

Consultation proposal by Shetland Islands Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to discontinue two stages of education, namely S3 and S4 at Sandwick Junior High School, and transfer young people to Anderson High School at the start of S3.

Context

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. As the council is proposing to discontinue stages of education within a school, it will need to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining the opportunity for representations to be made to Ministers.

1. Introduction

1.1 Shetland Islands Council proposes to discontinue the stages secondary S3 and S4 at Sandwick Junior High School and to alter the catchment area of Anderson High School to include young people who would, with the current arrangement, be educated at S3 and S4 at Sandwick Junior High School. The proposal intends that young people beyond the S2 stage in the current Sandwick catchment area will begin their education at Anderson High School on 17 August 2015 or as soon as possible thereafter.

This proposal is the latest stage of a lengthy period of both formal and informal proposals and consultations on the future of education in the Shetland Islands dating back to 2007. Shetland Islands Council has traditionally benefitted from significant income in relation to the oil industry. Educational decisions in the past have taken account of the financial circumstances of the time. However, in recent years the financial situation has changed and the council is no longer in such a favourable position. From 2008 to 2011 a working group took forward the council's 'Developing a Blueprint for Education'. Thereafter the constitutional arrangements for Shetland Islands Council changed and the 'Blueprint for Education' work was led by Children's Services officers only thereafter. In February 2012 councillors asked Children's Services to review and update the 'Blueprint for Education'.

In September 2012 a set of proposals for the secondary school estate were agreed. This included the proposed closure of the secondary department of Sandwick Junior High School with statutory consultation to commence in 2015 and proposed implementation in August 2016. In August 2013 an updated Medium Term Financial Plan was approved by Shetland Islands Council which required a saving of £3.268 million from Children's Services with almost all of this having to be achieved from the implementation of the 'Blueprint for Education'. At the request of Sandwick Junior High School Parent Council, their consultation was brought forward to take place in 2013. The 'Next Steps' proposals which were presented to Shetland Islands Council in September 2013 continued to recommend the closure of Sandwick Junior High School secondary department. However, discussions on the 'Next Steps' proposals were deferred. Instead, Shetland Islands Council instructed Children's Services to explore five different options for the future of secondary education in Shetland. In doing so, Children's Services staff carried out further informal consultation and engaged an independent educational consultant. A 'Strategy for Secondary Education in Shetland' report was then written incorporating stakeholders' views and those of the independent educational consultant. It was presented to Shetland Islands Council in November 2013. The report continued to recommend the closure of Sandwick Junior High School secondary department. However, an amendment on the day of presentation to the council, led to the current proposal for Sandwick Junior High School.

1.2 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- attendance at the two public meetings held on the 4 and 5 of March 2014 at Sandwick Junior High School and Anderson High School respectively in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the sites of Sandwick Junior High School and Anderson High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal on children and young people of Sandwick Junior High and Anderson High Schools; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;

- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.5 The proposal is to discontinue S3 and S4 at Sandwick Junior High. As this is defined in the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* as the discontinuation of stages of education within a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of:

- viable alternatives to the closure of S3 and S4 at Sandwick Junior High School;
- the likely effect on the local community with regard to sustainability and on the community's access to the buildings, grounds and facilities if the council were to discontinue education at these stages in the school; and
- the likely effect of different travelling arrangements on the environment and on children and young people and other school users occasioned by the closure.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Shetland Islands Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. Responses from Parent Councils, parents, children and young people, community members and ex-pupils of Sandwick Junior High School were passed to Education Scotland by Shetland Islands Council. These had been obtained through completion of response forms issued by the council or through individual written or electronic responses, questionnaires issued by Sandwick Junior High School Parent Council, written responses from children and young people from Sandwick Junior High School completed through the council's consultation process and testimonials submitted by ex-pupils of Sandwick Junior High School.

2.2 Of the 316 responses passed to Education Scotland by Shetland Islands Council and one response sent to Education Scotland directly, almost all stated that they were not in favour of, or expressed significant concerns about, the proposal. A few expressed the view that although they appear to be supporting this proposal, it is only in preference to the alternative complete closure of the secondary department at Sandwick Junior High School. Overall, there was a recognition of the financial challenges faced by the council. However, significant concerns were expressed about the consequences of the proposal on young people and on the Sandwick community. Significant concerns were also expressed about the way in which the consultation was conducted and the resultant lack of clarity at a time when parents and young people are considering the optimum point of transition.

2.3 Overall, children and young people attending Sandwich Junior High School were not in favour of the proposal. They are proud of their community and felt that if the proposal goes ahead it would be detrimental to the identity of their community. Children and young people value the strong school ethos, a wide range of out-of-class activity and wider experiences in their local community. They feel that attending Anderson High School will result in significant additional travel time for many before and after school and fear that this will limit the range of after school activity and clubs that children and young people can experience. Some have already experienced being taught by teachers who work in more than one school and feel that this arrangement has negatively impacted on their education in a few subject areas. They stressed that this was not a reflection on the quality of such teachers but rather on the arrangement of splitting teachers between schools. They fear that this type of arrangement would occur on a bigger scale should this proposal go ahead and potentially would be detrimental to their education. Given the proposed date of August 2015, young people are concerned that those currently in S3 at Sandwich Junior High School will have experienced three transitions in quick succession. For example, they have already moved from P7 to Sandwich Junior High School, will then move to the current Anderson High School with a further move to the new Anderson High School when it is completed in 2016. A few young people currently at S2 are anxious about making decisions regarding their future. Children representing the pupil council from P1 to P7 felt that if the proposal were to go ahead it would be better to close the secondary department at Sandwich Junior High School as their preference would be to move to Anderson High School from P7.

2.4 A sample group of young people attending Anderson High School had mixed opinions about the proposal. A few thought that they would enjoy having more young people to socialise with and that an increased school population could potentially boost the popularity of clubs. Most were concerned that some of the social spaces are already over-crowded, particularly during inclement weather, and that an influx of approximately 80 additional young people would exacerbate this. They also felt that lunchtime queues would become even greater, encouraging more young people to purchase less healthy food outside of the school building. A few were concerned that there would be an increase in class sizes and felt that this may be detrimental to their learning. All were concerned that the possible multi-teacher arrangement within a subject would diminish the quality of their learning experiences. They felt that this issue would be more prominent in a few subject areas more than others. A group of senior pupils recognised that in light of financial considerations, changes would have to be made across the schools estate. However, they did not feel that the current proposal was the best possible option.

2.5 A significant number of parents of children and young people at Sandwich Junior High School felt that the current proposal had not been sufficiently well considered by the council. They felt that there had been insufficient informal consultation around the current proposal. They were unclear as to why the proposal to discontinue with S3 and S4 over any other of the previous suggestions became the model taken forward for formal consultation. Some reported that a series of questions were submitted by parents in response to the formal consultation document. However, parents reported that the council had not responded in a timely manner which would allow parents to consider them fully prior to the close of the

consultation period. Many of the council's answers were deemed to be insufficient and it was reported that in some cases the council did not respond at all. Many felt that the uncertainty about the future of the school over a prolonged period of time has led to a great deal of stress and a lowering of morale across the school community.

2.6 Parents at Sandwick Junior High School expressed concern over the timing of this proposal which they felt had caused anxiety and indecision for parents of young people currently finishing S2. As a consequence of advice from an independent education consultant that transition would be better at the end of S2 rather than the end of S3, a number of these parents have already submitted placing requests for Anderson High School despite their preference to retain S3 and S4 at Sandwick. They are therefore concerned that should the proposal not go ahead, their child will have already started at Anderson on the 27 May 2014 and it would be inappropriate to move them back to Sandwick. Parents also felt that it is unfair to alter current provision when young people are already experiencing changes in national qualifications.

2.7 Parents at Sandwick Junior High School also felt that children and young people attending Sandwick Junior High School receive a high-quality education in a spacious, bright and stimulating environment with a range of appropriate resources. They felt that the ethos is particularly strong, with staff providing a caring and nurturing environment. They pointed out that the school performs very well in national examinations and that children and young people experience a wide range of rich out-of-class activities. They felt that the council has not made a case for the educational benefits for young people of the proposal.

2.8 Although parents at Sandwick Junior High School recognised that the council has to make savings, they were not convinced that the savings outlined in the proposal are accurate as they believe that the council has not taken account of all possible factors. They felt that the perceived negative impacts of the proposal outweighed the estimated savings outlined in the proposal.

2.9 Parents at Sandwick Junior High School were concerned about new travel arrangements which will need to be put in place. They felt that some young people would be travelling in excess of two hours each day and that this would have a negative impact on their ability to achieve their full academic potential. They felt that this would constrain their access to the range of out-of-class activities currently available to them. Many young people currently enjoy the experience of walking or cycling to school and parents feel that with new travel arrangements this will not be possible and will therefore have a negative impact on young people's health and wellbeing. Parents felt that the council had not made the new travel arrangements clear to them and are concerned that young people will be travelling to and from school without adequate adult supervision on public transport. They were unclear of the policies and procedures that will be in place to overcome potentially problematic situations. For example, what would happen if the public service bus is full to capacity as has happened in the past. Some expressed concerns about travel during adverse weather conditions.

2.10 Parents at Sandwick Junior High School were also concerned about the longer term future of Sandwick Junior High School and cluster primary schools and the resultant effect on their community. They were also concerned that if Sandwick becomes a S1 and S2 school only, then there will be a resulting effect on teacher recruitment and retention. Other factors affecting viability were seen to be increased levels of placing requests to Anderson High at the end of P7 to minimise an additional transition point together with the attraction of a new purpose-built Anderson High School. Some expressed concern over the effect on local businesses, the attraction of the village and the surrounding area to families and the reduction or loss of volunteering activity carried out by young people.

2.11 A few parents in a focus group at Anderson High School had mixed views about the proposal. A few expressed concern about sharing teachers across schools. Other concerns included a possible decline in attainment in the initial transition phase for those moving at the end of S3 in the first year of the new structure were the proposal to take place. Parents were keen that young people are able to experience all of the possibilities of a senior phase that maximises partnership arrangements and is flexible enough to meet all young people's needs. A few felt that, given the current financial and educational climate, changes need to be made and that the council should make these sooner rather than later.

2.12 Overall, staff at Sandwick Junior High School were not in favour of the proposal. Teachers value the existing collaboration with colleagues within subject working groups. However, a few would welcome the increased opportunity to collaborate with a wider range of colleagues and share good practice within a larger school setting. They felt that this would support their professional development and help to develop further a professional learning community. They reported enjoying their roles in Sandwick. They believe that they provide strong pastoral and curricular support and a wide range of opportunities for young people to achieve. Some are concerned that a few young people with additional support needs will not progress as well in a larger school setting. Concerns were also raised about the proposed arrangements which will involve teachers travelling between schools. They felt that this will result in them being less able to provide this high-quality support. They enjoy the rich outdoor environment directly surrounding the school which allows stimulating contexts for learning and are concerned that this will be less accessible to them in their revised arrangements. Primary staff value collaboration with their secondary colleagues and believe that together they ensure as seamless a transition as possible. They are concerned that again this will be diminished with the new arrangements.

2.13 Teachers at Anderson High School were concerned about how the teacher sharing arrangement will work. They felt that similar arrangements that are already in place have not always been of educational benefit to young people. They believe that the arrangements have not provided the best working conditions for such teachers who have been put under considerable pressure as they strive to provide a continuous learning experience for young people. Teachers were concerned about achieving a seamless transition for young people entering S3 from other schools as currently they have had different curricular experiences. Senior managers were concerned about over-crowding of social spaces in the existing building with an influx

of young people. They are keen to develop the senior phase in line with the principles and vision of Curriculum for Excellence. However, they recognise that as partnerships develop it is becoming apparent that cohorts of young people joining at the end of S4 is not conducive to a continuous experience of the senior phase. Staff believe that if the proposal were to go ahead then it would be better for all young people if it were to coincide with the opening of the new school building.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 Sandwich Junior High School secondary department currently provides secondary education from S1 to S4 for young people living in the South Mainland of Shetland. In terms of the Scottish Government Condition Core Fact, the building has been assessed as Condition B. In terms of the Scottish Government Sustainability Core Fact, the building has been assessed as Condition A. Its roll at the time of the consultation was reported as 151 and is therefore currently running at 44% capacity. Anderson High School is a six year secondary school and provides education for young people from S1 to S6. In terms of the Scottish Government Condition Core Fact, the building has been assessed as Condition B. In terms of the Scottish Government Sustainability Core Fact, the building has been assessed as Condition B. Its roll at the time of the consultation was reported as 884 and is therefore currently running at 75% capacity. The social spaces are already reported by a range of stakeholders to be crowded. The new Anderson High School project includes the construction of a new four storey purpose-built secondary school with a capacity of 1,180 pupils. It is anticipated that the school will open in late summer 2016. It is not clear how young people moving to the current Anderson High School before the new build will benefit from the current accommodation.

3.2 It is clear from the financial situation and, in order to continue the principles and vision of Curriculum for Excellence, that there is a need for change in the way that education is organised in the Shetland Islands. The council reports that the way that their secondary high schools and junior high schools are arranged is not financially sustainable. Young people are entitled to experience a coherent curriculum from 3 to 18. Anderson High School is currently developing the senior phase further. It is continually developing positive partnerships with a range of businesses, organisations and further and higher educational establishments which is enabling them to provide a more innovative curriculum to meet diverse needs. Young people would benefit from the range of flexible learning pathways better if they had continuous experience of their senior phase from S4 to S6.

3.3 As stated in 3.2 young people are entitled to a coherent curriculum from 3 to 18. If the proposal goes ahead both schools would need to ensure that young people's entitlements to a broad general education are met. Anderson High School is confident that it can provide young people with their subject choices for specialisation when they enter S3 when the agreed point of transition arises. However, it is not clear how the process is going to be managed to ensure a seamless transition. For example, it is not clear how appropriate information will be communicated and how pupil profiles will be developed. To enhance transition the council has indicated that there are plans to introduce a common curriculum. However, it is not clear to the school community what this entails and how this will be

achieved. Also, in the future, Anderson High School plans to move to the new senior phase timetable immediately after the Easter break and it is not clear that plans for transition from this point for S2 young people from Sandwick have been considered.

3.4 It is the intention of the council that a number of teachers will work across schools. This would enable more opportunity for collaborative working and provide teachers the opportunity to experience a range of national qualifications. Although the council aims to keep travel between schools and the number of schools a teacher will work across to a minimum, it is envisaged that a number of teachers may be making multiple journeys across a week. It is possible that this may impact negatively on the range of out-of-class activities that young people currently enjoy. More significantly it is not clear from the proposal that this arrangement will be of educational benefit and will be a viable and cost effective solution. Teachers are anxious about the proposal as it is not clear to them how the new arrangements will work.

3.5 The council's proposal is based on best value, taking account of its responsibility to use its resources effectively and efficiently. The figures provided to consultees relate to global figures for aspects of the proposal. The council needs to make the financial aspects of this specific proposal more transparent to enable a shared understanding of how this contributes to the overall business case.

3.6 As the proposal will lead to the discontinuation of stages of education within a rural school as defined in the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which the council should have special regard. HM Inspectors took account of the council's consideration of the viability of alternatives to discontinuing these stages of education in the school. The council has been aware of the financial situation for some time and has been making cost savings in a range of ways over a period of time to avoid closure. However, it still has considerable savings to make. The council took reasonable steps to consult with parents of children and young people at both schools on a range of different options and over a substantial period of time before proceeding to consult on discontinuing education of two stages in the secondary department. However, despite comprehensive consultation, it appears that the current proposal was unexpected and that the council did not undertake the same level of informal consultation as it had with other options. It is not clear to HM Inspectors that the current proposal is the most viable or reasonable option. In its final consultation report, the council will need to explain why it believes this to be the case.

3.7 An initial impact assessment has been carried out and the council has considered the effects on the community to be minimal. It has already commissioned an independent and fuller impact assessment to be carried out. The council does recognise that there may be an impact on young people's wider experiences. It intends to work with providers such as the leisure centre to adapt timings of classes to enable young people access to activities. The council recognises that there may be a greater problem in recruiting teachers to Sandwick Junior High School should the secondary department only educate young people at S1 and S2. It is committed through a teacher sharing arrangement to ensuring that

every teacher will have the opportunity to develop courses and programmes and present young people for national qualifications.

3.8 It is not clear to HM Inspectors that the current timeline for this proposal is the best option for young people. The council should consider further the option of delaying the proposal to coincide with the opening of the new Anderson High School. This would enable time to address some of the issues such as developing the common curriculum, avoiding too many transitions in a short space of time and the potential over-crowding of social spaces in the current Anderson High School building.

3.9 The council has given a commitment that no young person will travel for more than 65 minutes for a journey to or from school. It has yet to make the travel arrangements clear, including whether the transport provided will be on a public service or privately contracted bus. The council is however in the final stages of a tendering exercise for local public services and school transport. New bus contracts for all public services and school transport services will be in place for August 2014.

4. Summary

4.1 The council has made a clear case that for, reasons of financial sustainability and the need to develop a coherent senior phase for young people which meets their diverse needs and aspirations, the current arrangement of providing education for the S1 to S4 stages at Sandwick Junior High School is neither viable nor in the best interests of children and young people. However, in the consultation proposal, the council has not set out a convincing case that the discontinuation of S3 and S4 at Sandwick High School is the most reasonable and viable option and will deliver clear educational benefits for the children and young people directly affected by it.

4.2 In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to explain clearly why it believes the current proposal is the most reasonable and viable option open to it. In its final consultation report, the council needs to set out clearly the transitional arrangements to ensure that children and young people receive their entitlement to a broad general education and that there is continuity and progression in their learning. Part of this should be a consideration of the option to delay implementation of the proposal until August 2016 when the new Anderson High School is scheduled to be completed. In its final consultation report, the council needs to define what it means by a common curriculum and how this will be achieved to enhance the transition process. The council also needs to provide further details on the proposed arrangement for sharing teachers across schools to demonstrate how these arrangements will benefit children and young people's learning experiences and are a viable and cost effective option. The council needs to set out more clearly and transparently the financial case for the proposal and how the cost savings have been calculated. Finally, the council needs to set out clearly the arrangements it will make to reduce any potential negative impact on the community of the proposal and address the reasonable concerns of consultees on the travel arrangements it proposes. In taking these actions and in finalising the proposal, the council should ensure it continues to work closely in partnership with parents, staff, children, young people and the wider community.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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