

MINUTE 'B'

'A' &

**Special Services Committee
Main Hall, Town Hall, Lerwick
Friday 8 November 2002 at 10.30 am**

Present:

P Malcolmson	R J Anderson
L Angus	Dr C M Begg
R I Black	A J Cluness
M U Colligan	C B Eunson
Dr C A Goodlad	F B Grains
I J Hawkins	W H Manson
J P Nicolson	W A Ratter
J M Ritch	F A Robertson
J G Simpson	T W Stove
W N Stove	

Apologies:

J C Irvine	W Tait
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In Attendance (Officers):

M Goodlad, Chief Executive
J Watt, Executive Director – Community Services
A Jamieson, Head of Education Service
H Budge, Senior Education Officer
E Smaaskjaer, Administration Manager
G Smith, Head of Community Development Service
S Crook, Service Re-Design Manager, Better Integrated Children's Services
S Hughes, Financial Support Services Manager
L Geddes, Committee Officer

Chairman:

Mr P Malcolmson, Chairman of the Committee, presided.

Circular:

The circular calling the meeting was held as read.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the special meeting of the Services Committee, and introduced officers to members of the public present. He went on to thank the Head of Education Service for the work he had carried out on the report in such a short period of time.

116/02 **Best Value Service Review – A Long Term Strategy for Education**

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Education Service and the Executive Director – Community Services (Appendix 1).

The Chairman advised that he had received petitions regarding the proposed closures of Quarff Primary School and Scalloway Junior High School. Mr J G Simpson had also received a petition regarding the proposed closure of Skerries School secondary department.

The Executive Director and the Head of Education Service then gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Committee entitled "Best Value Service Review – Education Service: Proposals for a Revised Scheme of Provision" (copy of slides attached as Appendix 1a) which explained the reasoning behind the report, the key drivers for change, the financial context and consultation. It then went on to consider a critical appraisal of the current model of delivery and the proposals and key principles behind the proposed model. The presentation concluded by summarising the long-term strategy for the scheme of provision.

The Head of Education Service advised that the second paragraph of paragraph 4.8 of the report should be amended as follows: -

"The closure of small primary schools could be considered under the following circumstances:

Prime Consideration

- It is deemed to be of educational benefit to the pupils.

Secondary Considerations

- When a school building is being considered for major refurbishment or new build.
- There has been a significant reduction in the school roll over a number of years and future trends indicate that this is unlikely to change.
- When the community makes a request through their school board".

He went on to advise that the proposals in the report were based on quality and equality of provision. They were a conscious attempt to suggest a strategy for a best value, quality education to Shetland as a whole, and one that was sustainable into the foreseeable future.

Before the debate commenced, the Chairman, Mr P Malcolmson, said that he would like to say a few words as to why this report was now necessary. He advised that there were now pressures on the Council which had not existed before. The Scottish Executive, in

particular, were demanding that local authorities carry out best value service reviews on all services delivered. The HMI report had also exposed considerable weaknesses and, as a result, they had made a number of recommendations. It had also become necessary for the Council to look for economies within their revenue budgets, and the downturn in the stock market was impinging on other investments. The Council wished to provide the best educational experience for children in the community by providing a quality service which assured equality across the board and, he felt, the only way to do this was to accept the report findings. Whilst the recommendations in the report would start the process, it was not possible to pre-judge the outcome. There was also a legal process of consultation which would have to be carried out in the communities affected, as well as scrutiny from the Scottish Executive on any future proposals. He concluded by pointing out that, for the avoidance of doubt, the proposal in the report referring to Scalloway Junior High School was for further examination of continued provision of secondary education, so it would be necessary for further reports to come forward. It did not mean that the Council were proposing to close the Scalloway secondary department today.

Mr Malcolmson went on to move the recommendations in the report, explaining that he was doing this not to inhibit discussion, but to help to focus the discussion so that amendments were set against this motion.

In seconding Mr Malcolmson's motion, Mr W A Ratter paid tribute to Members and officers who had been involved in the whole best value process. He said that he felt the management of the education service had greatly improved and he emphasised what he felt were a number of positive factors, referring in particular to the Community Schools model and the Better Integration of Children's Services model. He also referred to improved communications and transport and said that he felt a dispersed model based on community schools was the way forward in Shetland, as opposed to a centralised model where children had to attend secondary school in Lerwick. Although expensive, he felt that two-teacher schools would be essential to this dispersed model.

Mr R J Anderson referred to, what he considered to be, the absence of financial information in the report which would determine if the proposals were cost-effective and value for money. He also referred to the HMI report which had stated that pupils, in the main, enjoyed a high standard of education. However, there appeared to be nothing in the report to address concerns raised regarding management, leadership and quality assurance. He then went on to speak about a new site for the Anderson High School and said that, in the interests of pupils and staff, a new

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school was required on a new site and that he would like to see this investigated. He also referred to what, he felt, was a lack of consultation with the community regarding the proposed closure of schools.

He therefore moved, as an amendment, that: -

- (1) the report is noted;
- (2) the Executive Director of Community Services is instructed to report back to a further special meeting of the Services Committee on: -
 - (a) the cost of educating pupils in smaller schools under the present system together with the cost of education of these pupils under the system proposed today, together with the total annual cost under the new scheme of provision. That report should contain the results of consultation with the community in the areas affected,
 - (b) various funding sources and up-to-date costings and benefits of a new build at the Anderson High School at Clickimin,
 - (c) the special meeting of the Services Committee is held prior to the scheduled meeting of the Services Committee on 12 February 2003.

Mr F A Robertson seconded.

In response to a query, Mr R J Anderson confirmed that his motion included further examination of Scalloway Junior High School.

Notices of further amendment were given by the following: -

Mrs I J Hawkins
Mr J G Simpson
Mr W H Manson
Mr F A Robertson
Mr C B Eunson
Mr R I Black
Mr J M Ritch
Dr C M Begg
Mr J P Nicolson
Dr C A Goodlad

After summing up, voting took place by show of hands and the result was as follows:

Amendment (Mr R J Anderson)	6
Motion (Mr P Malcolmson)	12

Clarification was requested regarding paragraph 8.8 of the report. The Chairman advised that this paragraph would be deleted, as the proposal in the report stated only that the continued provision of secondary education in Scalloway is examined further. Some Members felt that it was important that secondary provision was provided in Scalloway to provide a counter balance to Lerwick and suggested that Scalloway was promoted for a specialised kind of secondary education. Others felt that the community had nothing to fear by further examination of secondary provision, and that they should be ready to justify their case.

Some discussion took place regarding the situation in Lerwick. It was noted that the largest concentration of pupils, around 1600, were in the Lerwick area, but that these pupils had always been disadvantaged in terms of accommodation. This would be further exacerbated in the future should the closure of schools go ahead, and due to further housing developments in the north of Lerwick and Sound. Some Members said that this should be dealt with as a matter of urgency, and said that they would like to have seen something firmer regarding this in the report.

A Member commented that, in implementing the recommendations of the McCrone Report, Shetland was bottom of the league as the funding formula was based on the number of pupils, not number of schools. He said that he hoped that further campaigns would be conducted at the highest officer level and political level in order to improve this situation.

(During the following discussion Mrs M U Colligan, Mr J G Simpson, Mr W A Ratter and Dr C A Goodlad left, and returned, to the meeting)

Speaking in support of the recommendations in the report, some Members complimented officers on a very clear report and commented that they were content with the proposed scheme of provision and with the reasoning behind it. It was commented that the statement that the current scheme of provision did not provide the best educational experience, and was not sustainable, gave a clear message that the status quo was not an option and that change is necessary. The recommendations in the report provided a vehicle to move this forward, and it was recognised that any changes would be phased in gradually.

Reference was made to the external factors driving the Best Value Service Review, and the HMI Report which had concluded that Shetland Islands Council was not demonstrating value for money. It was also noted that the recommendations in the report were

attempting to ensure equality of provision, and therefore closing the gap between education in one-teacher schools and the largest schools. The recommendations would also assist in dealing with the administrative problems faced by teaching Head Teachers.

Some Members commented that, whilst they recognised the feelings of communities facing proposed closures, they felt that what was being offered, particularly through the Community Schools model and integrated multi-agency approaches, was better. It was noted that any proposed school closures would have to be scrutinised by the Scottish Executive, and Members commented that the consultation process would be robust and would take account of parental concerns. A Member commented that, should the proposed closures go ahead, he would ensure that the transport networks were examined in parallel.

(During the following discussion Mr F A Robertson, Mr R I Black, Mr L Angus, Mr J P Nicolson and Mr R J Anderson left, and returned, to the meeting)

(Mr P Malcolmson left the meeting and Mr J M Ritch took the Chair)

Members who did not support the recommendations in the report emphasised the strength of support for the schools in the proposed closure areas. Concern was expressed that, whilst the consultation process had been going on for 20 months, Members had only had the report for six days. Members advised that they had received representations from their constituents, who did not feel that being taught in one-teacher schools was at all detrimental to a child's education. The poor infrastructure, especially in Sandness and North Roe, was referred to and it was felt that, despite the relatively short distances, it would not be appropriate for young children to be expected to travel these routes every day due to the poor condition of the roads.

(Mr P Malcolmson returned to the meeting and resumed the Chair)

Members particularly referred to the detrimental social and economic impact of the closure in schools in peripheral areas, and spoke of the potential impact of closures in their individual constituencies. A Member expressed concern that he felt the Council were being pushed into a Scottish lowland model of delivery which did not really provide for local concerns. Some Members also criticised the lack of financial information in the report, and said that they would like to have seen more information regarding how many pupils attend nursery, primary and secondary schools in their own areas and how many travel outwith.

A Member referred to paragraph 1.6 of the report, and enquired as to the role of teaching Head Teachers in 2-4 teacher schools. The Head of Education Service explained that, whilst it would be desirable to have a situation where there were no teaching Head Teachers, this would not be possible in Shetland. Therefore there would still have to be teaching Head Teachers in 2-4 teacher schools.

Mrs I J Hawkins referred to earlier assurances that the best value service review was not a cost-cutting exercise, and said she felt that the proposals in the report suggested that this was not the case. She particularly referred to the transfer of secondary pupils from Scalloway Junior High School to the Anderson High School, and said that there was no suggestion that this would improve the quality of education for these pupils. Exam results from previous years had shown that pupils at Scalloway Junior High School had achieved better results than Anderson High School pupils, so this suggested that the quality of education would be lower. She referred to the consultation exercise where 79.6% of parents of secondary pupils had said that pupils should have the opportunity to attend secondary education in their own area, but that this was not carried through to the proposals in the report. She went on to speak about community and historical links for retaining secondary education at Scalloway Junior High School. She suggested that, as the main reason for pupils transferring to Lerwick instead of Scalloway was to avoid the need for transferring again after Secondary 4, education at Scalloway Junior High School should be upgraded to cater for Secondary 5 and 6. This had also been put forward by School Boards.

Mrs Hawkins therefore moved, as an amendment, that: -

- (a) Scalloway Junior High School be upgraded to cater for Secondary 1-6, and that the catchment area continues to be Burra, Trondra, Nesting, Tingwall, Whiteness and Weisdale;
- (b) the findings of the various consultation exercises which have been carried out as outlined at 2.6 are noted;
- (c) the proposals at paragraphs 5.4 and 5.6.6 are endorsed;
- (d) the Head of Education Service is authorised to come forward with implementation plans on (a) and (c) of the report;
- (e) meaningful consultation is carried out on all other proposals.

Mr J G Simpson seconded.

After summing up, voting took place by show of hands and the result was as follows: -

Amendment (Mrs I J Hawkins)	3
Motion (Mr P Malcolmson)	12

(Mr F A Robertson and Mr R I Black left, and returned, to the meeting during the following discussion)

Mr J G Simpson asked for clarification regarding paragraphs 8.1 and 8.9 of the report, and was assured by the Chairman that this was part of the consultation process. Mr Simpson then went on to speak about the proposed closure of the secondary department in Skerries School, pointing out that the petition received had been signed by everyone in Skerries. He advised that the Skerries School constantly produced excellent results, and that the young people there did not lack social skills. They felt that to receive a secondary education in their own home was a fundamental right. There was much concern that the closure of the secondary department would result in depopulation and have a detrimental effect on the Skerries community, which was of significant value to the Shetland economy. The fact that secondary education was available in Skerries was a selling point for the islands, and the school role was increasing. He advised that the length of journey involved meant that it was not realistic for pupils to travel home at the weekends. A new extension to the school, at a cost of £0.75million, had recently been opened and he questioned how it could be best value to provide Skerries with one of the best-equipped schools in Shetland, then close it.

Mr Simpson went on to move, as an amendment, that the recommendation to close Skerries secondary department be removed from this report.

Mr R J Anderson seconded.

After summing up, voting took place by show of hands and the result was as follows: -

Amendment (Mr J G Simpson)	8
Motion (Mr P Malcolmson)	9

Mr W H Manson said that he had a number of queries about the report regarding the timing and timescale, social and community impact, educational standards and financial and budgetary implications. He expressed concern that, after 20 months preparation, Members were only given six days to consider the report. He pointed out that the SIC had a policy to support rural and fragile communities, and that the location of a school in an

area was a major factor in encouraging families to move there. He pointed out that the potential costs to the community of the proposed school closures were enormous.

Mr Manson therefore moved, as an amendment, that: -

- (a) the findings of the various consultation exercises which have been carried out as outlined at 2.6 are noted;
- (b) the proposals at paragraph 5.6.6 are endorsed;
- (c) the Head of Education Service is authorised to come forward with plans for (b) above;
- (d) consideration is completed on Scalloway Junior High School, and on other matters not finalised in this report, to recommend a robust scheme of provision which stands a reasonable chance of enduring for thirty years;
- (e) a report and debate is called for which considers realistically the Shetland of today and this Council's policy of support and maintenance for its peripheral communities.

Mr F A Robertson seconded.

A Member asked for clarification that, with the exception of 5.6.6 and the reference to Scalloway Junior High School, all other clauses in paragraph 5.5 would be removed. Mr W H Manson replied that these clauses would , effectively, be removed.

After summing up, voting took place by show of hands and the result was as follows: -

Amendment (Mr W H Manson)	8
Motion (Mr P Malcolmson)	11

(Mr L Angus and Mr J P Nicolson left, and returned, to the meeting during the following discussion)

Mr F A Robertson referred to the aims of economic and social inclusion included in the Corporate Plan, and commented that the location of schools was important in encouraging young people to settle in communities. He went on to speak about the Sandness School, which had recently been refurbished, and advised that parents refuted all concerns regarding small schools raised in the report, pointing out that the performance of Sandness children was continually above average. He added that the distance between Sandness and Walls was only 7-8 miles, but that it was one of the worst pieces of road in Shetland. The closure of the school, it was

felt, would have a detrimental effect on the community and would discourage people from settling in an area where there was only one main source of employment. Mr Robertson referred to scrutiny by the Scottish Executive, and said that he felt that once a particular school had been earmarked for closure the process would start, and that Scottish ministers would come down on the side of the Council.

Mr Robertson went on to move, as an amendment, that paragraph 5.5 of the report be excluded in its entirety until such time as consultation is carried out with parents and School Boards.

Mr W H Manson seconded.

After summing up, voting took place by show of hands and the result was as follows: -

Amendment (Mr F A Robertson)	8
Motion (Mr P Malcolmson)	10

Mr R I Black, Mr J M Ritch, Mr C B Eunson, Dr C M Begg, Mr J P Nicolson and Dr C A Goodlad withdrew their notices of further amendment. Therefore Mr P Malcolmson's motion was declared the finding of the meeting.