

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services
DATE	25 January 2018
REPORT TITLE	Cordyce School Closure Consultation
REPORT NUMBER	ECS/18/002
DIRECTOR	Helen Shanks (Acting)
REPORT AUTHOR	Andrew Jones

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT:-

To report to Committee on the outcome of a recent statutory consultation on the proposal to permanently close Cordyce School.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee agrees:

(i) to implement the proposal to permanently close Cordyce School in Aberdeen, with effect from 1 April 2018; and:

(ii) to instruct the Head of Policy, Performance and Resources to notify Scottish Ministers of the Council's intention to implement the closure proposal, in accordance with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended; and:

(iii) subject to any call-in by Scottish Ministers, that the Cordyce school site should be declared surplus to Education and Children's Services requirements, and to instruct the Head of Policy, Performance and Resources to make arrangements to transfer the site to the Head of Land and Property Assets.

3. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

3.1 Background

3.1.1 At its meeting on 1 June 2017, the Education & Children's Services Committee instructed officers to prepare a proposal document for public consultation on the proposal to permanently close Cordyce School. This report details the outcome of the subsequent consultation on that proposal.

3.2 Educational Implications

- 3.2.1 The Education Authority has a programme to ensure the provision of an affordable and suitable education service for all its pupils. Implementation of the proposal will assist in the delivery of these objectives, thereby meeting the Council's statutory obligations as set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (as amended).
- 3.2.2 The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 introduced the presumption of mainstreaming, which requires local authorities to start with the assumption that all children and young people should access learning within their local school, alongside their peers, rather than necessarily attending a separate school specifically for children with additional support needs. Implementation of the proposal to close Corydce School will also assist in the delivery of this objective.

3.3 Statutory Consultation Feedback

- 3.3.1 The consultation report for the proposed closure of Corydce School can be found at Appendix 1 of this report.

Methodology

- 3.3.2 All requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended were met in full.

Correction

- 3.3.3 Following publication of the Council's proposal document on 30 August 2017, a minor error in the reported previous staff numbers at Corydce School was discovered. The original document stated that there were two deputy head teachers, 14.42 full time equivalent class teachers, and 17 social workers, based at the school. In fact there was one deputy head teacher, 10.42 full time equivalent class teachers, and 10.5 full time equivalent social workers at the school.
- 3.3.4 Upon discovery of this error, an updated version of the proposal document providing the correct staff numbers, was published on the Council's consultation website and distributed to stakeholders on 18 September 2017. As the error was not considered by officers to be significant, it was not deemed necessary to review the merits of the proposal or to revise the timescales for consultation.

Feedback from Stakeholders and Education Scotland

- 3.3.5 A public consultation event was held on 20 September 2017 to discuss the proposals. The event was attended by five stakeholders. Twenty-six written submissions were also received in response to the consultation, including one response from the EIS teaching union.
- 3.3.6 Whilst a small number of respondents welcomed the proposal, as it would see pupils being placed in mainstream settings alongside their peers and it would help to reduce costs, the majority of those responding to the consultation were

not in favour of the proposal and raised concerns about the possible closure of the school.

- 3.3.7 These concerns included questions over whether the appropriate level of support for pupils with additional support needs arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties would be available within mainstream settings. There were also concerns about pupils 'falling behind' within a mainstream setting, and that some may choose not to attend school.
- 3.3.8 The response from the EIS teaching union raised a number of questions about the Council's approach to supporting pupils who would otherwise have attended Cordyce School, including its model of hub provision, and the training offered to staff. It also highlighted concerns about recruitment difficulties and budget constraints, which it was felt would impact on the quality of support offered to pupils.
- 3.3.9 In its report on the proposals, Education Scotland agreed that the proposal to close Cordyce School has educational benefit, that the continuum of provision which has been designed by the Council has merit and will provide appropriate alternatives for young people who may have attended Cordyce School. HM Inspectors were assured that the Council is working toward a range of inclusion strategies, and that the education benefits statement within the proposal document provides clear evidence of this.
- 3.3.10 The Education Scotland report also noted that the development of satellite hubs around the city is in an early stage of development. It recommended that the Council reassures stakeholders that the alternatives to full-time mainstream provision will be designed in consultation with them, and that the continuum of provision can effectively meet the needs of the most vulnerable young people.
- 3.3.11 The Council's response to all of the issues raised by consultees is provided within the Consultation Report at Appendix 1.

Overall View of the Proposals

- 3.3.12 Officers were satisfied that no comments had been received which would have caused them to review the merits of the proposals to permanently close Cordyce School.
- 3.3.13 It is therefore recommended that Councillors approve the original proposal, to permanently close Cordyce School, with effect from 1 April 2018.

3.4 Fire at Cordyce School

- 3.4.1 On 13 November 2017, Cordyce School suffered a major fire, which largely destroyed the main school building. Officers are working with the Council's insurers so that an appropriate settlement can be determined. In the meantime the proposal to permanently close the school as an institution remains in place, and the Council is required to continue with the statutory consultation process.

- 3.4.2 Due to the extent of the damage to the main school building, there is a requirement to demolish this part of the site. The costs of this are likely to be covered by any insurance settlement, subject to the deductible sums built into the Council's insurance policy. Two former accommodation blocks on the site, which were separate from the main building, remain intact as they were undamaged by the fire.
- 3.4.3 However the power supply to the buildings was cut off as a result of the fire and there have been a number of break-ins and vandalism to the buildings, both before and after the fire took place. The buildings have now been secured, but whilst they remain standing there remains a risk of further vandalism.
- 3.4.4 Should the decision be taken to close Cordyce School, it is therefore also recommended that the site is declared surplus for Education and Children's Services requirements, so that the appropriate action can be taken by appropriate officers to avoid further unnecessary costs being incurred by the Council.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Whilst Cordyce School was operating with a full pupil roll, it had the highest running cost per pupil of all schools in Aberdeen. The average annual running costs for the building are shown below:

- Oil & Electricity - £64,160
- Carbon Charges - £8,550
- Water - £5,330
- Cleaning - £26,660
- Repairs/Maintenance - £30,315
- Grounds Maintenance - £4,765
- Waste Collection - £5,980

Total annual property running cost: **£145,760**

- 4.2 Prior to the recent fire at Cordyce which saw the main school building largely destroyed, it was anticipated that closure of the school would help to bring about a reduction in running costs for the Council, as in the short term there would be a reduced need for fuel and facilities management costs, even whilst the site remains within the Council's ownership. However, whilst the building remained in place but not operating as a school, the payment of non-domestic rates relief would have been required, at a cost of approximately £82,000 per year after an initial rates relief discount period. To remove this rates liability the building would need to be demolished, sold or leased out to a 3rd party. Retaining the building and site would leave the Council with ongoing property costs.
- 4.3 Officers are currently working with the Council's insurers and until a decision is made on the future of the building and the site as a whole, the likely settlement from the insurers cannot be confirmed. If the proposal to close the school is accepted and a decision made to proceed with the demolition of the

remaining buildings, then the insurance settlement is likely to be limited to the cost of demolishing the parts of the site which were destroyed by the fire, subject to the deductible sums built into the Council's insurance policy.

4.4 The cost of demolishing the accommodation blocks would not be covered by the insurance settlement and would therefore need to be met from Council budgets.

4.5 However if the proposal to close Cordyce School is not accepted by Committee, then there would be a requirement to relocate the school to an alternative building, and / or to reinstate the school on its existing site. It is unlikely that any insurance settlement for reinstatement would cover all of the costs of rebuilding the school to modern standards, and therefore a significant capital investment by the Council would be required.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The public consultation has complied with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 provides Scottish Ministers with the power to call in decisions by local authorities to close schools, where there have been apparent failures in the consultation or decision making process.

5.2 Local authorities must notify Scottish Ministers of a closure decision within six working days of making the decision, starting with the day on which the decision is made, and submit to them a copy of the proposal paper and consultation report. There will then be a three week period for representations to be made to Ministers and a further five weeks for them to decide whether or not to call in the decision.

5.3 Officers are confident that there have been no failures in the consultation process; however should the proposal to close Cordyce School be accepted by Committee, prior to the decision being made by Scottish Ministers on whether to call in the decision, the local authority will not be permitted to proceed any further with the closure. Given that the timescale for the call-in decision being made by Scottish Ministers is a maximum of eight weeks following the Committee decision, this would still allow for the proposed closure of the school to take effect from 1 April 2018.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Legal

6.1 There is not expected to be a significant operational risk arising from the implementation of the proposals. Having followed all applicable legislation, the Council will be perceived as having taken account of the result of the consultation process.

Customer / citizen

- 6.2 Given that there are currently no pupils enrolled at Cordyce School, there is no significant risk to customers or citizens resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Financial

- 6.3 The financial implications which relate to the recommendations in this report are explained in Section 4, above.

Employee

- 6.4 Given that the staff formerly based at Cordyce School have now been deployed within other settings around the city, there is no significant risk to employees resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Environmental

- 6.5 There are no environmental risks or implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

Technological

- 6.6 There are no technological risks or implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

Reputational

- 6.7 There are no reputational risks or implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

7. IMPACT SECTION

Economy

- 7.1 There are no significant impacts on the economy associated with these proposals.

People

- 7.2 Following the transformation of the Council's approach to inclusion in schools there is now a clear continuum of provision, which sets out the supports available for children and young people at Universal, Targeted and Specialist level, and which reflects the requirements outlined in the Children and Young People's Act (2014). The continuum supports the delivery of timeous and proportionate support for individual children and young people, who will remain on the roll of their mainstream school. This will ensure that young people continue to have access to a broad curriculum and those who know the child best will continue to lead and coordinate the supports they require to access learning.

- 7.3 Accepting the recommendations within this report will help to reinforce and maintain the above approach and assist the Council in delivering on its

improvement outcomes, to ensure that children have the best start in life, and that children are respected, included and achieving.

Place

- 7.4 Accepting the recommendations to close the school and declare the site surplus, would allow for the asset to be progressed through the surplus site procedure, allowing for potential new uses of the site and/or development which could help meet the needs of the local community.

Technology

- 7.5 There are no significant impacts on technology associated with these proposals.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Aberdeen City Council Consultation Proposal Document on the proposed closure of Cordyce School:

https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/education-and-childrens-services/cordyce-consultation/supporting_documents/Cordyce%20Proposal%20Document.pdf

9. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Consultation Report on the proposed closure of Cordyce School

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