

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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| COMMITTEE | Education and Children's Services |
| DATE | 12 September 2023 |
| EXEMPT | The content of the report is public, but it contains an exempt appendix. (Paragraph 8 – Estimated Expenditure on Contracts: ‘This report refers to the acquisition or supply of goods/services where disclosure to the public of the amount to be spent would be likely to give an advantage to a person or organisation seeking to enter a contract with the Council.’) |
| CONFIDENTIAL | No |
| REPORT TITLE | Outline Business Case: Oldmachar Primary Schools Excess Capacity |
| REPORT NUMBER | RES/23/278 |
| DIRECTOR | Steve Whyte / Eleanor Sheppard |
| CHIEF OFFICER | Stephen Booth |
| REPORT AUTHOR | Andrew Jones |
| TERMS OF REFERENCE | 1.1.1 & 1.1.2 |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents a completed Outline Business Case, setting out the findings of a recent feasibility study, to identify options for reducing the number of primary schools within the Oldmachar Associated Schools Group (ASG).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Notes that no suitable options for reducing the number of primary schools within the Oldmachar ASG have been identified within the outline business case, and:
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to carry out further work to identify potential future options for improving and consolidating primary school provision in the Oldmachar ASG, alongside the planned work to review secondary school provision in this area of the city, and to report back to the Committee with recommendations and next steps as appropriate.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 At its meeting on 8 September 2022, the former Education Operational Delivery Committee approved the Council's School Estate Plan, and instructed officers to take forwards a detailed action plan to develop and improve the school estate. This included an instruction to officers to carry out a feasibility study, to identify options for reducing the number of primary schools within the Oldmachar Associated Schools Group (ASG), in order to minimise excess pupil

capacity, and to report back to the Education and Children's Services Committee with recommendations as appropriate.

- 3.2 The outline business case, included at Appendix 1 of this report, sets out the findings of the feasibility study, and provides an analysis of the options available for reducing the number of primary schools within the Oldmachar ASG.
- 3.3 The outline business case considers each of the existing primary school sites in the ASG, and the extent to which those schools could be merged together on one site, allowing one of the buildings to be closed.
- 3.4 In tandem with the feasibility study, a stakeholder engagement exercise was undertaken, in which parents, pupils, staff and the wider communities associated with the schools in the ASG were invited to review the brief for the feasibility study, and to provide their comments and feedback. Key messages from the feedback received included:
 - The need to maintain reasonable walking distances from home to school, if a school is to be closed
 - The need to avoid the remaining schools becoming overcrowded, if a school is to be closed
 - The importance of maintaining additional space in schools for children with additional support needs
 - The need for all pupils to continue to have access to good quality school facilities
- 3.5 In response to the feedback received from stakeholders and the concerns raised about the possible loss of space as a result of schools being merged together, there was an emphasis given within the outline business case to whether the options being considered provided sufficient space in the schools concerned to accommodate additional pupils, whether the options were likely to provide improved facilities for learning and teaching, and whether appropriate space for additional support needs provision could be maintained.
- 3.6 In developing the outline business case, several of the existing school sites were found to be unsuitable to support merging with another school on that site, due to limitations of space, or constraints created by site topography, and were therefore discounted.
- 3.7 Two of the sites, Forehill School and Glashieburn School, were deemed to have potential to accommodate a merged school, and were assessed in further detail within the outline business case to determine which adjacent schools could be merged with them, so that those buildings could be closed.
- 3.8 However, it was found that none of the options for merging schools on the Forehill or Glashieburn sites sufficiently fulfilled the identified project objectives, and would likely create challenges and pressures for the school communities concerned, particularly in terms of the available space and the opportunities for providing improved facilities for learning and teaching. There would also be a need to provide temporary alternative accommodation for pupils and staff,

whilst the necessary changes to buildings are made, and there were no suitable solutions found for this.

- 3.9 For these reasons, no preferred option for reducing the number of primary schools in the Oldmachar ASG has been identified at this time. The feasibility study for the secondary school estate at Bridge of Don, Oldmachar and Grandhome is due to start in late 2023. The scope for this study could be widened, to consider options for providing improved facilities and consolidation for both primary and secondary education within the ASG.
- 3.10 It is therefore recommended that the Committee instructs officers to carry out further work to identify potential future options for improving and consolidating primary school provision in the Oldmachar ASG, alongside the planned work to review secondary school provision in this area of the city.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Any costs related to further feasibility work will be met from existing budgets.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 provides that it shall be the duty of every education authority to secure that there is made for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education.
- 5.2 Section 17 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 provides that it shall be the duty of an education authority in the performance of their functions under sections 1 to 6 of the Act, to provide for their area, sufficient accommodation in public schools and other educational establishments under their management to enable them to perform their said functions. In addition, an education authority shall maintain and keep efficient every public school, and other educational establishment under their management, and shall from time to time provide such additional accommodation as may be necessary to enable them to perform their functions under the Act and may, provide, alter, improve, enlarge, equip and maintain schools and other educational establishments within their area.
- 5.3 A proposal to close or merge a school and catchment area is a relevant proposal under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The 2010 Act prescribes the procedural steps the Education Authority must take. This includes:
 - preparation of a proposal paper;
 - giving notice of the proposal;
 - ingathering oral and written representations;
 - holding a public meeting;
 - providing Education Scotland with all relevant documentation;
 - reviewing the proposal having regard to the representations received and Education Scotland's report; and

- thereafter publishing a consultation report containing an explanation of how it has reviewed the proposal and responding to the points raised during the consultation.
- 5.4 Section 2A of the 2010 Act provides for a restriction on making a school closure proposal in relation to the same school for a period of 5 years following either:
- a decision to refuse closure...; or
 - a decision made by the education authority following the publication of a consultation report not to proceed with the closure.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

| Category | Risks | Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level | *Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small> | *Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set? |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Strategic Risk | No significant risks identified | | | |
| Compliance | Risk that the Council is seen to make significant changes to schools without considering the views of stakeholders. | The recommendation not to proceed with changes to the schools at this time demonstrates that full consideration has been given to the views of stakeholders which were raised during the stakeholder engagement exercise. | L | Yes |
| Operational | Failure to engage and consult with communities on the future of the school estate which serves them, could lead to a breakdown in | The recommendation not to proceed with changes to the schools at this time demonstrates | L | Yes |

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| | relationships with community members. Proposals to close schools may not be popular with some stakeholders | that full consideration has been given to the views of stakeholders which were raised during the stakeholder engagement exercise. | | |
| Financial | No significant risks identified | | | |
| Reputational | Failure to engage and consult with communities on the future of the school estate which serves them, could lead to reputational damage for the Council. Proposals to close schools may not be popular with some stakeholders | The recommendation not to proceed with changes to the schools at this time demonstrates that full consideration has been given to the views of stakeholders which were raised during the stakeholder engagement exercise. | L | Yes |
| Environment / Climate | Taking no action on reducing the number of schools in the ASG will not provide opportunities for reducing carbon emissions from the school estate | The recommendation to consider further options may provide additional opportunities in the future to contribute to reducing carbon emissions | L | Yes |

8. OUTCOMES

| <u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2024</u> | |
|--|---|
| | Impact of Report |
| Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement | The recommendations within this report support the delivery of the following policy statements: |
| <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u> | <u>A City of Opportunity</u> |

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| | Policy Statement 2 - Review and invest in our school estate, ensuring all of Aberdeen's schools are fit for the educational needs and the challenges of the 21st century. The report considers the options for providing improved school facilities in the Oldmachar ASG |
| Regional and City Strategies | This project forms part of the School Estate Plan which will support the delivery of the Council's Property and Estates Strategy and the Net Zero Routemap for Aberdeen City. |

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

| Assessment | Outcome |
|--|--|
| Integrated Impact Assessment | Stage 1 Assessment has been completed. |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment | Not required |
| Other | No other assessments required |

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Education Operational Delivery Committee, 8 September 2022: [Agenda Item 14: School Estate Plan 2022.](#)

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Exempt Appendix 1: Outline Business Case – Oldmachar Primary Schools Excess Capacity

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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