

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services Finance and Resources
DATE	29 April 2025 07 May 2025
EXEMPT	The report is public, but the Appendix is exempt under Paragraph 8: <i>Estimated expenditure on Contracts</i> . The appendix refers to the potential 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	Victorian Schools Programme: Outline Business Case
REPORT NUMBER	F&C/25/080
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Eleanor Sheppard
CHIEF OFFICER	Stephen Booth
REPORT AUTHOR	Andrew Jones
TERMS OF REFERENCE	ECS: 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.2, 1.3 F&R: 1.1, 4.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents the completed Outline Business Case for the proposed Victorian Schools Programme, detailing options and estimated costs and timescales for improving the suitability of the city's Victorian school buildings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Education and Children's Services Committee :-

- 2.1 Notes the preferred option for taking forwards the Victorian Schools programme, as detailed within the Outline Business Case at Appendix A of this report; and:
- 2.2 Instructs the Chief Officer - Corporate Landlord to incorporate the preferred option and programming and cost implications for the Victorian Schools Programme into the development of the School Estate Plan annual update report, to be presented to this Committee in September 2025.

That the Finance and Resources Committee :-

- 2.3 Notes the preferred option(s) for taking forwards the Victorian Schools programme along with the associated costs all as detailed within the Outline Business Case at Appendix A of this report; and :

- 2.4 Notes the decision of the Education and Children's Services Committee on 29th April 2025 to include the programme of work into the School Estate Plan and instruct the Chief Officer Corporate Landlord to present the costs and programme of works for inclusion in the capital budget setting process for 2026/27.

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 the Chief Officer – Corporate Landlord 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 and options appraisal, to improve the suitability, accessibility and capacity levels of Victorian schools within Aberdeen City, and to report back to the Education and Children's Services Committee with recommendations and estimated costs.
- 3.2 The outline business case, included at Appendix A of this report, sets out the full findings of the feasibility study, and provides an analysis of the options available for improving the suitability of the ten in-scope Victorian school buildings.
- 3.3 The buildings included within the scope of this project are:
- Aberdeen Grammar School
 - Ashley Road School
 - Broomhill School
 - Culter School
 - Gilcomstoun School
 - Kittybrewster School
 - Skene Square School
 - St Joseph's RC School
 - Sunnybank School
 - Woodside School
- 3.4 Whilst some improvement and reconfiguration works have been undertaken in a number of these buildings over the years since they were built, the overall design and layouts of the buildings continue to present significant challenges for successfully delivering the modern curriculum.
- 3.5 Some of the common suitability challenges affecting many of the schools include: accessibility issues; lack of breakout spaces for small group work and pupil support; limited space for outdoor learning; lack of space for dining and PE provision; and inadequate toilet facilities. In addition, several schools are at or already exceed their available pupil capacity, and space within the school sites for extending the buildings is severely limited.
- 3.6 The outline business case seeks to provide opportunities to address these challenges, along with others which are more specific to each school building, so that their overall suitability for curriculum delivery can be improved, and so that any issues with lack of capacity can be resolved. Where possible,

opportunities to improve elements of the condition of the building have also been included, such as improvements to heating and ventilation systems, and the replacement of obsolete light fittings.

Other Victorian Schools

- 3.7 The Victorian school buildings in Aberdeen City which are outwith the scope of the project are:
- Harlaw Academy, Ferryhill School and St Peter's RC School - separate capital projects are currently under way to make improvements to the suitability of these buildings.
 - Hanover Street School - whilst this is a Victorian school building, it was extensively refurbished in 2009, and as a result each element of the school's suitability has been scored at either A (Good) or B (Satisfactory). No further significant suitability improvements are required for Hanover Street School at this time.

Feasibility Study and Stakeholder Engagement

- 3.8 A feasibility study was undertaken between January and October 2024. Officers and specialist consultants visited each school site to assess current building layout, the way in which spaces are used, and to consider opportunities for reconfiguring and/or extending spaces to improve their functionality and suitability.
- 3.9 In tandem with the feasibility study, a stakeholder engagement exercise was undertaken, in which parents, pupils, staff and the wider communities associated with each of the schools were invited to review the brief for the feasibility study, and to provide their comments and feedback on what they felt to be the priorities for improvement for their school building.
- 3.10 Information gathered from the site visits and from the stakeholder engagement was then used to produce sketch designs for a range of potential options for each building, and estimated costs were obtained. The individual options for each school are described in the outline business case at Appendix A.

Programming Constraints

- 3.11 Given the scale and complexity of this programme, and the nature of the works which would require to be undertaken across multiple school buildings, consideration needs to be given to how best to programme the works, to help ensure that the necessary improvements to school buildings can be made, whilst also minimising disruption to learning and teaching.
- 3.12 Each individual school project would require significant construction work to be undertaken on site, much of which would require pupils and staff to be displaced from parts of their building, or the entire school site, until the works are completed, which for a number of the schools would be for many months. This would require temporary classroom accommodation to be provided, or in most

cases an alternative school building to be made available, for decanting pupils and staff whilst the work is carried out.

- 3.13 If the decision is taken to proceed with the Victorian Schools programme, it is proposed that the former Walker Road School building (to which pupils and staff at Ferryhill School are due to be temporarily relocated later this year prior to the refurbishment of the Ferryhill building) is retained for use as a decant building to support the Victorian Schools programme. This would provide an alternative building for schools to be relocated to, whilst the refurbishment of their buildings is carried out.
- 3.14 The Walker Road building would only become available after the Ferryhill School refurbishment is completed, and following this it would only be possible to decant one school at a time to it, so any projects requiring a decant would need to be run consecutively, so that the Walker Road building can be used to support each of them.
- 3.15 Consideration would also need to be given to the capacity of Corporate Landlord and Capital teams to deliver the programme, which would involve an extensive amount of work over an extended period of time. This would be an additional resource commitment, over and above that required for the delivery of the Council's existing priorities for developing other parts of the school estate, which are set out within the School Estate Plan . Current team capacity within the Corporate Landlord cluster is limited, and relying on existing staffing capacity alone would further extend the length of time required to fully deliver the programme. The appointment of an additional project manager within the Corporate Landlord team would help to increase the capacity of the team and ensure the programme can be delivered in a shorter period of time. Salary costs for an additional project manager have therefore been included within the costs section of the outline business case.
- 3.16 It should also be noted that the availability of contractors to undertake works in each of the schools may limit the potential for any projects to be run concurrently, and this would also have an impact on the timescales for delivery of the programme.
- 3.17 Taking all of the above points into consideration, it is proposed that the recommended improvements to the Victorian School buildings are programmed over an extended period of up to fifteen years, with works to the buildings deemed to be highest priority for improvement being undertaken first.
- 3.18 The scheduling of individual projects within the programme would be reviewed on an annual basis, with updates on the anticipated timescales for project delivery, and any recommendations for changes to the programme, being reported for Committee consideration through the annual School Estate Plan update report. This would allow for some flexibility in the delivery of this long term programme, for example to account for any future emerging priorities for other parts of the school estate which may need to be dealt with during the same time period, and it will provide an opportunity to take advantage of any external funding streams made available over the lifetime of the programme.

- 3.19 An indicative high level programme, which reflects the above considerations, is set out within the outline business case at Appendix A.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The approved capital programme, agreed by Council on 5th March 2025, includes an initial allocation of £2.4m for the Victorian Schools programme, with £400k allocated for 2025/26, and a further £1m in 2028/29 and in 2029/30.
- 4.2 The estimated capital costs for making the necessary improvements to the Victorian schools, which are set out within the outline business case, far exceed this initial allocation, and if a decision was taken to proceed with the Victorian Schools Programme, a significant re-prioritisation of the capital programme, over an extended period of time, would be required to fund it, alongside accessing any external funding streams made available in the future. Members should note that the costs presented in the outline business case are indicative of the Victorian Schools Programme taking 15 years to deliver, and that shortening or lengthening the delivery of the programme will either reduce (in the case of a shortened programme) or increase costs, due to the impact of annual inflation increases, which have been accounted for within the estimated costs.
- 4.3 The outline business case also sets out additional revenue costs associated with the programme, with one-off revenue costs over the life of the programme estimated at £14m, to cover project management, decant and transport to alternative premises, and the hire of temporary classroom accommodation for the duration of construction works. In addition, with some projects adding additional floorspace to school buildings to provide extra capacity, higher running costs for those buildings are anticipated, and this would require an overall uplift to annual revenue budgets of up to £590k. There is currently no provision within the Council's revenue budgets to cover these costs.
- 4.4 Given that the Victorian Schools Programme would require significant capital and revenue funding for which budgets have not yet been identified, it is recommended that, should Members be minded to proceed with making improvements to the Victorian schools, then the programming and cost implications of that decision should be incorporated within the School Estate Plan update report, due to be presented to the Education and Children's Services Committee in September 2025. Officers will also continue to be alert to funding opportunities that may help support delivery of the programme.
- 4.5 This would allow for the programme to be fully considered alongside other new priorities which may be identified in the School Estate Plan update, and in turn would allow for a comprehensive overview of plans for the school estate and their financial implications to be included within the budget setting process for 2026/27.

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.

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?
Strategic Risk	No significant risks identified			
Compliance	Failure to plan effectively for the Victorian schools leading to the Council being unable to fulfil its duty to make adequate and efficient education provision	The recommended option as set out within the business case would help to ensure that adequate and efficient provision will be available at the Victorian schools for the foreseeable future	L	Yes
Operational	The preferred option doesn't meet the	Building users will be consulted and	L	Yes

	needs of building users	engaged with throughout the design development to ensure their views and requirements are highlighted		
Financial	Inability to deliver the Council's desired outcomes within the available budget	The recommendation to refer cost implications alongside those of other school estate priorities to the annual budget setting process will provide an opportunity for an appropriate budget to be identified. Officers would then work with cost consultants and designers during design development stage.	L	Yes
Reputational	Failure to engage with stakeholders on the planned changes to the schools could lead to reputational damage for the Council.	Ongoing dialogue and engagement with staff, parents and pupils would continue throughout each project.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	Impact from school transport emissions resulting from decants to other buildings, and concurrent operation of buildings, may result in short term fluctuations in emissions.	Officers will work with environmental planning colleagues at the planning stage to identify opportunities to mitigate any short term negative impacts	M	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

Council Delivery Plan 2024	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u>	<p>The recommendations within this report support the delivery of the following policy statements:</p> <p>A City of Opportunity</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 presents options for making improvements to the city's Victorian school buildings.</p>
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026</u>	
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Prosperous People: The project will support Stretch Outcome 8 in the LOIP - <i>Childfriendly city where all decisions which impact children and young people will be informed by them by 2026</i> . Ongoing stakeholder engagement will help ensure that the views of children and young people will be taken into account.
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	The updated School Estate Plan supports the delivery of Stretch Outcome 16 in the LOIP – 50% of people report they feel able to participate in decisions that help change things for the better by 2026. The proposed improvements to the school site will assist in reducing carbon emissions from the school estate.
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	No assessment required. I confirm this has been discussed and agreed with Stephen Booth, Chief Officer Corporate Landlord on 24 March 2025.
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 A: Outline Business Case – Victorian Schools Programme

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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