

# North Lanarkshire Council Report

## Policy and Strategy Committee

approval  noting

Ref DB/TOH

Date 31/01/20

## Review of Outdoor Education

**From** Executive Director of Education and Families

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### Executive Summary

At the Council Budget meeting of 21 February 2019, members rejected the budget savings proposal to close Kilbowie Outdoor Education Centre and requested a wider review of outdoor education provision be undertaken during 2019/20 to examine future models and options.

This report highlights the outcome of this review, informed by feedback from key stakeholders, to provide a sustainable way forward for the future of Outdoor Education in North Lanarkshire.

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### Recommendations

The Policy and Strategy Committee is recommended to:--

- (1) Note the outcome of the updated report and the review of outdoor education provision
- (2) Consider and agree to either:
  - a. Fund the continuation of Kilbowie Outdoor Centre and agree associated subsidy levels, or,
  - b. Close Kilbowie Outdoor Centre and phase out activity during 2020/21 in line with existing commitments and the development of alternative options

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### The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Improve North Lanarkshire's resource base

Ambition statement (4) Market and promote North Lanarkshire as the place to live, learn, work, invest, and visit

## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 Kilbowie Outdoor Centre, which is based in Oban (over 100 miles from North Lanarkshire) opened in October 1991 following a transfer of staff and equipment from Caldercruix Outdoor Centre. From this starting position, with an average group size of 35 facilitated by 4 instructors, Kilbowie has grown and currently has space for 120 pupils facilitated by 13 instructors and 3 support staff (Appendix 1). Appendix 2 shows the existing plans and pictures for the site.
  - 1.2 The Kilbowie Outdoor Centre is operated directly by the Education and Families Service and provides pupils with both an Outdoor Education and residential experience. Its core function is to provide a residential outdoor activity experience to all North Lanarkshire Primary 7 pupils.
  - 1.3 Currently, all Primary 7 children have the chance to attend the Kilbowie Centre each academic year.
  - 1.4 National guidance document 'Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning' Education Scotland states, "*The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences*" It does not state that a residential aspect is a statutory requirement and advises that "*in the light of outdoor learning becoming more 'regular and frequent', current practice will evolve as more use is made of school grounds and local areas.*"
  - 1.5 These aspects are integral to the Plan for North Lanarkshire and the linked consideration of next stage community investment across school, town centres and natural habitats and attractions.
  - 1.6 In addition to the current support for outdoor provision locally (and the plans incorporated within 1.5 for the future), a number of critical challenges have been identified with maintaining the residential model of operation linked to cost, location, flexibility and sustainability. Although there is a contribution from parents, current provision in Kilbowie requires to be heavily subsidised by core revenue budgets. The typical subsidy is £194 per pupil attendance and £282 per pupil attendance for those in receipt of free school meals. In addition the Council has incurred and continues to incur capital costs to maintain the integrity of the building and facilities. These revenue and capital costs have to be set against the wider financial and economic outlook facing the Council with a forecast budget deficit of £97m over the next three years.
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## 2.0 Report

### 2.1 Kilbowie Outdoor Centre - Current Operating Model

- 2.1.1 The Centre offers 39 weeks (term time) of provision to North Lanarkshire primary schools and additional support needs schools. The initial allocation of schools to specific weeks is undertaken by Kilbowie staff. Whilst this provides a universal offering which ensures availability for all P7 pupils, it limits the scope of individual schools to determine exactly when their residential experience will take place. For example, each year a range of weeks will consistently fall within periods of adverse seasonal weather which may impact upon activities.

- 2.1.2 In addition to core P7 activity, the centre hosts a number of Oban community based activities at weekends and holiday periods. Also, during the summer holiday period the centre has arrangements in place with other organisations to provide some outdoor education activities.
- 2.1.3 The current annual net (expenditure less income) operating budget for Kilbowie Outdoor Centre is £748,312 (Appendix 1 provides a full breakdown of the Annual Budget). In addition, there are annual pupil transport costs of circa £70,000.
- 2.1.4 A valuation of the Kilbowie site was undertaken in November 2018 which indicated a capital receipt of £680,000 would be generated if the site was sold.
- 2.1.5 Kilbowie operates at close to full capacity in terms of uptake by schools. Since 2007 all NLC Primary 7 pupils have been offered a place.

Year	Pupils Attending	% of P7 Attending based on School Roll
2014/15	3490	90.50
2015/16	3682	91.82
2016/17	3680	93.50
2017/18	3735	94.89
2018/19	3655	92.32

Table 1: Kilbowie Outdoor Centre Attendance figures for 2014-2018

## 2.2 Delivery Model - Options

- 2.2.1 In line with the review, the Service has investigated a number of alternate outdoor education delivery models. As a result of this process, the following two primary options have been identified for further consideration and can be summarised below:
- a. **Current Operating Model (subsidised)** – retain the existing arrangement whereby provision is delivered in house via Kilbowie Outdoor Centre, with staff directly employed and managed by North Lanarkshire Council and funded through the Council’s revenue and capital budgets as per the current model or via a revised subsidy arrangement;
  - b. **Revised outdoor education model (non-subsidised)** – in this scenario, Kilbowie as a location would be closed via a transitional arrangement and individual Headteachers empowered and supported to make their own arrangements as appropriate for outdoor education provision for pupils with linked guidance and programmes developed.
- 2.2.2. A high level option appraisal matrix, exploring relative advantages and disadvantages of these options for operational delivery is detailed in Appendix 3.

## 2.3 Current Operating Model (Option A)

- 2.3.1 Option (A) is a proposal to primarily maintain the status quo via an agreed subsidy level. The current delivery model for outdoor education residential experience for P7 pupils at Kilbowie is a well-established, integrated resource within the day to day

operation of schools and establishments in North Lanarkshire. However, there are a number of direct issues in relation to current and future sustainability issues, directly linked to funding and viability.

- 2.3.2 Firstly, the ongoing upkeep and capital investment required to maintain the facility is a significant issue. Since 2010/11, capital works to the value of £1.985m have been carried out to maintain provision with an additional £0.395m earmarked for 2019/20, which has been re-phased to 2020/21 pending clarity on the future of the facility.
- 2.3.3 Given the age of the Kilbowie building, adherence to health and safety requirements and year-round use of the facility, there will be an ongoing demand upon capital resources to support major maintenance and refurbishments if the centre remains open.
- 2.3.4 As previously detailed, the Kilbowie experience is subsidised on a universal basis for all pupils, with an enhanced subsidy for pupils in receipt of a free school meal.
- 2.3.5 The lack of fully flexible access to Kilbowie means that schools already top up outdoor learning experiences at other times of the year through alternative options.
- 2.3.6 The remoteness of the site of Kilbowie from North Lanarkshire means that it is difficult to utilise the provision for other purposes at different times of the year.
- 2.3.7 In addition, the reality of the current budgetary environment and planned developments of parks in North Lanarkshire have created a context in which the Kilbowie offering requires to be fully and finally reconsidered.
- 2.3.8 The Kilbowie site occupies a prime water front site of 2.68ha (6.68 acres) near to residential developments. There is therefore the potential to sell the complete site for its existing purpose or subject to planning permission, for residential use.

#### **2.4 Considerations relating to a Revised Outdoor Education Model (Option B)**

- 2.4.1 Local Authority delivery models for outdoor education/learning vary across authorities. Argyll and Bute, Edinburgh City, Fife and Glasgow City have residential centres. In some circumstances this provision is within the local authority area (Fife's provision is in Balingry). West Dunbartonshire Council closed their facility a number of years ago and Aberdeen City Council have passed their facility to their arms-length company 'Sport Aberdeen'.
- 2.4.2 While provision at Kilbowie is well established, the current model and location of the centre mitigates against year round, 24/7, flexible access to the facilities. There is therefore little flexibility available to schools regarding when they can access the provision other than through allocated residential visits.
- 2.4.3 Linked to the above, a number of schools in North Lanarkshire already supplement the Kilbowie experience with other residential trips for children as part of the P7 – S1 transition, sometimes planning on a cluster basis. The movement towards increased emphasis on cluster working means that more shared trips would be planned for schools in future. This is in addition to a much more direct focus upon maximising the opportunities for outdoor provision across our local natural habitats and environments.

2.4.4 As detailed previously, the current provision at Kilbowie, with an average gross cost per pupil of £327 is significantly subsidised, with an average subsidy per pupil of £194 for full rate paying pupils and £282 per pupil in receipt of free school meals.

2.4.5 The review has confirmed that there are alternative delivery means available in the medium and long term which could provide better value solutions to North Lanarkshire's children and communities, whilst also offering a wider range of flexible choice and opening up rich new sources of learning not available at Kilbowie.

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### 3. Equality and Diversity

#### 3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

This policy is being brought forward in relation to the Council's policies to ensure it complies with its responsibilities under the Fairer Scotland duties by providing a more flexible set of arrangements through procurement in the medium term and within the North Lanarkshire model in due course, schools will be more able to target resources to address the needs of the vulnerable.

#### 3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

In line with guidelines, an Equality Impact Assessment has been started and will be updated as the planning for the future of the Kilbowie Outdoor Centre is brought forward, to ensure that the needs of pupils and staff are taken into account during this process.

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### 4. Implications

#### 4.1 Financial Impact

The 2019/20 Net Expenditure budget for Kilbowie Outdoor Centre is £748,312 coupled with a transport budget of approximately £70,000. This equates to a future maximum savings value of £818,312 (phased) that could be achieved from cessation of the current subsidised residential service (Option b).

Alternatively, if Kilbowie was retained (Option a), there are considerations in respect of the level of subsidy which could be offered. For example, the table below details the Council subsidy which would be required for different charging options. These calculations are based on the number of full rate and reduced rate pupils attending Kilbowie in 2018/19:

Charge to Full Rate Pupils (£)	Charge to Reduced Rate Pupils (£)	Annual Council Subsidy (£)	Potential Saving (£)
133.50	45.50	745,722	72,591
150	150	621,350	196,962
250	250	255,850	562,462
320	320	0	818,312

Table 2: subsidies required for different charging models

The Council has undertaken significant required capital investment in Kilbowie in recent years to maintain the asset and further investment will be required on an ongoing basis if the facility is to remain operational.

The Council would generate a capital receipt, estimated at £680,000, if the Kilbowie site was sold.

#### 4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

The centre has a budgeted staff cohort of 16 FTE. If the decision is taken to close Kilbowie, the relevant Council staffing policies will be applied in relation to managing change, including full redeployment options over the envisaged phased closure. For clarity, if approved, it is proposed that a phased closure would be undertaken during 2020/21 in line with existing centre commitments.

#### 4.3 Environmental Impact

N/A.

#### 4.4 Risk Impact

The project would be managed in accordance with the Council's project and risk management guidelines.

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### 5. Measures of success

- 5.1 Realisation of asset value.
- 5.2 Uptake of provision from 2021.
- 5.3 Continued opportunity to undertake outdoor education experiences.

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### 6. Supporting documents

- 6.1 Appendices 1 - 3



Derek Brown, Executive Director of Education and Families

## Appendix 1

### Kilbowie Outdoor Centre 201920 Staffing Structure and Revenue Budget

POST	2019 FTE	2019 Grade
Head of Centre	1	NLC14
Depute Head of Centre	1	NLC13
Senior Instructor	2	NLC11
Instructor	9	NLC9
Centre Warden	2	NLC2
Clerical Assistant	1	NLC2
	<b>16</b>	

DESCRIPTION	BUDGET
	£
Employee Costs	681,819
Property Costs	86,992
Supplies & Services	334,900
Transport & Plant Costs	66,654
Administration Costs	13,406
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>1,183,771</b>
External Income	-58,562
Charges for Pupils	-376,897
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>-435,459</b>
<b>NET EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>748,312</b>

In addition there are annual pupil transport costs of approximately £70,000 per annum.



Kilbowie Outdoor Centre, Gallanach Road, Oban, PA34 4PD. The boundaries of the council's ownership are shown outlined in red on the plan below. Servitude rights which benefit the property are shown in green.



### Appendix 3

<b>Option A: In house via Kilbowie Outdoor Centre with existing funding through the NLC revenue budget and existing charging scheme.</b>	
<b>Potential Advantages</b>	<b>Potential Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedded service in the context of learning and teaching in North Lanarkshire</li> <li>• History and track record in outdoor education</li> <li>• Direct council control and ability to influence and change service delivery</li> <li>• Organisationally efficient</li> <li>• Well established cross departmental/cross service working resulting in enhanced joined up services for customers</li> <li>• Subject to effective service improvement procedures, support and challenge through Education and Families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limitations of access; variance of provision depending on time of year</li> <li>• No surety over future revenue funding levels</li> <li>• No option for Head Teachers to choose a different targeted approach funded through external funding</li> <li>• No option for Head Teachers to utilise Pupil Equity Fund to reduce costs further for vulnerable pupils</li> <li>• Ongoing capital investment required</li> </ul>

<b>Option B Closure of Kilbowie Outdoor Centre and Revised Outdoor Provision Model</b>	
<b>Potential Advantages</b>	<b>Potential Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides flexibility on the use of budget resources in a challenging budgetary environment</li> <li>• Redirection of up to £800k of revenue budget to areas of higher educational priority and capital receipt on sale of Kilbowie</li> <li>• £395k of budgeted capital expenditure can be redirected to priority areas</li> <li>• Focus limited resources on higher priority areas of education</li> <li>• Focus pupils on academic/technical/vocational learning</li> <li>• No liabilities for maintaining buildings</li> <li>• Reduced workforce in a period of austerity</li> <li>• Teachers will not have to re organise their home life for being away for up to 5 days/4 nights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative parent reaction given the perceived high quality delivery at Kilbowie with adverse publicity</li> <li>• Loss of potentially first away from home residential experience for pupils (if no flexible residential alternative was implemented by the school)</li> <li>• Children may not get the first introduction to the great outdoors which may generate lifetime interests in hillwalking etc – although this can be achieved through a range of alternative options, including local habitats and environments within North Lanarkshire</li> <li>• Workforce change management will require to be undertaken inline with existing council policies.</li> </ul>