

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

---

<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Education and Children's Services
<b>DATE</b>	20 February 2024
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Northfield Primary Schools Excess Capacity
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	RES/24/054
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Steve Whyte / Eleanor Sheppard
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Stephen Booth
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Andrew Jones
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	1.1.1 & 1.1.2

---

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents a summary of the findings from a recent feasibility study, which aimed to identify options for reducing the number of primary schools within the Northfield Associated Schools Group (ASG).

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 notes the content of this report; 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 Northfield ASG, alongside the planned review of the long term future of Northfield Academy, and to include an update on progress within the annual update to the School Estate Plan in September 2024.

### 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 for officers to carry out a feasibility study, to identify options for reducing the number of primary schools within the Northfield 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 At its meeting on 8 November 2022, in relation to the above instruction, the Committee agreed that "officers should fully explore and exhaust all options in order to avoid any such school closures where possible".
- 3.3 A feasibility study was carried out between March and June 2023, and this included a stakeholder engagement exercise, 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.

- 3.4 A summary of the findings of the feasibility study and stakeholder engagement is provided at Appendix 1. This includes details of the options which were considered viable and which therefore required to be explored further within an outline business case, in order to identify a preferred option for recommendation to the Committee.
- 3.5 However, following the conclusion of the feasibility study and stakeholder engagement, work on progressing this project was paused, whilst inspections of the primary schools in Northfield were undertaken, to check for the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). This followed concerns raised nationally relating to the safety of buildings containing this type of material in their roof structures, and it was deemed prudent to delay making any recommendations on the closure of specific schools until the status of the buildings in relation to RAAC had been determined.
- 3.6 It has subsequently been confirmed that none of the primary schools in Northfield contain RAAC, although RAAC was confirmed to be present in a large part of the Northfield Academy building. In a separate report to the Committee for its meeting on 20 February 2024, detailing the arrangements for managing the RAAC at Northfield Academy and the other schools it has been found to be present in, officers have recommended that consideration should be given to the long term future of Northfield Academy, with a view to providing solutions to address the presence of RAAC within the building. The report recommends that officers are instructed to provide the Committee with an update on this and possible next steps at its meeting in September 2024.
- 3.7 For the Northfield primary schools, the options to be explored in the outline business case require to be assessed whilst giving consideration to the feedback received from stakeholders, including their concerns regarding the impact which the closure of a school may have on children, and the wider school community. Any preferred option would need to include provision for maintaining safe walking routes to school, which was another concern highlighted by stakeholders. The outline business case would also need to consider the instruction by Committee members to fully explore and exhaust all options in order to avoid any school closures where possible.
- 3.8 Given that there is now a requirement to consider the options for the long term future of Northfield Academy, due to the presence of RAAC within the building, this presents an opportunity to look at the school estate within this ASG as a whole, including the secondary school provision. This may generate new options for consolidating the primary schools, which were not considered within the feasibility study, and which may help to better address the concerns raised by stakeholders.
- 3.9 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 Northfield ASG, alongside the proposed work to

consider the long term future of Northfield Academy. An update on this work would be reported to the Committee as part of the annual update to the School Estate Plan in September 2024.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Any costs related to further options appraisal 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) a decision to refuse closure...; or
  - (b) 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)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	No significant risks identified			
<b>Compliance</b>	<p>Risk that the Council is seen to make significant changes to schools without considering the views of stakeholders.</p> <p>Risk of successful legal challenge for failing to comply with statutory duties.</p>	<p>The recommendation to take further time to consider additional options before proposing changes to schools at this time demonstrates that full consideration has been given to the views of stakeholders which were raised during the stakeholder engagement exercise.</p>	L	Yes
<b>Operational</b>	<p>Failure to engage and consult with communities on the future of the school estate which serves them, could lead to a breakdown in relationships with community members. Proposals to close schools may not be popular with some stakeholders</p>	<p>The recommendation to take further time to consider additional options before proposing changes to schools at this time demonstrates that full consideration has been given</p>	L	Yes

		to the views of stakeholders which were raised during the stakeholder engagement exercise.		
<b>Financial</b>	No significant risks identified			
<b>Reputational</b>	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 to take further time to consider additional options before proposing changes to 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
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	Taking no immediate 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

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2024</u></b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>	The recommendations within this report support the delivery of the following policy statements:

<a href="#"><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></a>	<p><u>A City of Opportunity</u></p> <p>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 Northfield ASG</p>
<a href="#"><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</u></a>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Prosperous People: The project will support Stretch <b>Outcome 8 in the LOIP</b> - <i>Childfriendly city where all decisions which impact children and young people will be informed by them by 2026.</i> The recommendation takes into account the views expressed by children and other stakeholders.
<b>Regional and City Strategies</b>	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
<b>Integrated Impact Assessment</b>	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed.
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	Not required
<b>Other</b>	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 Appendix 1: Northfield Primary Schools Feasibility Study – Summary of Findings

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

<b>Name</b>	Andrew Jones
<b>Title</b>	Service Manager
<b>Email Address</b>	ajones@aberdeencity.gov.uk
<b>Tel</b>	045101