

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE
12 NOVEMBER 2009

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	ECS/49/09

School Building Programme

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport

SUMMARY

This report outlines the content of the provisional submission to the Scottish Government, required by the 23rd October, to identify which schools within Highland should be considered for replacement within the first phase of the national School Building Programme for Primary Schools. Members are asked to consider the detail of this provisional submission and to formally approve the content.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Scottish Government wrote to local authorities on the 8th October 2009 asking them to identify the schools that should be considered for inclusion within the initial phase of the School Building Programme for Primary Schools. The return date requested for this submission was the 23rd October 2009. A copy of this letter, that outlines the criteria on which the Scottish Government would base their investment decisions, is appended as **Annex 1** for ease of reference.
- 1.2 Highland Council was asked to identify 2 Primary Schools that are in poor condition and/or very unsuitable for consideration as part of this process.
- 1.3 This report outlines the basis of the Highland Council submission identifying the factors that were taken into account which critically met the criteria stipulated by the Scottish Government and also addressed the authority's own priorities.
- 1.4 The submission to the Scottish Government on the 23rd October was qualified indicating clearly that it was a provisional response on the basis that the proposals would be considered by Members at the ECS Committee on the 12th November. This included the identification of which school would be the top priority

2. THE PROVISIONAL SUBMISSION

- 2.1 The provisional submission sent to the Scottish Government on the 23rd October is appended as **Annex 2**
- 2.2 The submission highlights that over 25% of the Condition – Category C Primary schools in Scotland are within Highland. For this reason it is essential to reduce the number of schools in this category. The objective of the submission was to begin to address this issue. In addition the Scottish Government was keen to lift as many pupils as possible out of being educated in poor accommodation.

- 2.3 The proposal is to replace 5 existing Condition C or D schools with 2 new build Primary schools.
- A new Primary school in Fort William replacing the existing Fort William PS and Upper Achintore PS.
 - A new Primary school in Easter Ross replacing the existing Obsdale PS, Ardross PS and Newmore PS

It was suggested that the new school in Fort William was the higher priority on the basis that it would result in a higher number of pupils being accommodated in improved accommodation.

- 2.4 “Pen portraits” have been produced for each of the schools to be replaced within the above proposal. These high-light the essential criteria that the Scottish Government out-lined in their letter of the 8th October have been addressed. In addition percentage occupancy figures have been provided to high-light the relative under utilisation of space in some of these schools.
- 2.5 The educational benefits of building new integrated schools are also included to emphasise another positive aspect of the proposals over and above improving the school environment and utilisation of buildings.
- 2.6 It should be emphasised that at this stage these are **proposals** and that the Scottish Government will assess the relative merits of these alongside the proposals from other authorities. An announcement about which schools nationally will attract 50% funding support will be made in December 2009.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are requested to confirm the response to the Scottish Government that included the following proposals::
- To replace 5 existing Condition C or D schools with 2 new build Primary schools as detailed below
 - A new Primary school in Fort William replacing the existing Fort William PS and Upper Achintore PS.
 - A new Primary school in Easter Ross replacing the existing Obsdale PS, Ardross PS and Newmore PS
 - That the new school in Fort William is the higher priority on the basis that it would result in a higher number of pupils being accommodated in improved accommodation.
 - To note that for any proposal to amalgamate schools a statutory consultation process will require to be carried out.

Signature:

Designation: Hugh Fraser, Director of Education, Culture & Sport

Date: 26th October 2009.



Author Ron Mackenzie, Head of Support Services

Background papers:

Annex 1 – letter from the Scottish Government entitled – School Building Programme:
Announcement of first phase of Primary schools.

Annex 2 – provisional response to Scottish Government dated 23rd October.

Annex 1

Schools Directorate Schools Division T: 0131-244 7870 F: 0131-244 1474 E: colin.reeves@scotland.gsi.gov.uk	 The Scottish Government
COSLA T:0131 474 9241 F:0131 474 9292 E: robertn@cosla.gov.uk	 COSLA

8 October 2009

SCHOOL BUILDING PROGRAMME: ANNOUNCEMENT OF FIRST PHASE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS

With the announcement of the first phase of 14 secondary schools on 28 September 2009, the focus is now on announcing the first phase of named primary schools, under this new programme, as soon as possible. The principal driver behind this whole programme, as signalled in the Cabinet Secretary's statement to Parliament on 17 June, is to lift as many pupils as possible out of being educated in poor accommodation.

A copy of a statement issued by Scottish Government and agreed by COSLA on the announcement on the 28th is attached in the annex. It makes mention that COSLA and Scottish Government are embarking on a joint process to identify the primary schools by applying the same criteria used for the first secondaries (see below) . As you will appreciate, a process such as this requires accurate local information on the school estate.

The Scottish Government already holds considerable information on the national condition of the primary estate; however, this is not detailed enough to allow us to make an informed decision on improvements needed in each local authority. This letter therefore invites you to indicate the level of need in your authority, and where appropriate to identify two primary schools that are in poor condition or are very unsuitable, for consideration as part of our process. We would ask that you clearly specify which school would be your top priority for attention.

To allow us to accelerate the process and make an announcement before December, we would appreciate this information by 23 October. We will then pool this detailed information with the more general data already held by Scottish Government, and apply the criteria detailed below to arrive at the final decision. Consideration will begin immediately after the 23rd, possibly with the assistance of an independent 'expert' to assist with the processes of reaching a decision.

The school building programme has been discussed at length in the media with varying degrees of accuracy. We think it is therefore also worth reminding you of some of the parameters of the programme. The offer of Government funding is for 50% of the cost of construction of a primary school – whether new build or refurbishment, whatever you feel is most appropriate in the particular circumstances. Government funding for the first primary schools will be phased over the financial years 2010-11 to 2013-14. As has been indicated to those who have received offers of funding for a secondary school, given the principal driver indicated above, the offer extends broadly to upgrading on a like for like basis in terms of range of facilities and school capacity.

The criteria that will be taken into account in the process of identifying the first primary schools are listed below. We have described against each criteria what factors will be taken into account, and the additional information from councils that we would find helpful:

Distribution of needs, nationally - insofar as condition is concerned, the latest indications are set out in the new *School Estate Statistics 2009* published on 29 September 2009.

Information about schools' condition - please give the 'history' of the school's condition ratings as submitted in the Core Fact returns 2004, 2007, 2008 and 2009 eg "BCCC". This can be augmented/explained in the 'pen picture' which we are also asking for. For an example of this please see the annex.

Information about schools' "unsuitability" - some of the worst secondary schools were selected on grounds of known, extreme unsuitability to deliver a modern education. If your plans for primary investment, and your 2 priority primaries have been selected because they are unsuitable (rather than simply on the ground of condition) please set out the reasons – configuration, inflexibility, lack of capacity etc – and give the condition ratings and a suitability rating, if it has been assessed.

Additionality - the point here is to support acceleration of investment programmes by identification of the top priority school(s) for which funding has yet to be secured or put in place as part of school investment plans.

Authorities' own priorities - this is why we have asked in this letter for an indication of your priority primary school for investment.

Aspects of readiness to proceed - bearing in mind that decisions will be made and announced by the end of the year and the Government funding is phased over the 4 financial years indicated above, please provide detail of practical issues, possible timings of planning, procurement, construction phases etc if known at this stage.

Also attached is an example of the 'pen picture' developed by Scottish Government for the first 14 secondary schools, and which describes why this particular school was selected. Something similar for the primary school(s) which you submit would also be helpful

If you would like further clarification of, or to discuss anything in this letter, please contact either of us. Submissions should be made to Bill Scott-Watson, Area 2-D South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ or schoolestates@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

COLIN M REEVES
Scottish Government

ROBERT NICOL
COSLA

Annex

Scottish Government Statement on 28 September 2009:

"This £1.25bn capital investment in the school estate by the Scottish Government and local government is a very positive step and is in accordance with the joint Concordat commitments to do what is necessary to improve the fabric of schools, deliver curriculum for excellence and reduce class sizes.

We (*Scottish Government*) identified the 14 secondaries in most need of investment on the basis of a framework of criteria and intelligence on the school estate. We worked closely with COSLA to develop the criteria, and we have agreed with COSLA that the remaining schools will be identified in full partnership as part of a joint process.

With COSLA's help we will now accelerate the joint process to agree the first set of primaries using the same criteria we used for the first 14 secondaries. Without second guessing the process we have to go through and having looked closely at the extent of poor conditions and unsuitability and the scale of needs and local investment priorities across Scotland, we now anticipate that each council will benefit from the first phases of the school building programme."

Examples of a 'Pen Portraits'

Condition: BBB (2004, 2007, 2008 core fact returns)

Roll/Capacity: 725/1150

The school (originally Victorian, but extensively refurbished) was part of an original list for a PPP project. Current proposals are for the creation of a campus including secondary, primary and nursery provision. HMIE report identified concerns over suitability of accommodation e.g. lack of pupil social space, as well as condition of much of the building and playground. Although money has been spent on trying to keep up the condition of the school the real problem is its fundamental unsuitability (initial assessment is category C) to deliver modern education. Plans are for a 700 capacity replacement school on site, which could be built without need for decant.

Condition: CCC (2004, 2007, 2008 core fact returns)

Roll/Capacity: 624/1060

The present building opened in the 70s. Recent addition of Vocational Learning Centre (£466k alteration, completed autumn 2008). HMIE report in 2005 identified issues with disability access and the heating system. In a 2007 assessment the Council rated the school in the second lowest category of suitability. An Option appraisal was due to be undertaken in 2009-10 to consider longer term requirements of school. Provisional capital budget, published February 2009, signalled £1m for improvements to condition and suitability ratings in several phases, though not until 2011/12.

ANNEX 2

Mr Colin Reeves
The Scottish Government
Schools Directorate
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

Please Ask for: **Hugh Fraser**
Direct Dial: **(01463) 702802**
Fax: **(01463) 711177**
E-mail: **hugh.fraser@highland.gov.uk**
Your Ref:
Our Ref: **HF/AC**
Date: **23 October 2009**

Dear Colin

SCHOOL BUILDING PROGRAMME: ANNOUNCEMENT OF FIRST PHASE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS

I refer to your letter dated 8th October 2009 regarding the above and would like to thank you for including two Highland schools for consideration during the selection process for investment in the Primary schools sector.

I note that the Government's main priority in relation to the School Building Programme is to lift as many pupils as possible out of being educated in poor accommodation.

It should be noted that these initial proposals are provisional as there has been no formal political approval by the Education Culture & Sport (ECS) Committee which is not due to meet until the 12th November 2009. As a result there may be a requirement to amend this submission following consideration of proposals at that Committee.

There are currently 183 Primary Schools operational within the Highland Council area. The condition of these schools can be summarised thus:

- 11 are rated as Condition A
- 57 are rated as Condition B
- 112 are rated as Condition C
- 3 are rated as Condition D

It should be noted that on the basis of the recent School Estate Statistics publication Highland Council has over 25% of the Category C (Poor) schools in Scotland.

For this reason it is important that Capital investment is targeted towards reducing the number of schools in this category. This submission attempts to address this issue.

The submission takes into account a number of factors including:

- Condition and Suitability
- Percentage occupancy
- The fact that the schools in question are not currently within the approved Capital programme
- The authority's own priority to reduce the number of schools in Category C and Category D by the appropriate means

- The requirement to ensure that scarce resources are freed up to ensure maximum educational benefit

The Highland Council submission is predicated on building 2 new Primary schools to replace 5 existing schools. The schools in question are:-

- A new Primary school in Fort William replacing the existing Fort William PS and Upper Achintore PS
- A new Primary school in Easter Ross replacing the existing Obsdale PS, Ardross PS and Newmore PS.

A "Pen Portrait" has been produced for each of the above schools within the submission and this information is enclosed for your consideration.

The priority for consideration is the new Primary school in Fort William, although it should be stressed that this reflects the view of officials and is not a decision that has been formally approved by the ECS Committee. This decision will be taken on 12th November 2009.

If you have any questions in relation to this submission please contact Ron MacKenzie on 01463 702805 (ron.mackenzie@highland.gov.uk) in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Fraser

cc: Alistair Dodds, Chief Executive
Steve Barron, Director of Housing & Property Services