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**ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL  
COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**COUNCIL  
3 MARCH 2011**

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**EDUCATION REVIEW – REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL ESTATE**

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**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the review of the Education Estate and recommendations on the scope of the school merger proposals to be brought forward for consultation in compliance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Council notes the contents of the report.
- 2.2 That the Council notes the positive engagement with the Scottish and Argyll Rural School Networks in relation to the development of the joint protocol outlined in this paper.
- 2.3 That the Council does not proceed to formal consultation at this stage but agrees to conduct pre consultation activities in the communities identified at section 5 of this report to contribute further to the community impact and assessment of the viable alternatives information to be considered by Council when deciding whether to commence a formal statutory consultation on amalgamation.
- 2.4 That the Council notes the actions proposed to mitigate the inherent risks within the schools consultation process and in future that any further review of the school estate will be based on an annual review of provision.
- 2.5 That the Council requests a further report commenting on the pre consultation feedback with recommendations regarding further statutory consultation in compliance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

**3. DETAIL**

- 3.1 Chronology of the School Estate Review

The following table provides a chronology of the school estate review activities since May 2010.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
17 May 2010	The Executive instructed the Executive Director of Community Services to undertake an informal consultation to determine stakeholder views on options to deliver a sustainable education budget.
17 May 2010	The Executive agreed the proposed methodology for assessing the relative efficiency of our primary school estate and instructed the Executive Director of Community Services to conduct a review of the school estate.
Jun 2010	A series of 4 area based consultation events were convened in Oban, Lochgilphead, Dunoon and Helensburgh. The events were attended by Head Teachers, Parent Council and pupil representations, HMIE, local media, trade union representatives and a number of other school staff. The feedback report from the events "Review of the School Estate – Informal Consultation" was presented to Council at the meetings of 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 25 <sup>th</sup> November 2010.
Jul – Oct 2010	The establishment of a project team to apply the agreed methodology for assessing the relevant operational efficiency of schools; to consider merger options within local school clusters; to consider feasibility issues for identified options and consider the financial implications of the proposals.
2 Nov 2010	The Executive Director presented a series of papers summarising the informal consultation feedback; the school amalgamation proposals affecting 26 demitting schools and 20 receiving schools; an outline consultation proposal document; the financial impact of the proposals and an outline of the suggested consultation process. The papers were accompanied by a draft copy of each of the 20 proposal documents and agreement was sought to finalise the documents and take them to formal, statutory consultation. Following discussion of the documents by Council and reflecting on pre consultation feedback by affected stakeholders; the Executive Director was asked to verify a range of information – most notably in relation to travel routes/journey times.
2 – 18 Nov 2010	School Transport Team carried out a satellite tracked travel verification exercise for each proposal. Additional verification checks were carried out by the project team in consultation with relevant Council Officers/other stakeholders and relevant additional information added to the draft proposal documents.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
25 Nov 2010	Revised series of papers presented to Council for school amalgamations affecting 25 demitting and 19 receiving schools. The proposal for Luing Primary School was recommended to be withdrawn due to the capacity of the replacement ferry during the main ferry annual maintenance works.  Council agreed to take the recommended proposals to formal, statutory consultation.
26 Nov – 12 Dec 2010	Stakeholder notification; printing and distribution of proposal documents; arrangements made and publicised for public consultation meetings.
13 Dec 2010	Statutory consultation period commenced
5 Jan 2011	Agreement by Council to halt the school consultation programme to enable the recently appointed Spokesperson for Education to review the school review proposals and to engage with parent councils through a series of school visits.
6 Jan – 24 Feb 2011	Project team discussions with HMIE; Scottish Government Schools Infra Structure Team; Scottish Rural Schools Network; Argyll Rural Schools Network; Review of Scottish Government approvals and call ins of other authorities' proposals. Additional research with regard to school occupancy models; population projections; community impacts and viable alternatives.

- 3.2 As noted above, the Spokesperson for Education made visits to a wide range of schools in the intervening period including those in the scope of the original review proposals (see appendix A for details). During these visits, there was the opportunity for constructive dialogue with parents, staff and pupils which informed her review. The recommendations made within this report are developed from these visits and discussions, consideration of the efficiency assessments prepared by the project team, the letters and feedback made by stakeholders since the initial draft papers were submitted to Council on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2010, through the positive dialogue with the Argyll Rural Schools Network (ARSN) and submissions received in the formal consultation period between 13 December 2010 and the Council meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2011.
- 3.3 The recommendations made within the report therefore have sought to balance all of these comments with the requirement of the council to deliver best value in the use of its assets.

#### **4. REVIEW OF THE APPLICATION OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT**

- 4.1 The seminar of Council held on 17 February 2011 was presented with a

detailed analysis of the proposal documents, HMIE reports, consultation reports and Scottish Government call in and decision letters related to 11 Westerns Isles Council proposals. The analysis noted apparent inconsistencies in the comparison of proposal documents to eventual outcomes and similarly apparent inconsistencies in the comments made by HMIE and the eventual outcome. Although it is not for Argyll and Bute Council to make representation in relation to Western Isles Council decisions, it does illustrate the risks that are inherent in the process.

4.2 Comparison with Western Isles Council successful proposals demonstrates that the Argyll and Bute Council draft document and published supporting information is in greater level of detail and does not omit any area of consideration contained in the Western Isles material. Nonetheless, further consideration of the reasons for call in at Western Isles and a wider review of other authorities' materials suggests that Argyll and Bute Council may be able to mitigate the risks by adopting the following amendments:

- 4.3
- The Council should review its estate on an ongoing basis and reduce the scale of proposals to be considered at any one time. It would appear sensible to adopt this advice from a resource perspective and also to allow for adjustments/lessons learned to be learned from proposals.
  - Specific pre consultation with communities on community impact to supplement the research based materials referenced in the earlier Argyll and Bute draft proposals (and as featured in successful Western Isles Council proposals). It is suggested that this be carried out in conjunction with the Argyll Rural Schools Network. The product of this pre consultation activity would then feature in a pre consultation report to be presented to Council for agreement to either formally consult or to withdraw the proposal.
  - Prepare an explicit risk assessment for pupil transport which details and assesses all of the identified risks pertaining to a proposal, the mitigating actions by the authority and places the proposal in the context of current Council practices. Where any dispute over travel times remains, it is proposed that representatives of the local parent council participate in a further verification exercise to ensure the Council has explored every avenue to resolution. This recommendation also noted the stated position of the Spokesperson for Education that in her review of school estate, she will approach the issue of pupil transport in a more holistic way and consider all factors in context rather than apply a specific time threshold.
  - Set out the consideration of viable alternatives in an options appraisal format rather than in text format to ensure there will be no confusion over what options have been considered and how these have been assessed by the Council.

- Present the financial savings in a spreadsheet format showing the detail of the current budgets and the detail of the new composite merged school budget (the saving being the difference between existing and proposed) to avoid misunderstanding or misrepresentation of working papers as the basis of savings. The savings will also be shown net of any GAE adjustment using the Scottish Government formula as agreed with ARSN/ SRSN.
- Community Services is scheduled to conduct its annual review of schools accommodation in compliance with Argyll and Bute Education Services Management Circular 1.33 during February/ March 2011 issued in 2010. A more formal approach to the review of the use of accommodation/ capacity will be delivered through the new circular and the feedback will confirm schools' use of accommodation and whether the occupancy model is being applied consistently and accurately. The circular will also be amended to take account of updated Scottish Government guidance on teacher/ pupil ratios for P1 and P2-3 classes as part of this review of capacities.
- It would therefore be equally sensible to request Community Services bring forward review options annually in conjunction with the School Estate Strategy and Management Plan.

## 5 PRE CONSULTATION ON COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 5.1 The Education Spokesperson has considered the school efficiency information prepared by the project team, the potential options for school mergers within localities, the feedback received by the commencement of the review programme in May 2010 and the discussions with parent councils and school staff on her visit programme.
- 5.2 From this consideration, the following options are recommended for pre consultation with communities on community impact as outlined in Section 4.3 above. Please note there are no formal amalgamation proposals being presented to Council at this stage and the communities listed below are proposed for pre consultation as outlined in the protocol developed with ARSN.

<b>PRIMARY SCHOOLS</b>
St Kierans to Castlehill
Ardchonnell to Dalmally/ Kilmartin
North Bute to Rothesay JC
Toward to Innellen
Luss to Hermitage PS
Achaleven to Dunbeg
Achaleven to Lochnell
Ardchattan to Lochnell

Minard to Furnace
Minard to Lochgilphead
Rhunahaorine to Glenbarr
Clachan to Tarbert
Skipness to Tarbert
Ashfield to Lochgilphead
Ashfield to Tayvallich

Please note the above list includes variant proposals which would be discussed with the affected demitting communities. Receiving communities would not be involved at the pre consultation stage as this will focus on the community impact of the closure of a primary school in a demitting community. Receiving communities would however be involved in any statutory consultation if Council progresses any formal proposals to consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

It is suggested therefore that 10 community pre consultation events would be required to reflect 15 draft proposals (including 3 variants). It is proposed that no event takes place for the 2 communities where the local school has no pupils and the properties are in effect closed at present.

- 5.3 It is proposed the workshops will involve representatives of parent councils, ARSN, community councils, school staff, other community organisations and relevant other council staff. An outline of the workshops structure is enclosed at Appendix B.

5.4 Parklands School

As a result of discussions within Education Services and with parents at Parklands School, a commitment has been given to investigating a different model and range of services to support children with a wider range of additional support needs. The investigation will consider whether a revised model is viable and would produce a sustainable school over the longer term. A further report on this investigation will be brought to Council at a later stage.

## 6. OUTLINE TIMESCALE

- 6.1 The following indicative timescale is proposed for the revised school estate review.

Action	Target Dates
Review Existing Proposals and Develop Review Methodology/ New Proposals	5 January – 17 February 2011
Administration Review of Methodology & Phase 1 proposals	21-23 February 2011
Publish Papers for Council Consideration	24 February 2011
Council Agree to Proposed Pre	3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2011 (Scheduled Council

Consultation Programme	Meeting)
Pre Consultation Meetings	w/c 14 & 21 <sup>st</sup> March 2011
Publish Pre Consultation Reports for Council to Determine Decision	5 <sup>th</sup> April 2011
Council Agree to Withdraw Proposals or Progress with Statutory Consultation	12 <sup>th</sup> April 2011 (special meeting)

6.2 Should Council decide to progress with statutory consultation, further discussion with HMIE will be required regarding the timescales for the subsequent stages however it is anticipated that any amalgamation would be achievable for the December school recess. Head teachers at the recent round of meetings were consulted on a December recess amalgamation and most expressed a preference for that rather than over the October recess. It should be highlighted that the above timetable would be directly affected by any decision by Scottish Government to call in any proposal progressed by Council for statutory consultation irrespective of the eventual decision.

## 7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Given the background to the school estate review, it is worthwhile re-presenting some core facts around the Council's primary estate:

- The proposals for school merger ensure that there is no educational detriment and in most cases provide significant educational benefits that link directly to the comments of HMIE as outlined in recently successful merger proposals
- The Council has received comment from a range of external audit bodies advising the Council should review its use of education estate to ensure it delivers best value in the use of resources.
- The Council operates 80 primary schools, in relation to current roll figures the Council has a very significant number of surplus primary school spaces.
- The cost per pupil figures per annum varies significantly from over £30,000 to around £3,000. Whilst acknowledging that the Council's geography will sometimes mean that some pupil costs will be higher than average, this range demonstrates an inequitable and unsustainable use of resources.
- The costs of maintaining a larger number of assets than that required to educate the current and projected pupil population significantly outstrips the resources available for property maintenance again demonstrating the unsustainability of the current position.
- There is a further primary school roll reduction anticipated which will further reduce the primary school occupancy levels.
- The Council has a programme of service reviews which targets a 15% reduction in budgets over a 3 year period.

These points give an illustration to the basic core facts underpinning the school estate review.

- **IMPLICATIONS**

<b>Policy:</b>	None at present
<b>Financial:</b>	The costs associated with the community impact pre consultation would be met within the existing Community Services Departmental budget.
<b>Personnel:</b>	None at present
<b>Legal:</b>	Compliance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010
<b>Equal Opportunities:</b>	None at present

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**Appendix A – List of Visits by The Spokesperson for Education**

<b>MAKI</b>	
Minard PS	Ardrishaig
Kilmichael Glassary PS	Achahoish
Ashfield	Furnace
Lochgilphead Joint Campus	Port Charlotte
Tayvallich	Keills
St Kierans	Dalintober
Castlehill	Clachan
Southend	Rhunahaorine
Drumlemble	Skipness
Tarbert	Glenbarr
Port Ellen	Kilmartin
Bowmore	Craignish
	Inveraray

<b>OLI</b>	
Lochnell	Kilchrenan
Barcaldine	Easdale
Achaleven	Kilninver
Ardchattan	St Columba's
Salen	Tobermory
Lochdonhead	Park
Ulva	Rockfield
Dervaig	Dunbeg
Taynuilt	Dalmally

<b>HELENSBURGH &amp; LOMOND</b>	<b>BUTE &amp; COWAL</b>
Rosneath PS	North Bute
Garelochhead PS	Rothesay Joint Campus
Kilcreggan PS	St Andrew's
Parklands	Strachur
Arrochar PS	Tighnabruich
Luss PS	Kilmodan
Hermitage	Strone
John Logie Baird	Sandbank
Colgrain	Toward
Cardross	Innellan
St Josephs	Dunoon PS
Rhu	

## **Appendix B – School Estate Review Joint Protocol Proposed Community Impact Pre Consultation Events Outline**

### **Purpose**

The Council has carried out a review of its primary school estate during the latter part of 2010 and prepared school amalgamation proposals for formal consultation in compliance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act. The vast majority of schools in Argyll and Bute are listed as rural schools by the Scottish Government and therefore proposals require to consider their impact on the affected communities and whether all viable alternatives have been fully explored. In the draft proposal documents published by Council in November 2011, the community impact was assessed in relation to community use of the property which would be closed and their access to other facilities, by reference to research that indicated the primary factors for sustainable rural communities and to local housing planning/ completion rates. These factors were consistent with successful amalgamation proposals progressed by other authorities that were benchmarked against.

In January 2011, the Council advised it was halting its school estate consultation programme to allow for it to be reconsidered by the Education Spokesperson who would visit as many schools as possible including the schools considered for amalgamation in November 2010. This also allowed further discussion to take place with the Scottish Government, the Scottish and Argyll Rural Schools Networks and HMIE. From these discussions, this protocol governing the conduct of a pre consultation stage has been developed that has been framed to go beyond that required by the current Act and associated guidance. This is also intended to minimise the risks associated with the any schools estate proposals that may be progressed by the Council being subject to a Scottish Government call in. The pre consultation to be carried out with communities will help the Council to understand and assess the impact of a proposal on a rural community, to identify and assess key issues and potential alternatives to amalgamation. The pre consultation report will be agreed jointly with the affected community so that their input is reflected in the report to Council on whether to commence formal, statutory consultation in compliance with the Act.

This outline suggests an approach to this pre consultation.

### **Requirement**

It is proposed to convene a series of 2 hour meetings, one in each demitting community to provide an opportunity for community representative organisations to provide an input to the events. It is not intended to be an open public meeting and attendance would be by invite to relevant community based organisations. The attendance would include representatives from the local parent council, the local community council, where appropriate other community organisations such as community hall management committees, Head Teacher, education services staff, planning/ economic development services staff and any other community organisation identifiable locally. It would not be expected for the representative group to be too large and the event would retain a workshop feel.

The list of communities identified in the attached report may have variant options which affect the same community (ie separate options to amalgamate with different

schools). In these circumstances a single workshop event would be proposed as the community impact of amalgamation would be similar in either case and any variation in impact could be considered by the group.

### **Facilitation**

Each community pre consultation event would be led jointly by the appropriate link Quality Improvement Officer leading on the review of school estate affecting that community and a nominated community representative outlining any perceived adverse educational or community effects. The workshop facilitation would be carried out by a member of staff from the Community Learning and Development team with the event being scribed jointly by the Community Services staff and community representatives. All participants would have an opportunity to contribute in an open constructive dialogue. Minutes will be circulated once confirmed by the Council and community representatives

### **Location**

Advice would be taken from the local Head Teacher and Parent Council as to the most appropriate venue within the affected community. Advice would also be sought on whether a daytime or evening meeting would be most appropriate.

### **Product of Event**

The workshop events will be designed to provide the following outputs:

- A review of education benefits statement
- The identification of all anticipated community impacts
- An assessment of the level of impact each is perceived to provide by the community
- An outline of any actions that would be suggested by the community to mitigate the affect of the impacts
- A note of any proposed viable alternative that is suggested by the community representatives
- A note of any additional points raised by the community representatives

This will be compiled into a pre consultation report to be reported to council when considering the next steps in the school estate review. The agreed Summary Document will cover points of agreement and disagreement, and will form the basis of any decision the Council might take to proceed to producing formal proposal documents towards consultation on closure of the school. The full report from each event will be hosted on the school consultation web pages for wider public information.

### **Agenda**

The agenda should facilitate the engagement of all present. After opening statements by the Quality Improvement Officer, and the nominated community representative, issues arising should be noted on a board and debated openly. These issues and any agreed conclusion should be noted by the joint record-

keepers. Points of disagreement should also be noted, particularly on any proposal which may risk infringing the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

An outline of proceedings may be:

Introduction on background and context	(QIO/ Community Rep)
Identification of impacts of proposals on the community	(All)
Group discussion on Identified Impacts	(All)
Group Agreement on Assessment on level of Impact	(All)
Break	
Identification of Mitigating Actions	(All)
Group Discussion of Mitigating Actions	(All)
Summary, Questions and Final Comments	(CLD/ Community Rep)

### **Timetable**

It is suggested that 10 community pre consultation events would be required to reflect the list of communities set out within the report (including 3 variants). It is proposed that no event takes place for the 2 communities where the local school has no pupils and the properties are in effect closed at present.