

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Achfary Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Kinlochbervie Primary School.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

THIS IS A PROPOSAL PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S AGREED PROCEDURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process:

- To discontinue education provision at Achfary Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Kinlochbervie Primary School. (Maps of the current catchment areas are at **Appendices A and Ai**). For the avoidance of doubt, any reference in this document to Achfary Primary Schools should be taken as a reference to both the primary and nursery classes.
- An alternative option would be to re-assign the catchment area to Scourie Primary School. (A map of the current catchment area is at **Appendix Aii**).
- The proposed changes, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.
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Legislative Background

- 1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (S.3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).
- 1.2 Achfary Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the special regard required for rural school closures. The Council has considered the demographic projections for the area and the school roll projections for Achfary Primary (see Section 4 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 5 and 6 below); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 14 below) and to the impact of differing travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Achfary catchment (Sections 12 and 19 below). The sole P1-7 pupil presently in the catchment already attends Kinlochbervie Primary.

Reason for the Proposal

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:

- No children have attended Achfary Primary School since the end of session 2011-12;
- Current population figures within the school catchment indicate a maximum school roll of 2 by 2019-20;
- A school roll of this size provides significant impediments to the successful implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence (details below) and;
- A school roll of 2 hampers social interaction opportunities for children, who conversely benefit from attending larger schools amongst more children of their own age.
- The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below.

Examination of Alternatives

- 3.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternatives to closure. The alternatives to closure would be:
- to re-open Achfary Primary School, either with its current catchment area or an extended catchment area, or;
 - to continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement.
- 3.2 In considering the re-opening of the school, the Council has investigated the long-term roll projections as well as demographic information (See Section 4 below).
- 3.4 Were Achfary Primary to be re-opened, it would most likely be under an alternative management arrangement under which the school was managed as part of a “cluster” arrangement with other schools within the ASG. However, alternative management arrangements would not address the wider population issues within the Achfary area.
- 3.5 There has been no significant rise to the school age population of Achfary since the school was mothballed in 2012.
- 3.6 The current proposal follows informal discussions between Highland Council officials; local elected members and local representatives. Informal discussions with the latter were held as follows:
- Scourie Primary School Parent Council (Chairperson) (25 January 2016)
 - Scourie Community Council (25 January 2016)
 - Kinlochbervie Primary School Parent Council (Chairperson) (26 January 2016)
 - Kinlochbervie Community Council (26 January 2016)
 - Reay Forest Estate (25 and 28 January 2016)
- 3.7 In the event of a school closure being approved, consideration is required on the most appropriate way to re-zone the Achfary catchment. Further discussion on this can be found at Section 16 below.
- 3.8 The detail of the Council’s consideration of the alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and its appendices. A brief summary is at **Appendix B**.

Re-Opening of Achfary Primary School with Current Catchment Area

- 4.1 There is currently one pupil of P1-7 age (P6) living within the catchment area of the school, with 1 pupil who would be of nursery age (N3) in August 2016. There is 1 further child of pre-nursery age within the catchment (all figures as at February 2016).
- 4.2 The above figures suggest that, were Achfary School to re-open with 100% of catchment pupils attending the school, the P1-7 roll figures for the forthcoming few years would be:
- 2016-17 - 1
2017-18 - 0
2018-19 - 1
2019-20 - 2
- 4.3 The population living in the catchment fell by 40% (from 64 to 40) between 2001 and 2011 and the population of the primary catchment is older than the Highland average with only 6% aged 16 to 29 and 17% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Sutherland overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 0.3 births per year: the recent historic average has been below this but with an increase in the last four years.
- 4.4 The long term roll at Achfary is probably in the region of 2 to 3 pupils albeit with year to year fluctuations around these figures. These roll projections indicate that if Achfary Primary were re-opened, it would be as a single teacher school with a very small roll. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching, particularly in terms of the requirements of the current curriculum. Further detail is provided at Section 11.
- 4.5 As previously stated, the school has not been operational since July 2012. No placing requests in or out of Achfary Primary School were recorded in the two sessions prior to mothballing (2010-11 and 2011-12).
- 4.6 If the school were to re-open, the potential pupils would have shorter journey times to school than they do at present. Further details on travel journeys to school are provide at Sections 12 and 16 below.

Re-Opening of Achfary Primary School with Expanded Catchment Area

- 5.1 The catchment area for Achfary PS abuts those of four other schools – Scourie, Kinlochbervie Primary, Altnaharra, and Lairg. All four are themselves rural schools. The roll at Scourie Primary is projected to fall to 9 next session before recovering in the longer term, whilst that of Kinlochbervie Primary is projected to remain fairly steady, at around 18-20 pupils in the longer term. The roll at Altnaharra Primary is due to fall to 3 in August 2016 and to remain at 2-3 for the foreseeable future. Any expansion of the Achfary catchment at the expense of the catchments of these 3 rural schools risks undermining the future of these schools, as well as increasing travel distances for pupils without increasing the roll at Achfary to a viable number.

- 5.2 Lairg Primary, whilst also a rural school, has a current roll of 40 and is projected to experience a rising roll in future years. Whilst there are a scattering of properties in the Lairg catchment that could, on the basis of geography, be considered for inclusion in the Achfary catchment (e.g. Corrykinloch and the Overscaig House Hotel) there are no children currently at any of these properties. The very small number of houses under discussion would make no significant difference to the future roll at Achfary. Furthermore, any proposal to alter the catchment area of Lairg Primary would require a statutory consultation with the school's parents, who would be likely to oppose any suggestion that they perceived as undermining the roll at Lairg.
- 5.3 A map of the Lairg Primary School catchment is at **Appendix C**. Roll projections for Altnaharra, Kinlochbervie, Lairg and Scourie Primaries are at **Appendix D - Diii**.

Continuation of "Mothballing"

- 6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that that would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community. "Mothballing" would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school.
- 6.2 Scottish Government guidance relating to the mothballing of schools makes it clear that mothballing is a temporary measure and should not be used to undermine the requirements to undertake a statutory school closure consultation.
- 6.3 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.
- 6.4 A continuation of mothballing would have no impact on the community. Currently the mothballed building is used for ad hoc community events.

General Background

- 7.1 This proposal is advanced within the wider context of demographic change in the area. Between 2001 and 2011 (Census figures) the population of Highland grew by 11% but the population of the Kinlochbervie High ASG area fell by 6%. During this period the secondary school roll fell from 94 in 2001 to 49 during the current session. The population of the Kinlochbervie ASG area is older than the Highland average with 11% aged 16 to 29 and 16% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively).

The birth rate (the true birth rate measured as births per year per 1,000 women aged X years) tends to be close to the Highland average.

- 7.2 The reference in the above paragraph to "...per 1,000 woman aged X years" is included because there is a different expected birth rate for women depending on their age. For example the expected birth rate for a woman aged 25 is higher than for a women aged 45. The Council has looked at the ages of each

woman in the area and applied the expected rate to each before adding them together to come up with the final figure.

7.3 The consultation process for this proposal is set out in detail at **Appendix E**.

Current Details – Achfary Primary School

8.1 Achfary Primary is located in Reay Forest, on the A838 road. Its catchment area extends from Laxford Bridge to just beyond Merkland Lodge.

8.2 The school building at Achfary is accommodated within the village hall, which is itself leased by Highland Council from the local estate. The main classroom is located in a room off the main hall, and the main hall itself was used for PE. The school has the use of another room off the main hall, and of an outside area.

8.3 The school has a permanent capacity of 18. Based on the permanent capacity available, the notional 2019-20 roll of 2 pupils would represent 11% use of capacity.

8.4 The Highland Council assesses all of its schools for Suitability and Condition, in line with the Scottish Government's School Estate Management guidelines. Schools are assessed on a scale with the ratings "A" (good) "B" (satisfactory), "C" (poor) and "D" (bad). Achfary Primary School is currently rated as "C" for educational suitability and "C" for building condition.

8.5 The number of pupils within the catchment area entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.

8.6 The most recent HMIE report was published in January 2008. **A copy is at Appendix F.**

8.7 In recent years Highland Council has sought to manage its smaller primary schools through "cluster" arrangements with other local schools. Were the school to re-open as part of a cluster, the staffing entitlements, as per the Council's Devolved School Management policy are as follows;

Associate (Cluster) Head Teacher
Unpromoted Teachers – 1.00 FTE
Class Contact Time Teacher 2.5 hours per week
Clerical Assistant – 16 hours per week

A Cleaning Operative would also be employed at around 6.25 hours per week.

When the school was last in operation meals were cooked and served onsite and a Cook HC3 was employed for 20 hours per week. In the event the school were re-opened, it is likely meals would be cooked off site and transported to Achfary.

8.8 Were the school to re-open, school transport would be provided for the pupils who would be enrolled from 2018-19 onwards.

- 8.9 Annual Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions from the Achfary School building are estimated at 50.4 tonnes, along with annual Carbon Monoxide (CO) emissions of 0.063 tonnes.

Current Details – Kinlochbervie Primary

- 9.1 Kinlochbervie Primary School is located within the village of the same name in north-west Sutherland. The school has three classrooms, one of which is a dedicated music and art room; a Learning Support room; and a general purpose room. The playground has features such as a garden area, a rocky hill, and painted games. The school is able to make use of the gym hall in the adjoining High School for Physical Education and any events which require a large indoor space. In addition, there is a modern village hall just along the road where the school can put on plays, workshops, etc.
- 9.2 At the time of the 2015-16 school session census, the school had 17 pupils in P1-7, although numbers have since increased and the roll was 23 as at February 2016. A pre-school partner centre is managed by the Care and Learning Alliance, delivering the pre-school curriculum on behalf of Highland Council. The projected roll suggests the numbers will decline slightly over the next few years before settling at around 18-20.

2016-17 - 24
2017-18 - 23
2018-19 - 21
2019-20 - 19
2020-21 - 19
2021-22 - 18
2022-23 - 18
2023-24 - 17
2024-25 - 16
2025-26 - 18
2026-27 - 19
2027-28 - 19
2028-29 - 20
2029-30 - 20

There are currently 6 children in the CALA Nursery. The nursery roll is expected to be 4 in August 2016.

- 9.3 During the last 5 completed school sessions (2010-11 to 2014-15) there has been 1 placing request to join Kinlochbervie Primary. 1 placing request has also been made to leave Kinlochbervie Primary.
- 9.4 The population living in the catchment fell by 15% between 2001 and 2011 and the population of the primary catchment is older than the Highland average with 11% aged 16 to 29 and 14% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Sutherland overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 2.7 births per year: the recent historic average has been slightly below this.

- 9.5 The school has a permanent capacity of 50. The expected roll of 24 in August 2016 would therefore represent 48% use of capacity.
- 9.6 Kinlochbervie Primary is currently assessed as “B” for Suitability and “B” for Condition. Future investment need within the school will be assessed as part of the Council’s capital programme and maintenance programmes, and based on the ‘core facts’ of condition, suitability and sufficiency.
- 9.7 The number entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.
- 9.8 The year group numbers expected for August 2016 are as follows:
- P1 – 4
 - P2 – 2
 - P3 – 4
 - P4 – 2
 - P5 – 5
 - P6 – 3
 - P7 – 4
- 9.9 The most recent HMIE report was published in February 2010. A copy is at **Appendix G**.
- 9.10 The 2015-16 staffing structure is as follows;
- Associate Head Teacher, Kinlochbervie High and Primary Schools, and Durness Primary – 1.00FTE
Unpromoted Teachers – 2.00 FTE
Class Contact Time Teachers – 5 hours per week
Clerical Assistant/General Auxiliary – 17 hours per week
- In addition, ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are allocated annually to the school, to meet assessed levels of need.
- The Catering and Cleaning Service employs a Cleaning Operative HC2 at 10.50 hours per week. Meals are provided as part of the shared campus with Kinlochbervie High, and catering staff are employed for both schools.
- 9.11 At present, 2 school transport routes operate to Kinlochbervie Primary School, transporting a total of 8 school pupils. Currently therefore, approximately 35% of the pupil population are in receipt of school transport.
- 9.12 Annual CO₂ emissions from the shared campus for Kinlochbervie High and Kinlochbervie Primary are estimated at just under 771 tonnes, along with 0.963 tonnes of annual CO emissions. It is not possible to split the emissions between the primary and secondary schools, but in any case the figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Achfary Primary School.
- 9.13 As the single pupil from the Achfary catchment area currently attends Kinlochbervie Primary, no adverse effects for Kinlochbervie Primary are expected to arise from a decision to close Achfary.

Current Details – Scourie Primary

- 10.1 Scourie Primary School is located in northwest Sutherland. The catchment area stretches from Kylesku to the south shore of Loch Laxford.
- 10.2 At the time of the 2015-16 school session census, the school had 17 pupils in P1-7, although the roll was 16 as at February 2016. There is a P1-5 class with 9 pupils and a P5-7 class with 7 pupils. A pre-school partner centre is managed by the Care and Learning Alliance, delivering the pre-school curriculum on behalf of Highland Council. The projected roll suggests the numbers will fall sharply in August before making a gradual recovery in future years.

2016-17 - 9
2017-18 - 12
2018-19 - 11
2019-20 - 12
2020-21 - 13
2021-22 - 14
2022-23 - 16
2023-24 - 20
2024-25 - 19
2025-26 - 18
2026-27 - 19
2027-28 - 19
2028-29 - 20
2029-30 - 20

There are currently 3 children in the CALA Nursery. The nursery roll is expected to increase to 7 in August 2016.

- 10.3 During the last 5 completed school sessions (2010-11 to 2014-15) there has been 1 placing request for pupils from other areas to join Scourie Primary. 1 placing request has also been made to leave Scourie Primary.
- 10.4 The population living in the catchment increased by 4% between 2001 and 2011 and the population of the primary catchment is slightly older than the Highland average with 15% aged 16 to 29 and 15% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Sutherland overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 1 birth per year: the recent historic average has been close to this.
- 10.5 The school has a permanent capacity of 48. The expected August 2016 roll of 9 pupils therefore represents 18% use of capacity.
- 10.6 Scourie Primary is currently assessed as “C” for Suitability and “C” for Condition. Future investment need within the school will be assessed as part of the Council’s capital programme and maintenance programmes, and based on the ‘core facts’ of condition, suitability and sufficiency.
- 10.7 The number entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.

10.8 The year group numbers for August 2015 are as follows:

P1 - 1
P2 - 1
P3 - 1
P4 - 1
P5 - 5
P6 - 1
P7 - 7

10.9 The most recent HMle report was published in February 2010. A copy is at **Appendix H**.

10.10 The school's 2015-16 staffing structure is as follows;

Head Teacher, – 1.00FTE
Unpromoted Teachers – 1.3 FTE
Class Contact Time Teachers – 5 hours per week
Clerical Assistant/General Auxiliary – 17 hours per week

In addition, ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are allocated annually to the school, to meet assessed levels of need.

10.11 The Catering and Cleaning Service employs a Cleaning Operative HC2 at 8.75 hours per week, and a Cook HC3 at 23.75 hours per week.

10.12 A single school transport route currently operates to Scourie Primary, transporting 3 pupils. Therefore approximately 19% of the pupil population are in receipt of school transport.

10.13 Annual CO₂ emissions from Scourie Primary School building are estimated at 64 tonnes, along with 0.08 tonnes of annual CO emissions. This figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Achfary Primary School.

10.14 As the single pupil from the Achfary catchment area currently attends Kinlochbervie Primary, the proposed closure is not expected to have any adverse effect on Scourie Primary.

Educational Benefits

11.1 Highland Council is of the view that the school environment should be of a quality that sustains and improves education provision, pupil performance and outcomes for the young people of Highland.

11.2 With the above aim in mind, Highland Council has adopted the above indicators in reviewing its' school estate:

1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
2. Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
3. Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.

4. Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
 5. Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary) although it is recognised that this may not always be possible in a rural Council area such as Highland.
 6. School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
 7. School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
 8. Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
 9. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
 10. The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
 11. Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built up community.
- 11.3 It is Highland Council's view that children from the Achfary catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at the larger neighbouring schools. Formalising the current arrangements would provide a number of such benefits, judged against the Highland criteria set out above, and in particular those at points, 2, 3, 4 and 9.
- 11.4 Pupils at both Kinlochbervie and Scourie Primary Schools regularly work in co-operative learning groups of various sizes, sometimes as a whole school group and sometimes in groups of mixed ages and abilities. A roll of 2/3, of varying ages, such as that if Achfary Primary re-opened, would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static, since there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. A roll of 2/3 would limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
- 11.5 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.
- 11.6 As part of the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce the aim is to develop increased awareness of the world of work, social skills and employability skills, including team working, leadership and working with others. Such knowledge and understanding and skills acquisition would very much benefit from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age/stage
- 11.7 It is self-evident that a total school roll of 2 or 3 pupils at varying ages severely restricts opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. This applies even to individual sports, where successful learning of skills is helped by talking and sharing of experiences. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices. Whilst these problems can be overcome

by taking the pupils to participate in activities in neighbouring schools, that in itself involves time out of school in travelling.

- 11.8 As with sports, the larger rolls at Kinlochbervie and Scourie provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities. Primary schools within the Kinlochbervie ASG host a visiting Art specialist, Strings tutor, Chanter tutor and a Kodály Voice tutor, all of whom engage in whole school and whole class pieces.
- 11.9 Schools in the Kinlochbervie ASG are also participating in the YUNGA (United Nations Youth Award), a programme aimed at getting young people involved in social and environmental issues, and which involves a substantial degree of co-operative work.
- 11.10 Larger pupil numbers also provide more opportunities for after school activities. Scourie Primary currently runs an after school Craft Club, and Gardening Club, whilst Kinlochbervie Primary has a multi-activity after-school club and is planning to set up clubs in Computing, and Gardening.
- 11.11 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form and reform.
- 11.12 In summary, pupils from the community of Achfary have derived a range of positive educational benefits from the mothballing of Achfary Primary, and wider opportunities than if they had attended Achfary Primary.
- 11.13 As the pupil from the Achfary catchment currently attends Kinlochbervie Primary, no adverse effects for that pupil are expected to arise from the merger.

Effects on School Transport

- 12.1 During the 2015-16 session, one P1-7 pupil will be travelling from the Achfary catchment to Kinlochbervie Primary. This pupil travels on the existing transport from Achfary to Kinlochbervie High, and consequently there is no current additional cost to the Council.
- 12.2 The fact that Achfary School is currently mothballed means that the sole P1-7 pupil will not experience any differing travel arrangements as a result of formal closure
- 12.3 When comparing the scenarios of a re-opened Achfary Primary to its current mothballed status or to formal closure, it is recognised that the larger merged school implies an increase in the number of pupils entitled to school transport compared to the number who could have otherwise walked or cycled to school, and the occasional inconvenience for parents who wish to take their child to/from school during the school day, should they require to do so.

- 12.4 As the sole current pupil travels on existing transport, there are no additional greenhouse gas emissions from school transport as a result of the mothballing or closure of Achfary Primary.
- 12.5 Highland Council is not aware of any days in the most recent winter, in which the education of the Achfary pupil was disrupted due to unavailability of school transport in bad weather.
- 12.6 Formal closure of Achfary Primary does raise the possibility of increased travel distances for children in the catchment who will be aged for school in future, and this issue is discussed further in section 19 below.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 13.1 As the school is already “mothballed” there will be no impact on school management arrangements at Kinlochbervie or Scourie from a formal closure of Achfary Primary School.
- 13.2 A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements.
- 13.3 The staffing implications of re-opening Achfary Primary School are set out at Paragraph 7.10 above, whilst the financial implications are set out at Section 14 below, and the associated **Appendix I**.

Effect on the Local Community

- 14.1 The community of Achfary is very closely linked to the Reay Forest Estate, which currently provides almost all the employment opportunities within Achfary itself.
- 14.2 The building is currently used for community events such as ceilidhs and film nights, and since the school has been mothballed has also been used regularly by the Estate for staff meetings and other events which were previously not possible.
- 14.3 As Highland Council does not own the Achfary School building, the lease between Highland Council and the Estate would likely be terminated in the event of the closure proceeding. If so the future use of the building will be a matter for the local Estate. The Estate has advised that they would continue using the hall as a community facility for the foreseeable future, and would additionally look to increase the number of community events held there.
- 14.4 Paragraph 4.5 above explains that the population of the catchment fell by 40% between 2001 and 2011, during a period when the school was open. Past analyses of rural locations in Highland that have experienced school closures has established no clear relationship between school closures and population patterns.
- 14.5 The Report of the Scottish Government’s Commission on Rural Education, published in 2013, found a number of examples of communities which continued to depopulate despite the presence of a school. The Commission’s

review of the scientific and other literature on school closures found there was a lack of robust evidence on how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of closure) links to the sustainability of communities.

Financial Consequences

- 15.1 The Table at **Appendix I** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger.

Catchment Areas

- 16.1 The distance and driving time between Achfary Primary School and Kinlochbervie Primary School is given as 15 miles and 27 minutes (source: Google Maps) whilst the same source gives the distance and driving time from Achfary Primary to Scourie Primary as 13.6 miles and 25 minutes.
- 16.2 Achfary Primary School is located within the Scourie Community Council area.
- 16.3 The building at Kinlochbervie Primary has a higher score for Suitability than the building at Scourie Primary.
- 16.4 Although Scourie Primary School is marginally closer to Achfary than Kinlochbervie Primary, in the medium term the roll projections are less certain. The larger pupil and staff numbers anticipated for Kinlochbervie Primary offer more opportunities for pupils to be part of age appropriate peer groups, and for staff to be part of a larger in-school professional network, than would be the case at Achfary Primary. Furthermore, the higher standard of accommodation at Kinlochbervie offers educational advantages over that at Scourie.
- 16.5 For the above reasons, Highland Council recommends that the Achfary PS area is re-assigned to that of Kinlochbervie Primary School.
- 16.6 Nevertheless, it remains Highland Council's opinion that both Scourie and Kinlochbervie Primaries offer educational advantages in comparison with a re-opened Achfary Primary.
- 16.7 Highland Council would welcome the community's views on the best way to re-assign the catchment area of Achfary Primary School.
- 16.8 Whichever decision is taken with respect to catchment areas, existing pupils will not be required to change schools and will continue to qualify for school transport. This will also apply to any younger siblings of such pupils, provided they remain at the same primary school.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 17.1 A preliminary EQIA assessment is at **Appendix J**.

Rural Impact Assessment

- 18.1 A preliminary Rural Impact Assessment is at **Appendix K**.

Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 19.1 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the length of journey from Achfary to either Scourie or Kinlochbervie, details of which are provided above. However, as the school has been mothballed since 2012, the single current pupil is already making the journey to Kinlochbervie. The population in this area is accustomed to making long journeys to access things that people in urban areas take for granted.
- 19.2 Funded school transport will be provided to P1-7 pupils from Scourie attending whichever school the catchment is re-assigned to.
- 19.3 The pre-school children in the Achfary catchment area live at Merkland Cottage, at the eastern edge of the catchment. One pupil has registered for pre-school education in Kinlochbervie for August 2016. The distance and journey time from their home to Achfary Primary is 10.4 miles/19 minutes and that to Kinlochbervie Primary is 25.3 miles/46 minutes (source: Google maps). Although this journey time is undoubtedly an adverse effect, this must be balanced against the adverse educational effects that would arise from a child having to attend pre-school nursery on their own and having no peer group. The geography of Highland means that long journey times are not unknown even for such young children.
- 19.4 In overall terms, the adverse effects arising from the additional travelling time for pupils must be balanced against the educational benefits that will arise for pupils set out at section 11 above.

Recommendation

- 20.1 In considering the future of Achfary Primary School, the Authority has had special regard to viable alternatives to closure, to the likely effect on the community, and to the likely effect of different travelling arrangements arising from the proposal. Prior to consultation, informal discussions on these issues were held with a range of with local community representatives. The Council's detailed consideration of each issue is set out above. The Authority concludes that the closure may have a beneficial effect on the community, in providing opportunities for the building to be developed for community use. We further conclude that the likely long term roll of Achfary Primary means there are clear educational benefits to closure and no viable alternatives to closure. Closure will have no effect on the current travelling arrangements for the sole P1-7 pupil, and although adverse effects from travel do potentially arise for future pupils, these must be balanced against the educational and community benefits identified. Taking all of the above into account Highland Council recommends that Achfary Primary School, currently "mothballed," is closed and the catchment area re-assigned to that of Kinlochbervie Primary.
- 20.2 This proposal paper is issued in terms of the authority's procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report, and the submissions received, will be presented to the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee of the Highland Council.