

**LEARNING ESTATE INVESTMENT PROGRAMME (LEIP)**  
**MULL CAMPUS UPDATE**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) Mull 2-18 Campus project, which is now at site selection stage. The Council agreed to proceed with engagement, site selection and business case development at its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

Community engagement took place from 17<sup>th</sup> September to 4<sup>th</sup> October 2024 with a total of 352 responses received. Communities were asked what they thought were important factors to be considered when assessing potential sites. Key themes of the feedback were location, travel, ease of access, family unity, equity, access to facilities, community stability and curriculum range. The feedback received has been incorporated into the site selection criteria and relative weightings.

There is a desire from some on Mull for a central High School but very little support to relocate the Early Learning and Primary School provision from Tobermory, and community members have asked to consider a split site solution. The additional costs of a split school have been researched and are likely to be in the region of £11-12.5m capital and £0.6-1m per annum revenue when compared to a campus model. Aside from cost, a 2-18 campus model is considered by the Council's education service to deliver significant educational benefits compared to separate facilities, particularly in a rural island setting.

The Iona community are unanimous that they wish to remain within the catchment area of Oban High School and have asked to be removed from the scope of the project.

A call for sites ran from 27<sup>th</sup> August to 25<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and this identified a number of possible sites. This has been narrowed down to those that are potentially viable, which include sites in Tobermory and central locations on Mull, and a detailed technical assessment of the shortlisted sites is underway.

The site selection criteria have been widened to incorporate feedback received during the engagement exercise and reflect the unique island factors and geography of Mull

and the islands, and a transport assessment has been undertaken. More detailed impact assessments on equality, island, economic, children's rights and wellbeing and Fairer Scotland Duty are being carried out. These are expected to conclude in January to allow a recommendation report to be finalised for consideration at the next meeting of the full council scheduled for February 2025.

Members are asked to consider the contents of this report and note the updated timescale for the site recommendation report which has extended to allow for these impact assessments to be undertaken.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) Mull Campus project, which is now at site selection stage. A previous report was provided to the Council on 25th April 2024 where it was decided that the Council:-

*“noted the capital and revenue implications of the LEIP / Mull Campus project which were of a strategic financial nature” and*

*“considered the project to be affordable at this time, and agreed that up to £5m from the previously earmarked LEIP funding be used to commence the Business Case, undertake engagement exercises, commence the site selection process and establish governance arrangements, with updates to be brought back to Members at appropriate gateway points.”*

**3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that Members *consider* the contents of the report and *note* the updated timescale for a site recommendation to be made to full Council.

## **4.0 DETAIL**

### **4.1 Background**

- 4.1.1 The Council submitted a bid for Scottish Government LEIP funding in October 2022 for a 2-18 campus on Mull and this was accepted in October 2023. The bid met the LEIP eligibility criteria on condition, with funding provided on a “like for like” basis to replace the existing Tobermory campus.
- 4.1.2 The potential cost implications of LEIP funding, which requires the Council to pay the full capital cost up front with up to 50% of eligible costs funded by Scottish Government over 25 years, were considered by the Council on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024. The Council deemed the project to be affordable at that time and agreed to commence with business case development, engagement exercises and the site selection process.
- 4.1.3 The Mull Campus project is being delivered as part of the North Schools Programme, which is a partnership between hub North Scotland Ltd and five local authorities to deliver eight schools. Three of these projects, including Mull Campus, are island schools.

### **4.2 Governance**

- 4.2.1 Following Executive Leadership Team agreement to the proposed governance structure a project manager was appointed and core delivery team established in June 2024. The first Project Team was held in July 2024, and Strategic Board in August 2024, and these meet monthly. The Board will report to Council committees/ full Council as required at appropriate gateway and decision points. A copy of the reporting structure is attached in **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2.2 This is the first update report that has been provided to full Council since the establishment of the project governance structure. Regular updates are provided to the informal Political Sounding Board which comprises of the Council Leader and Policy Leads for Education and Commercial and Finance.

### **4.3 Community Engagement**

- 4.3.1 A Community Sounding Board has been set up for the project which is formed of representatives of parent councils, community councils, community development trusts and other constituted community groups representing Mull, Iona and the islands, as well as staff and pupil voices. The purpose of the group is to advise the Mull Campus Project Team on how best to engage with the community in relation to the project, share project updates and information and for representatives to feedback to and on behalf of the groups they represent.
- 4.3.2 An intense period of community engagement was carried out between 17<sup>th</sup> September and 4<sup>th</sup> October 2024, where the Mull Campus team attended drop-in sessions at 10 different venues across Mull and Iona. Individuals could feedback online and the link and QR code to the online form was circulated widely over the 3-week period. A dedicated staff session was carried out in

Tobermory, and pupil focus groups were held in all primary schools on Mull and Iona, the existing Tobermory campus and at the Oban School Hostel.

- 4.3.3 A total of 352 people contributed comments to the engagement. Over 200 attended in person during the 32 hours of drop-in session time, with 115 contributing online and 32 email or paper responses received.
- 4.3.4 The purpose of the engagement was to find out what communities affected by the site selection decision thought were important factors that should be considered when assessing potential sites. The feedback received was summarised in a community engagement analysis report (**Appendix 2**), published on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The feedback has directly influenced and shaped the criteria and relative weightings that will be used by the technical team to assess potentially suitable sites.
- 4.3.5 The key themes and issues raised most frequently are summarised below:
- Location: most people felt that the primary and/ or ELC provision must be kept in Tobermory. A split site with ELC and primary provision in Tobermory and a more centrally located high school was commonly requested.
  - Travel: wellbeing impact on children spending long portions of their day travelling, especially younger children. Poor transport infrastructure and environmental impact were also raised.
  - Ease of access: a campus easily accessible from good transport networks, with plenty of parking and safe pick up and drop off. Active travel was important to some, with a desire for children to be able to safely walk and cycle to school.
  - Family unity: avoiding children having to leave home through the week to board, families having the right to choose whether to board or stay at home and the rights of the child to education and a home life. The Iona community strongly requested to retain access to funded places at Oban High School, regardless of where the campus is located.
  - Equity: a desire for fairness and equity and creation of social cohesion between communities in the north and south.
  - Access to facilities: access to good facilities on campus and close by. This includes sports facilities and outdoor space, community facilities, shops and other activities. Equitable access to after school clubs whereby children do not have to rush away to catch ferries or buses home.
  - Community stability: the power of a campus to create community stability and sustainability, by either attracting and retaining people to live and work, or by supporting nearby businesses. Concern about depopulation was a common theme across all communities, with people worried about the impact on their local community if the campus was located elsewhere.
  - Expanded curriculum: there was a desire for an increased range of subjects including vocational subjects and easier access for teachers to travel to the campus from Oban to provide specialist teaching.

4.3.6 Following the community engagement period, the level of public interest in the project remains high and there is a desire from some to know more about the sites that are currently being evaluated and to understand how the evaluation will take place and whether they will have further input to the process. Community members have asked for the assessment to take account of the area's unique island and socio-economic factors and the United Nations Convention of the rights of the child. In addition, two specific requests have been made, which are outlined in sections 4.4 and 4.5.

#### **4.4 Split Site Request**

4.4.1 Following the community engagement exercise, Mull Community Council have asked the Council to consider a split site solution, with Early Learning and Primary School provision in Tobermory, and a more central High School. They issued a media release on 19<sup>th</sup> November expressing their concern at the current campus proposal.

4.4.2 Indicative capital and revenue costs of a split site solution have been developed to understand the potential cost impact, noting that these are estimates due to the early stage of the project. The anticipated additional costs compared to a joint campus solution are in the region of £11-12.5m capital and £0.6-1m per annum revenue.

4.4.3 Discussion has taken place with the Scottish Government LEIP team, including a joint meeting held at the request of community representatives. This confirmed that the funding metrics for LEIP are set and are on a "like for like" basis, and no additional funding can be provided for duplicate facilities such as dining halls, gym halls and sports facilities. Furthermore, the Scottish Government have also committed to additional 'locational' uplift factors for island locations and have forecast that a 40-50% award is a fair reflection of the project funding at this stage for a campus. Any additionality would need to be fully funded by the Council. The potential increase equates to a one third increase over a campus solution and is unlikely to be affordable.

4.4.4 Aside from the cost impact, the Council's education service considers that there are significant educational benefits of a 2-18 campus model compared to separate primary and high school facilities, particularly in a rural island setting. These are outlined in more detail in **Appendix 3** and include transitional benefits with a consistent approach to the child's education for the entire length of their time in education, access to specialist teaching for primary age children, sharing of resources and promotion of intergenerational learning.

#### **4.5 Iona Community**

4.5.1 Iona Community Council and Iona Parent Council have asked for Iona to be removed from the project proposal, with the community unanimous that they wish to remain within the catchment area of Oban High School regardless of where the new campus is located on Mull. They have been advised that no recommendations will be made at this point, and their views will be included in the recommendation report presented to full Council in the new year.

## **4.6 Site Selection**

- 4.6.1 A call for sites was launched from 27<sup>th</sup> August to 25<sup>th</sup> September 2024 to seek suggestions of sites that may be suitable for the new Mull 2-18 Campus. This was shared widely with the community and issued to partner organisations. Eleven possible sites were identified through this process, and scoping visits were carried out in early October. The initial long list has been narrowed down to those that are potentially capable of accommodating the campus requirements, and a detailed assessment of the short list is underway. This includes sites in the Tobermory area and central locations on Mull.
- 4.6.2 Standard criteria are being used to assess each site's ability to meet the educational requirements of the brief, technical deliverability (e.g. utilities, ground conditions, topography, flood risk and drainage), cost and risk.
- 4.6.3 These criteria were then widened to reflect the unique island factors and geography relevant to the project location on Mull. This includes what local communities said were important to them when selecting the sites, as detailed on page 13-14 of the engagement report (**Appendix 2**), transport and accessibility and socio-economic factors. Due to the large geographical area and heavy reliance on transport a detailed transport analysis of the impact of the different sites has also been carried out.
- 4.6.4 To ensure the Council complies with its legal obligations we are now in the process of carrying out more detailed impact assessments on equality, island, economic, children's rights and wellbeing and Fairer Scotland Duty. These are due to conclude in January and once complete a recommendation report will be finalised for consideration at the next meeting of the full Council scheduled for February 2025.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The community engagement exercise for site selection for Mull Campus is complete and the feedback received has been incorporated into the criteria and relative weightings for the site selection process.
- 5.2 There is little support to relocate Early Learning and Primary School provision from Tobermory, however some members of the community would like to see a central High School. A request has been made to consider a split site solution, which would cost an additional £11-12.5m capital and £0.6-1m revenue, which is unlikely to be affordable to the Council.
- 5.3 The Iona community have asked to be removed from the scope of the project.
- 5.4 A detailed assessment of shortlisted sites is underway, and the timescale for this has been extended to allow further detailed impact assessments.
- 5.5 A recommendation report is expected to be provided to the next meeting of the full Council, scheduled for February 2025.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Policy – The Council’s Learning Estate Strategy 2021 sets out an ambition to have Schools in category A or B in terms of suitability and condition. Delivering a new Campus on Mull is the no.1 priority in that strategy to address the suitability and condition of the current campus in Tobermory and is also a Corporate Policy.
- 6.2 Financial – On 25th April 2024 the Council deemed the project to be affordable at that time. A split site solution, requested by some members of the community, would cost in the region of an additional £11-12.5m capital and £0.6-1m revenue.
- 6.3 Legal – The UNCRC Rights of the Child achieved royal assent earlier this year, strengthening the legal rights of children and their families. This will be considered carefully as part of the site selection process.
- 6.4 HR – None at this stage. To be considered once the site for the campus is known.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
  - 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – An equality impact assessment is underway as part of the site selection process.
  - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – An economic impact assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty assessment is underway as part of the site selection process.
  - 6.5.3 Islands Duty - An island communities impact assessment is underway as part of the site selection process.
- 6.6 Climate Change – The carbon impact of travel is being considered as part of the transport assessment for the site selection process. To be eligible for full LEIP we will require to meet certain criteria in respect of embodied carbon and operational energy use.
- 6.7 Risk – A risk register has been developed with risks and mitigation reviewed regularly by the Project Team and reported monthly to the Strategic Board.
- 6.8 Customer Service – A community engagement exercise has been undertaken to understand what was important to the communities when considering possible sites. Engagement with community members and groups is ongoing and a dedicated Community Sounding Board has been established.
- 6.9 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – A children’s rights and wellbeing impact assessment is underway as part of the site selection process.

**Douglas Hendry**

**Executive Director with responsibility for Commercial Services and Education**

**Policy Lead for Education Audrey Forrest**

6<sup>th</sup> December 2024



**For further information contact:**

Head of Commercial Services – Ross McLaughlin

Head of Education and Lifelong Learning and Chief Education Officer – Jen Crocket

Head of Education – Learning and Teaching – Wendy Brownlie

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1 - Mull Campus Project Reporting Structure**

**Appendix 2 - Mull Campus Community Engagement Report**

**Appendix 3 - Educational Benefits of 2-18 Campus Model on Mull**

## Appendix 1 - Mull Campus Project Reporting Structure

