

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

**CABINET – 29 OCTOBER 2009**

### **THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S SCHOOLS BUILDING PROGRAMME – PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

#### **Report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to invite Cabinet consideration and seek approval for nominations to the Scottish Government for the new build or refurbishment of two primary schools under the Schools Building Programme.

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** On 17 June 2009 the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning announced a £1.25 billion school building programme, which aims to deliver 55 new schools across Scotland and which will receive £800 million of Scottish Government funding support. On 28 September 2009, the Cabinet Secretary announced the first tranche of this programme with the identification of 14 secondary schools.
- 2.2** Correspondence, dated 8 October 2009, was received from the Scottish Government asking local authorities to identify two primary schools that are in poor condition or are unsuitable for the delivery of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century curriculum in order that they could be considered for funding support.
- 2.3** The Scottish Government correspondence contained a number of key points:-
- Projects are to lift as many pupils as possible out of being educated in poor accommodation;
  - Councils are to submit refurbishment of new build proposals for two primary schools;
  - Scottish Government will provide funding for 50% of the construction costs;
  - Councils are to clearly state their top priority

#### **3. THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING POSSIBLE PROJECTS**

- 3.1** Consultations have been undertaken with officers of the Scottish Government. As a result, it has been ascertained that to qualify the projects must be seen as “new” and therefore those that are already in progress are ineligible for consideration. It has also been further clarified that proposals for a new-build school merger will be considered, but following a number of enquiries from councils about this possibility, the Scottish Government are concerned about strain on available funds and such projects would be unlikely to qualify for the

full available 50% subsidy, this is because the commitment from the Scottish government is to provide funding on a “like for like” basis.

**3.2** In consideration of proposals, the Scottish Government will take account of a number of factors. These are set out in the letter of 08 October 2009 to Authorities:

- Distribution of needs nationally;
- Information about schools’ condition
- Information about schools’ unsuitability;
- Additionality
- Authorities’ own priorities
- Aspects of readiness to proceed

**3.3** Given the very short timescale to respond it is clearly not possible to carry out a detailed option appraisal exercise and it is necessary, therefore, to identify a set of key considerations to be taken into account. It is proposed that these be:

- Capacity: this is a judgement based on a balance between present pressures on the school as set against the diseconomies arising from surplus capacity.
- Readiness to proceed: relates to practical issues such as possible timings of planning, procurement, construction and site investigation.
- Parental feedback: relates to the correspondence and dialogue that the authority has had with parents or the Parent Council relating to the fabric of the building.

**3.4** While these factors include the general condition of the building, as further detailed in the paragraphs below, weight will also be given to the ability to secure future revenue savings based, for example on reduced energy costs from “green construction”. Of particular significance will be the impact in terms of the number of young people who will benefit from the successful proposal, thereby delivering maximum returns to the community from the investment. The Scottish Government is also recognising matters such as “readiness to proceed” in that schemes will require to be readily feasible in terms of construction and secure support from any public consultation. From the perspective of Best Value and sound housekeeping it is only prudent therefore to ensure that the correct balance is struck between the advantages to the capital and maintenance programmes on the hand and securing benefits to the maximum numbers of young people on the other.

**3.5** A particular feature of this exercise was to concentrate on schools in the north of the Authority. This was in line with the Cabinet decision of 11 February 2009 to allocate resources within the capital programme for a new build school in the north of the authority, complementing an equivalent commitment to the south of the authority in association with the Knockroon project, which has yet to culminate, and those establishments benefiting under “Better Schools: Better Learning”.

In this way the Scottish Government criterion of according with the Authority’s priorities can be demonstrated as having been given due consideration.

- 3.6** This approach also has the benefit of ensuring that funds are available to meet the 50% contribution sought by the Scottish Government. However, it yields an additional benefit of releasing the equivalent of the national funding contribution into the capital programme. This is additional to the release of further capital funds arising from maintenance or renewal costs that would otherwise be necessary if there were not a new build. In summary therefore, it is not only the identified projects that will benefit, but also, potentially other schools.
- 3.7** To identify a shortlist of possible projects advantage was taken of the annual comprehensive survey of the school estate. This reviews school properties in terms of the School Estate Management Plan.

#### **4. EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL PROPOSALS**

- 4.1** Following the process described above, officers from Education and Asset Improvement worked to develop the proposals detailed within the remainder of this section and identified 5 short-listed potential projects to be considered for submission. These are:-

- A new school resulting from the merger of New Farm Primary School and Nursery Class and Silverwood Primary School, incorporating appropriate early years and extended community facilities;
- A new build for Gargieston Primary School and Nursery Class;
- A new build for Kirkstyle Primary School;
- A new build for Nether Robertland Primary School and Nursery Class; and
- A refurbished and extended Fenwick Primary.

- 4.2** Further detail on each of the potential options is provided below.

#### **4.3 New Primary School from the merger of New Farm Primary and Nursery Class and Silverwood Primary**

Both schools are 1960s/1970s design. There are accessibility issues at both schools and the accommodation is not energy efficient. A merged school would require a capacity of 480 to accommodate the current and projected pupil rolls. Suitability for delivering a modern curriculum could also be improved and despite recent capital investment both buildings still require significant capital investment.

##### **New Farm Primary School**

Spend over the last 5 years: £224,210

Projected necessary future spend from Cabinet paper of 11 February 2009 - Nil

##### **Silverwood Primary School**

Spend over the last 5 years: £256,000

Projected necessary future spend: £400k from Cabinet paper of 11 February 2009 (£200k in 2009/10 and £200k in 2010/11).

**Other factors:**

Based on current projections it is estimated that the combined roll of any new school would be 480 in 2015 compared to the present combined roll of 475.

If this option were chosen, a choice would have to be made between the present site of either school. In the absence of a ground survey it is thought that both sites have sufficient space to accommodate a new build without the need for a decant. A site within the precinct of James Hamilton Academy might result in the loss of amenity to the secondary school. It is likely that respondents to the necessary consultation exercise would focus on such issues as the need for an extensive associated traffic management scheme due to the increased pupil roll. There would also require to be an impact assessment in terms of school transport and walking distances.

There would be potentially substantial revenue savings caused by merging the two schools arising from unified management, support staff and facilities management structures. The merged school would enjoy the additional flexibility arising from the larger scale resourcing available to a larger school. While in the past there has been some parental concerns regarding the fabric of Silverwood Primary School there has been no demand from either establishment for a replacement building. However, this would not be a like for like project and so would be unlikely to secure the full 50% grant.

#### **4.4 New Build Gargieston Primary School and Nursery Class**

Gargieston Primary School and Nursery Class is also a 1960s/1970s design. A particular issue is the accommodation for the nursery class being housed in separate and inadequate accommodation. The nursery is oversubscribed and there is a pressing need for additional space. The main building structure is of timber-based construction with a history of fabric problems. Table 1 identifies that the current building is now dated for the delivery of a modern curriculum and is also energy inefficient. The school requires significant investment to bring to the desired standard and address issues specific accommodation issues.

Spend over the last 5 years: £252k

Projected necessary future spend: £350,000 from Cabinet paper of 11 February 2009

Other factors:

Based on current projections it is estimated that the roll of the new school will be 318 in 2015 compared to the present roll of 317. The nursery class adds 60 children to this with the possibility for expansion beyond present numbers.

Over the past few years the nursery class has been over-subscribed necessitating a ballot. This project would give an opportunity to expand provision. Other than in the construction phase there would be no issue from additional traffic. Rather, this would give an opportunity to address the traffic and parking problems associated with the site. There has, over the past year been much parental demand for an upgrade of facilities; it is likely therefore that this project would attract support. Although it may be possible to keep the school working during construction, to achieve the desired delivery date for the project, it may be necessary to operate a decant during the building phase, given the cramped nature of the site and accommodation, refurbishment on the scale necessary inevitably would be disruptive to the school.

#### **4.5 New Build Kirkstyle Primary School**

Kirkstyle Primary is 1960s/1970s design comprising 2 floors and has accessibility issues as the ground floor has several levels. The building is rated as being disadvantageous for modern curriculum and is also energy inefficient. As with other buildings Kirkstyle requires investment to bring it to the desired standard, despite major recent capital investment.

Spend over the last 5 years: £531k

Projected necessary future spend: Nil from Cabinet paper of 11 February 2009

Other factors:

Based on current projections it is estimated that the roll of the new school will be 366 in 2015 compared to the present roll of 320 and would therefore require a smaller geographic footprint.

The grounds of Kirkstyle Primary School are extensive and it highly likely that a new school could be built while the present buildings are occupied. The recent investments in the building have significantly improved its appearance and there has been no demand from parents or staff to conduct further extensive refurbishment or repair work and so the likely response to this proposal is presently unknown.

#### **4.6 New Build Nether Robertland Primary School and Nursery Class**

The buildings at Nether Robertland are also of 1960s/1970s vintage. There are accessibility issues due to the ground floor being on several levels throughout the school. Building suitability could be improved and the building is not energy efficient. Significant investment is required to bring the school to

a suitable standard, addressing issues such as the nursery being housed in a separate building and traffic management issues.

Spend over the last 5 years: £395,534

Projected necessary future spend: £400k from Cabinet paper of 11 February 2009

Other factors:

Based on current projections it is estimated that the roll of the new school will be 422 in 2015 compared to the present roll of 370. The nursery class adds 60 children to this with the possibility for expansion beyond present numbers.

The Council owns land adjacent to the present site which is adjacent to Stewarton Academy playing fields. The ground conditions are unknown for construction work. There has been no parental concerns raised over the fabric condition of the building and so the likely response to this proposal is presently unknown.

#### **4.7 Refurbished and Extended Fenwick Primary School**

Fenwick Primary School is a late 1800s design and was extended in the 1970s to add hatted accommodation for a class and dining hall. The building is considered unsuitable for modern curricular needs and is not energy efficient. Despite capital investment in recent years there remains a need for continued investment to bring the accommodation to the Council's desired standard.

Spend over the last 5 years: £317,137

Projected necessary future spend: £200k from Cabinet paper of 11 February 2009 (£175,000 in 2009/10 and £75,000 in future years).

Other factors:

Based on current projections it is estimated that the roll of the school will be 178 in 2015 compared to the present roll of 148.

The particular issue here is the condition of the hatted accommodation and its separation from the main school building. There have been concerns expressed by the Parent Council and staff about the condition of the accommodation. The building is, however, of traditional construction which past consultations have shown tend to be valued by village communities and therefore a refurbishment combined with an extension is likely to be favoured over a new-build coupled to a vacation of the premises.

## 5. RECOMMENDED PROJECTS FOR SUBMISSION TO THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Scoring each project against the key considerations identified at paragraph 3.3 above brings out the following table, using a conventional 1-5 scoring system.

	Capacity	Readiness to proceed	Parental feedback	Unweighted total
New Farm/ Silverwood	0	1	0	1
Gargieston	5	5	5	15
Kirkstyle	3	5	0	8
Nether Robertland	5	5	0	10
Fenwick	3	5	5	13

After consideration of the above, therefore, it is recommended that Cabinet agree to submit proposals for a new build Gargieston Primary School and Nursery Class as its top priority, and that the proposal for refurbishing and extending Fenwick Primary is also submitted to the Scottish Government.

## 6. CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

- 6.1 The Council has a strong record of consulting with stakeholders in developing its capital projects. This record will be continued should funding be secured to deliver these proposals and will ensure that stakeholder input is maximised.

## 7. LEGAL / POLICY / FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Based on the available information and experience of previous new build projects it is estimated that the construction cost of the Gargieston Primary School and Nursery Class new build is approximately £12 million. Therefore the Council could anticipate approximately £6 million of financial support from the Scottish Government.
- 7.2 The estimated cost of refurbishing and extending Fenwick Primary is £5 million. This would attract Scottish Government funding of £2.5 million.
- 7.3 The very short timescale for this return means that these costs are indicative and only when design work is complete and tender returns received from contractors can the construction costs and Scottish Government support be finally ascertained.

## 8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Submission of the 2 recommended projects will contribute towards the Council's objective of improving the school estate and also assist in meeting the objective of improving educational attainment.

**8.2** The projects will also allow the Council to meet the national Government objective of removing pupils from being educated in poor accommodation.

**8.3** This report has been compiled with the best available information at the time of writing. It is considered that there are no implications in the sites discussed from the perspective of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency. No information is currently available from site investigation surveys, including test borings.

## **9. COMMUNITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

**9.1** This Action Plan will contribute towards the following strands of the Community Plan:-

- Promoting lifelong learning; and
- Promoting community safety.

## **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**10.1** Cabinet is asked to agree:-

- (i) to the submission to the Scottish Government of projects for a new build Gargieston Primary School and Nursery Class and an extended and refurbished Fenwick Primary School;
- (ii) that the Gargieston Primary and Nursery Class new build be identified as the Council's top priority;
- (iii) that the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services be remitted to provide Cabinet with further reports advising of progress;
- (iv) in view of the required timescales for the submission of proposals to the Scottish Government that this report be exempt from the call-in process to the Governance and Scrutiny Committee; and
- (v) otherwise note the contents of this report.

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GRS/EC/MM  
20 October 2009

**IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER – EUAN COUPERWHITE**

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Capital Investment Programme 2009/10 to 2018/19, Cabinet 11 February 2009  
Scottish Government Correspondence – School Building Programme:  
Announcement of First Phase of Primary Schools (dated 8 October 2009)