

Item 12: Question Time

To the Leader of the Council

“During the last Council, it was originally estimated that £43 million would be required to alleviate the unplanned roll pressures faced by the Inverness schools. Roll pressures that are largely due in part to inadequate analysis of demographics, unsustainable development, lack of infrastructure and inadequate levels of developer contributions, especially for education.

Approximately two years ago officers revealed to the Care, Learning and Housing Committee the original estimate of £43 million was unrealistic and was then estimated to be £200 million. Clearly, such an unexpected budget pressure impacts on all areas of Highland Council.

Inexplicably, no reports have been presented to either Full Council or Care Learning and Housing Committee, or the City of Inverness Area Committee on this substantive issue for well over a year. Yet Inverness Members have been invited to attend private Members briefings to advise them of the measures proposed to mitigate these roll pressures.

Given the time lapse, inflation, interest rate increases etc., and the absence of reporting to Members, can you advise all Members of this Council if this figure of £200 million has been reviewed since it was last reported to the Council and if so, what is the new figure?”

Response to Mr K Gowans

With reference to the £200m, it was a report to the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee of 1 March 2017, which at that time indicated that **pan-Highland**, there was an estimated differential of £190m between the funding allocated to Care and Learning capital at that time, and the identified business cases and bids proposed to go forward into the capital review. Those business cases were not related exclusively to schools, and included large proposals such as a Regional Sports Facility and Glenmore Outdoor Centre.

Therefore, there was no gap of £200m pertaining to Inverness schools, with the report indicating at that time an additional £37m requirement to meet school investment across Inverness.

In the March 2018 capital programme approved by Council, the following budget was approved which addressed the identified need for capacity and other improvements in Inverness Schools (figures for years 1-5 shown).

Charleston Academy £7.5m
Culloden Academy £7.5m
Milton of Leys Nursery Annexe £1.5m
Ness Castle Primary £12.3m
Smithton Primary £4m
Inverness High School £11m
Merkinch Primary £18m
Total £61.8m

In addition to the above, the Scottish Government funding for ELC expansion will also see investment across a number of settings, including Inverness. The Council also allocated £4.6m for Modular Units, to address further capacity pressures across the Highlands.

Despite the affordability challenges faced by the March 2018 capital review, significant school investment was agreed by the Council for Inverness schools, and the Council will fulfil its legal obligations to ensure across its school estate, sufficient capacity exists.

Regular reporting on delivery of capital projects, and financial monitoring, is considered by the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee, where Members can monitor progress of school and other investment projects.