



MINUTES

Avoch Primary School Parent Council

2nd June 2021 | 7.00PM

In Attendance by Zoom

Ruth Edmonds (Chair), Phoebe McDaid, Claire Weaver, Fiona Whyte, Kirsty Cameron, Ingrid Robertson, Debbie du Preez,

APS: Lorna Sim and Wanda Clark

Councillors: Craig Fraser and Gordon Adam

Avoch & Killen Community Council: Helen Baillot

Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council: Lucy Tonkin

Apologies

Jacqui Dingwall, Asia Kucharczyk, Julie Mackay

1 Review of Minutes from 27th April

- It was agreed to postpone a fundraising event this term due to limited time and opportunity to promote it widely.
- Sarah Byham has been back in touch to discuss the Outdoor Space project. This is progressing in discussion with Ingrid and Ruth. Wanda confirmed that Sarah has a development plan to use for this, but she will also send on a template that may be of use too.
- Lorna is still considering the best option for a sensitive and lasting memorial to Mrs Jack; nothing has been decided yet.
- Prizes for the School Growing Challenge might be seeds, gardening kits or gloves. Sarah Byham thought that this would work best as an individual prize, rather than a whole class prize and could be given at Leaving Assembly. It was agreed that the prizes will be funded from our budget.
- Morgan Sindall, who are building the new nursery, have agreed to help organise and supply material for our proposed new raised beds. Sarah thinks the raised beds will be mainly used with Buddy Classes. The BI Men's Shed have also offered support, hopefully before the next session starts. Claire asked for photos to document the build that could be shared on Facebook to engage the community and this was agreed.
- There has already been progress with the Sensory Garden; there is a draft plan and a funding application for c£5k will be going in next week to cover materials such as plants, stones, slabs and willow. We already have some other donations for this and it has been a great way to involve the wider community. The next step is to seek input from the children and hopefully from parents/carers too. There is a PC sub-group who will be contacting the school soon to take this forward.
- Ruth had met with AKCC about the issues around maintaining the pitch and progressing with drainage issues. She will be meeting with Struan Landscaping next week. It was noted that there are ongoing cost implications with this approach because maintenance is needed every two years. The requirement will be c.£700 every two years. We could do a big one-off fundraiser to ring fence money for the pitch maintenance. This will be costed out in more detail soon once the quote is secured.

- The Men's Shed will be doing an audit of the school grounds soon to see where they could contribute. This could be for small jobs needing done as well as providing benches, planters, etc that may be required or needing to be replaced.
- Bikeability – Fiona will provide a post on Facebook to update the Bikeability plans for next season. Lorna confirmed that she already let the P6s know that this will be delayed till the next school year.
- Breakfast Club – WC confirmed that the staffing issue remains, and we are no further forward, Wanda and Lorna are still covering the early slot but this is not sustainable and HC say it must close as new staff have not been found. This will be discussed further later this week – but the future doesn't look good. Ingrid asked if UHI students who have already had a placement at the school would be an option to follow-up. Wanda will explore this possibility as there has been no luck so far with advertising. Phoebe stressed the need to keep it going until the end of term as if it shuts now it is more likely that it will not re-open in August and it is a much needed and hard-won service.
Action – Wanda to follow up with UHI option. Ruth to check if other schools have a similar issue and will raise it with other BI PCs and with HCPC group.
- The PC gave a donation to the P7 school trip and agreed with Karen Patience to develop a flyer for the Transition to P1 event on 8th June. Debbie and Ruth will attend this.

The Minutes were approved.

2 Report from the School, Lorna Sim

A few things to update you on and some that I can't as I am still waiting for information from the Authority. If we start with what I don't know to date- I don't know staffing for next year nor do I know the final number of pupils for next session.

What I do know is that we will have a raised roll which currently is sitting at 290 plus 40 nursery. At present we plan the status quo at 11 classes but to allow for this we will utilise the GP room instead of the current P7/6 room which allows a few more to fit in. The nursery's new opening date is November so the nursery children will stay in the Scout hall until then. Once the nursery is complete it will free up the old nursery as an additional classroom for the school and we will get back our GP room.

I can also report that despite unfounded gossip, Morgan Sindall, the builder of the nursery are doing a very good job and are kind and helpful and especially the site manager. Any delays have not been their fault but outwith anyone's control.

I also know that after interviews a new Head teacher has been appointed. Her name is Lynsey Third and I believe she will be a good Head Teacher for the school. She is very approachable and I think that staff, pupils and parents will like her and what she brings to Avoch.

As you know this is my final head teacher update and my final parent council meeting. Being the HT of Avoch for 9 years has been an absolute pleasure- the children are the most polite hardworking and gracious children. I will miss them hugely

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your enthusiasm and proactive approach towards making Avoch primary, the very best school it can be. Above all I thank you for your support.

The past two years have been full of challenges- from the unexpected water tank fiasco, to the unexpected school closures and all that entailed and continues to entail. Leading a school through a pandemic has unsurprisingly been the most challenging time of my 41 year career. However, all that said, I have been very, very grateful to the parent council for making it that bit easier. I believe, we have strengthened our partnership and I wish this partnership all the very best in the future.

Questions:

In response to a question regarding the use of the old nursery as a classroom or GP room, it was confirmed that the new nursery and the former nursery are linked and neither could be available until the build is completed and signed-off by HC Building Standards. The expected completion date has been delayed until November.

Treasurer's Report, Claire

Our funds are healthy, having started this session on £20k. We have just had some additional funds coming from the Lottery. Our only output recently was for the P7 daytrip at a cost of £330. The full report is provided as an Appendix.

School Roll – with Lucy Tonkin from FRCC and Helen Baillot from AKCC in attendance

Concerns have been raised by parents/carers as well as within the wider community and the community councils. The school is currently at 99% capacity and continues to rise. The school roll predictions were made public in February and stated that Avoch will be at 105% capacity within five years. Avoch Primary has a far greater % capacity and has had far less investment than some the other Black Isle schools. Avoch already contributes at least half the role to Fortrose Academy in each school year and it is not justifiable that Avoch is losing out in terms of primary school resources.

Ruth expressed concern that with the new, ongoing and proposed developments in the catchment area, this is a clear concern and wants clarification that it is being considered appropriately by Highland Council. The school is already under-resourced for a roll of this size as it should have a second hall as a minimum. LS said that when the new nursery is built we will have an extra classroom so won't be at capacity

Highland Council uses a formula to calculate the predicted roll and subsequent requirement for additional resources that is based on 1 child per 5 new houses on new developments. PC members noted that this seems low, particularly as the new housing developments in the area are being marketed for young families. Ingrid asked if we can get clarification on this formula and if we can provide our own evidence. Would it be possible to get current population/housing data that could provide clarification on the accuracy of this formula as we need to work from a correct baseline. Phoebe notes that the last time the school roll was predicted, it was vastly wrong and so an accurate calculation needs to be sorted as a priority.

It is expected that there will be children moving into the area as the new homes are completed. The school is predicted to be over-capacity very soon and the roll will not fall. We need to be more vocal as this affects half the children on the Black Isle which is not acceptable.

Cllr Craig Fraser agrees that Avoch will be over capacity very soon looking at the HC figures. The other BI schools are way down at around 50-60% capacity. Craig notes that the impact on the school has always been raised at planning committee for these new developments (as well as the impacts on other resources such as the surgery and roads infrastructure) but that it does not always appear to get taken on board.

Ingrid had spoken with HC Principal Planner, Tim Stott in regard to the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan consultation who had said that you can't (in policy) prevent housing development because there is a lack of infrastructure. The rationale from HC is that the most recent developer cannot be penalised because of the infrastructure – in other words they will not without further development because of existing infrastructure issues. The school has already been impacted because of the new attenuation tank that was required purely for the benefit of the new housing, not the wider community which illustrates this point. It is a shame that we do not see a joined-up approach from HC in this regard. The school roll falls under the Education Committee and there seems to be little or no interaction with the Planning and Development Committee where decisions are made that impacts the school. Ingrid had also spoken to Derek Martin (HC Area Care and Learning Manager) about forecasting class sizes and it seems that the predictions rely entirely

on the past five years, rather than being based on new housing specifically. Ingrid said we must be reactive, keeping ahead of the curve, rather than simply reacting to potentially inaccurate forecasts.

Cllr Gordon Adam noted that the roll for Fortrose Academy is forecast to fall and that this means that this is a problem tied specifically to Avoch PS and not the other feeder schools. Cromarty APC had already asked for the catchment boundaries to be redrawn due to their falling roll some years back. This is not straightforward and it did not go ahead but redrawing the catchments may be a solution in the future. There is now no chance of funding to provide another new school even though one has been mooted at Fortrose for decades. He agreed that Resolis and Culbokie were expensive new-builds and arguably had not been necessary, but that argument has passed now. Ruth noted that redrawing the catchment areas was not a popular idea but said it may provide a possible solution in the future. It was agreed that this is a difficult situation. There would be additional travel cost implications if, for example, the Rosemarkie children were put to Cromarty or Resolis, however this would certainly be less than the cost of a new school. At the moment it is not even clear if Cromarty or Resolis would have enough space anyway. Craig Fraser said that if a catchment boundary change is ever mooted seriously as an option, we would need a bus transport cost benefit analysis and should ask for this if we are proposing any catchment change.

Our Community Council reps were asked to respond. Helen from AKCC noted that she had raised the issue of the school roll often, most recently at the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan meeting about resources in the area. She hasn't seen / is not aware of meaningful consultation with Education providers on any big planning applications. AKCC has lodged objections recently to developments in Avoch on the grounds of roads, traffic and general resources, especially including the school roll. The CC want to have a greater role in planning responses and ask to be consulted more and earlier. Lucy Tonkin from FRCC noted a similar issue and is happy to support the concerns raised here. Lucy said that FRCC are mostly concerned about the road infrastructure and the transport into school; the buses are full and the bus stops are packed and not very safe. Fortrose and Rosemarkie have no specific signage to say that children are on the roads, etc, not even a 20mph flashing sign as Munloch has.

The issue of developer contributions was raised by Fiona who wanted clarity on where the funds are going and if any of them can be accessed to provide additional school resources. Ingrid confirmed that the Avoch Cairn housing site had given a contribution of £38k but we don't know where it had gone and if there was a direct benefit to the community. Helen of AKCC has been pursuing this without success to date. What we need is clarity to specify where this goes, which would both placate the community and hopefully provide a solution.

Gordon Adam had written to Tim Stott and got a detailed, complicated, reply. This said that we *can* get developer contributions for Avoch but that these could be challenged and so must be in accordance with ScotGov statute. In the future, communities will get a bigger say in how the money is spent, but this will first require a change in the law at ScotGov level. Gordon will send this note to Ruth and Helen. Gordon queried what Ingrid had been told about education infrastructure not holding up development (via Tim Stott) as he did not believe this was the case. Gordon reiterated that the Inner Moray Firth Development Plan is clear on restricting new development to 'preferred sites' and so the large development at the south end of Avoch is not likely to get consent. The council can't go back on what has already been approved, but consent for more big developments will be harder to agree from this point forward.

We have a good case to put forward to request more resources for Avoch and this will be pursued.

Actions:

Ruth to discuss with HCPC Forum to see if other PCs have had success in this regard and if there are collective concerns about school rolls / capacity which could be mobilized to support Avoch PS.

Ruth/Ingrid will provide a bullet-point summary of the main issues of concern that can be shared and agreed with the community councils and councillors before being put to the Highland Council.

Bus Stop (Helen Baillot from AKCC in attendance)

A public bus stop has appeared in our layby without any consultation, even with the school. The old bus stop has been removed. Lorna has been pursuing this, as has Helen as Chair of AKCC. Ruth has noted our concern with Highland Council. The layby is school property and is maintained by the school out of the school's budget. Ruth had been in touch with our HC Estates contact as well as other representatives from Highland Council to attend for this item, but no-one was available. We have since been told that the new bus stop was stipulated as part of the planning consent for the new housing across the road.

Our concerns are mainly regarding the safety of the children if this continues as a public bus stop. In addition, there is the need for our buses or occasional hired coaches to wait there which can now no longer happen. The school has also worked hard for the Police to be able to use this for a mobile safety unit (to monitor vehicle speed) and this will no longer be available to them. It may also encourage public use throughout the day of the private school path as a short cut across the village. Ruth had received today a response from Dafydd Jones, Head of Planning that confirmed it was a requirement of the planning consent but did not otherwise address the concerns we raised.

Helen AKCC notes that the safety concerns are real and there is no evidence provided to show that this has been considered before a decision was made. There is a plan available on the planning website and this was also forwarded by Dafydd Jones, but it was disingenuous if the planners would expect anyone to have commented on it without notification. Additional consultation would have been expected for this and for the pedestrian crossing.

Cllr Craig Fraser noted that he spoke at the planning committee for this report and does not remember that any of these issues or associated safety concerns were raised at that time. This decision seems to be contrary to the Safer Routes to School campaign. Craig stated that it would be reasonable and justified to ask that this is revisited from a planning perspective. He also suggested that we should raise it directly with Stagecoach to get their opinion on the change as there are likely to be clashes with the public bus timetable as well as an additional junction requirement when public buses are exiting the lay-by and re-joining the road. Craig suggested we talk to HC Transport Planning to see if a full traffic management assessment was carried out or can be carried out now to assess this change.

Cllr Gordon Adam agrees that the lack of consultation in this instance is a serious omission. Lorna confirmed that if we had been made aware, the school would have raised objections at the time and that the present situation is not workable.

We will ask for the situation to be revisited and hope that the bus stop can be re-sited outwith the school layby. If this situation is to stand, we will require HC to pay for the maintenance of the lay-by as there will be extra half-hourly buses using it. Helen would support this approach for AKCC. Ruth asks for and receives the support of Gordon and Craig on this issue.

Action: Ruth will talk to D&E school buses and Stagecoach before writing a document laying our concerns in response to Dafydd Jones.

Parent Engagement

Parent Engagement is on the School Improvement Plan for next year and we have been offered the opportunity to attend a session on 14th June. A few teachers from the school including Miss Young and Miss Patience will go. Claire will attend on behalf of the PC. The opportunity to attend is welcomed, especially with the new Head in post next year. Lorna says that over 96% of parent/carers took part in the recent parents evening and this seems to have been a small positive impact of the need to move to online sessions.

AOB

Wanda asked if we had a useful contact for photography that could be used for a group nursery shot, though there are no school funds for this. Claire had a contact down as Cat of Magic in the Woods, who is an Avoch parent.

Class Reps: we need to start promoting this soon although Lorna confirmed that the classes cannot be finalised yet. Debbie provided assurance that the information can remain non-specific so we will get this out soon to muster interest and then follow it up later on asking for a rep from each finalised class and the nursery.

Lorna will invite all new parent/carers to come to the meeting on Tuesday 8 June as well as the new P1 and nursery parent/carers. Ruth asked for APC volunteers to attend the meeting.

Ruth gave thanks and a farewell to Lorna for her nine years as our Head. Her dedication and commitment to the school has been appreciated.

Date of Next Meeting

This will take place following the start of the new school year, most likely in September 2021.

Appendix 1 – TREASURER'S REPORT

AVOCH PARENT COUNCIL			TREASURER REPORT		2nd June 2021	
Opening balance as at 24th March 2021					£20,591.05	
Income						
Your School Lottery				£158.80		
					£158.80	Total Income
Expenditure						
					£0.00	Total Expenditure
Closing balance as at 13th April 2021					£20,749.85	
					£13,037.23	(Play equipment fund)
					£921.82	(Outdoor fund)
					£6,790.80	Net Total
Outstanding Items:						
	Income	Expenditure				
Avoch Primary P7 trip		£330.00				
			Total	330		
			Net Total	£6,460.80		

Playground equipment funds	
Funder	Total
APC	£5,000.00
Raddery Trust	£5,000.00
BIG Stall	£454.01
Envoy	£250.00
Ross-shire Engineering	£250.00
Avoch Harbour Chippy	£60.00
Tullochs	£500.00
Christmas Raffles	£1,523.22
Total	13037.23