriculum for excellence. The National Improvement Framework priorities include raising attainment for all, and closing the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children.
- 8.5 The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. At Tayvallich Primary School, staff are challenged and supported through a range of continuous professional development and review opportunities gained by working and learning with a range of colleagues. Tayvallich Primary School is part of the Mid Argyll Cluster, and a smaller local cluster which means that staff can be supported together, moderation and tracking of pupil progress is enabled and staff work across stage appropriate groups. Tayvallich Primary School is part of a shared headship which means that staff can be supported together in a clearly defined way and staff work closely as a team.
- 8.6 There is a planned programme of development activities and opportunities for quality professional dialogue on an ongoing basis at Tayvallich Primary School. All teachers have been actively involved in key developments. In a recent curriculum review, curricular frameworks have been improved for Health and Wellbeing, Literacy and Numeracy, Science and Social Studies. The shared headship approach allows staff to work together, not only as two schools but also as part of the area cluster towards improving policy and practice. The Head Teacher is experienced and in previous roles led initiatives at a national level. The Principal Teacher at Tayvallich has been part of Argyll and Bute's Leadership Network to support school self-evaluation and has taken the lead on specific areas of school improvement.
- 8.7 The shared headship model supports a distributive leadership approach and provides staff with opportunities to lead aspects of the curriculum and make day to day management decisions. In recent years children at Tayvallich Primary School have been taught in two classes composed of a number of children from more than one year group. They benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships with different groups and individuals, develop social skills, meet challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a social group. They are able to interact and socialise with groups of children their own age and gender, take part in team activities and move with their peers to

secondary school.

8.8 Outcomes

Through the GIRFEC practice mode, meeting the needs of every child continues to be a priority and teachers carefully plan and assess to ensure each child has the opportunity to reach their potential. Careful tracking and monitoring procedures are in place to evidence pupil progress. This includes professional dialogue with teachers, learning discussions with children, classroom observations, assessment and looking at pupil work. Planning for Progress meetings are being further strengthened. These discussions between home and school improve parental engagement whilst focusing on next steps for learning. Where appropriate, intervention is put in place, while working effectively with other agencies and parents to ensure the needs of each child are met.

8.9 In the primary classes, standards of attainment have been maintained over the last three years. Most children are achieving national expectations in reading, writing, listening, talking and numeracy. A larger staff, parent body and partner group by nature increases the breadth of talent and interest that may be available to share within a school setting. This applies both in terms of the wider curriculum and within aspects of the curriculum that may be enhanced by staff individual expertise eg PE, language, science, expressive arts teaching.

8.10 Experiences – Broadening the range of Opportunities

Children are offered a range of active, planned experiences which help them develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for their mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing both now and in the future. In the Pre 5 Unit children enjoy a range of experiences. Staff know the children well and are sensitive to their individual needs.

8.11 Pupils from Pre-5 to P7 have taken on responsibilities which enhance the development of a positive ethos across the school. Children are provided with a variety of experiences to develop their sense of responsibility, independence, confidence and enterprising attitude. Across the school children are engaged with learning and contribute well in lessons.

8.12 Staff promote positive relationships at all levels and also through the Young Sports Leaders programme, the impact of this being that children enjoy good relationships with their peers, young leaders feel confident and entrusted to take these developments forward. A 'Respect Me' policy is built into class lessons and permeates the whole school ethos through assemblies and class work on rights and responsibilities.

8.13 Environment for Learning

Tayvallich Primary School is a suitably-equipped and well supported school, situated in the beautiful village of Tayvallich. The school is at the heart of the community. There has been substantial investment made in recent years in upgrading the teaching areas for Pre5 and primary age pupils. While outside space is limited, pupils benefit from access to a range of community facilities

which are in close proximity to Tayvallich Primary School including the village hall, shop and local businesses.

8.14 Rural Factors – Impact on Travel Arrangements

The travel distance from Ashfield Primary to Tayvallich Primary is 8.58 miles via the B8025. The travel time for this journey is approximately 20 minutes. However, the point was made during the pre-consultation by members of the community that should children be at the far end of Loch Sween, which is part of the Ashfield catchment area, the journey to Tayvallich could be approximately 25-30 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for two years. Other catchment areas in Argyll and Bute have a similar travel distance between them. However, it is recognised that adverse weather in the winter currently impacts on travel arrangements. Head Teachers take into account the local circumstances when deciding to close the school and/or send pupils home early. All schools in Argyll and Bute have an emergency closure plan for severe weather.

Some comments from the community meetings on travel arrangements were as follows:

“Parents are happy with current arrangements.”

“Current pupils have quite a journey to go to Tayvallich, particularly if they are young.”

“It is a long distance to travel to Tayvallich for young children if at the far end of Loch Sween, to the far end of this catchment area.”

8.15 Rural Factors – Community Impact

As stated in section 7, there is a sense of a loss of social connection which was maintained by school events at Ashfield Primary. This is reflected in comments made by local residents:

“Decline within the village, if the school were to open again, it would be more likely to attract families but job situation very difficult. Local shop shutting. Hard for youngsters.”

“Concerned that another local facility is lost – along with the shop, church and Achanmara House.”

“A shame the school has closed – it was a thriving, great wee school. Fantastic fund raising and concerts, community and support.”

“Would be more encouraging to families here if there is a school.”

“Negative effect on the community. New younger families in area. Would be good to have option of educating within the village for them.”

However, there were a large number of suggestions as to the use of the building, which would benefit the community if it did not re-open as a school:

“Facilities here are better than the village hall.”

“Would be good to put the school building at the heart of the community as a multi-functional building. Facilities here are better than the village hall.”

“Would be great for the community to buy this building if numbers do not go up – would be great to make this a hub. If this is not a school, what can it be used for?”

“Can the building be offered to youth groups – scouts, guiding, SCA, lunch club, any groups?”

“Could the school be divided? Half as a house that is sold and funds community rooms/asset. Or community owned and rent out office space/hive for activities.”

There was a suggestion that given there could be issues regarding staffing the school should it re-open, particularly with a national teacher and Head Teacher shortage, that there needed to be a creative approach to working collaboratively with other local schools:

“Needs to be integrated in provision with bigger schools – use other staff from other schools to staff here – creatively, link with Lochgilphead PS?”

- 8.16 At the community events, people were clear about the challenges which faced their community, less employment, fewer families, less pupils and more holiday homes:

“Until second home owners are less in Argyll and Bute, the problem will not decrease, and aging population.”

“Not enough children here to justify keeping the building as a school – needs to be used for something else.”

However there was some positivity about the possibilities and opportunities which could be created, if the school building were developed or sold. There are some within the community exploring how the school building could be used effectively to support community development and activities.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 9.1 The financial savings generated from mothballing would predominately be made through staffing costs. Details of estimated budget for a comparative school to Ashfield can be found in Appendix 7. These financial savings support the delivery of services across the whole of Argyll and Bute. The estimated annual running costs of the mothballed buildings are £5,591.

- 9.2 The cost of transport to Tayvallich and Lochgilphead Primary Schools is £16,246.05

- 9.3 The approximate cost to bring the property into a reasonable condition for re-opening is approximately £46,000 for fabric, mechanical and electrical works. In addition professional fees would be necessary and would amount to approximately £7,000. The overall cost is therefore approximately £53,000 and finalised design and specification would be necessary before any works could be instructed. Please see Appendix 7 for financial detail.

10.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 10.1 Currently seven pupils travel to Tayvallich Primary School and three pupils travel to Lochgilphead Primary School from the Ashfield catchment area, for which there is an environmental impact. However, it could be argued that this has been offset by the requirement to only run Ashfield Primary School as a mothballed building rather than an operational building.

11.0 CONCLUSION

- 11.1 Five alternative options have been reviewed in considering the future of Ashfield Primary School. Information was collated on pupil numbers,

housebuilding, finances, the school, travel arrangements, environmental impact and the local area and community informed the options.

- 12.2 Members are asked to approve the start of the formal consultation which should now take place to consider each option that is thought reasonable as there are a number of differing views within the community.

13.0 IMPLICATIONS

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| 13.1 | Policy | Consultation will be in line with existing consultation policy and statutory requirements. |
| 13.2 | Financial | There will be resource implications with officers time spent on preparing the reports and consultation documents and events. |
| 13.3 | Legal | Adherence with the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. |
| 13.4 | HR | None at this time. |
| 13.5 | Equalities | Will continue to be considered as part of the consultation process and options appraisal preparation. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be prepared. |
| 13.6 | Risk | There could be reputational risk to the council in consulting on the closure of rural schools. |
| 13.7 | Customer Service | Information for all stakeholders will continue to be provided as part of the wider consultation process. |

- Appendix 1: Floor plan Ashfield Primary School**
2: Area plan Ashfield Primary School
3: Local Development Plan Achnamara
4: Local Development Plan Tayvallich
5: Local Development Plan Key
6: Community Feedback
7: Financial information

23 August 2018

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