

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	EDU/12/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education Committee

Date: 20 May 2021

Report Title: St Clement's School Update

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates Members in relation to actions being taken forward by The Highland Council to support the development of a capital project to replace the current St Clement's School buildings in Dingwall. The overall condition and suitability of the existing accommodation is poor and requires action to ensure young people are being taught and supported in the most suitable environment.
- 1.2 The report follows from recent and ongoing engagement with Parents, Members and the Head Teacher, an appraisal of potential sites in Dingwall for a new school building, and the site assessment that is underway, which in due course could lead to the commencement of a Statutory Consultation process.
- 1.3 Decisions on funding to support the delivery of a new school will be a matter for the Full Council and are expected to be considered at a future Council meeting.

2. Implications

- 2.1 **Resource (Budget and Staffing)** – as indicated within the report, there is at present no funding provided for within The Highland Council's capital programme for a new St Clement's school. Full resource implications would be considered as part of future reports relating to the proposal and The Highland Council's capital programme.
- 2.2 **Legal** – any relocation would require The Highland Council to conduct a Statutory Consultation process per the terms of the relevant legislation.
- 2.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** – a new St Clement's school building would provide an opportunity to improve the environment within which our young people are educated, and address some of the existing building condition and suitability issues that impact on the provision.

- 2.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – any new school would be expected to have a positive impact, replacing aged and separate existing school accommodation.
- 2.5 **Risk** – taking a project forward would be subject to the outcome of the site investigation and confirmation of a viable site, commencement and conclusion of a Statutory Consultation process, and securing of funding.
- 2.6 **Gaelic** – no particular implications to highlight.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the actions being taken forward to support the development of a project for a new St Clement's School;
 - ii. Note the positive discussions that have taken place with parents and local stakeholders; and
 - iii. Note the expectation of further reports to this Committee and/or Full Council in the coming months.

4. Background

- 4.1 St. Clement's is one of the three Special Schools operated by The Highland Council and provides education to children in the 3-18 age group. It is located in Dingwall and mainly admits pupils from a wide area of Easter Ross, with some pupils attending from further afield. The main school building dates back to the early 20th century although there have been many building modifications down the years. The current school accommodation comprises the original main building, a modular annexe building that was installed in 2015 and an older modular unit. Overall the accommodation is currently rated "C – (Poor)" for both Condition and Suitability, mainly due to the state of the main building, having three separate buildings on the campus, and the limitations of some of the facilities, such as external areas. There is general agreement that the accommodation does not adequately support the delivery of education for some of our most vulnerable pupils that are unable to attend a mainstream school.
- 4.2 In August 2019 The Highland Council considered a report on school capital investment priorities that agreed that there should be engagement with the Parent Council of St. Clement's to review potential locations for a new school prior to initiating a formal Statutory Consultation process on the location and nature of a replacement facility. The Covid pandemic has impacted on the expected timeline for this work being taken forward, but significant progress has been made in recent months as set out within this report.
- 4.3 Potential new sites in Dingwall were identified and reviewed with Parent Council representatives and Ward Members in 2019. This covered all sites that are zoned for development (other than for housing) in the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan that was adopted in 2015. Some of these sites are owned by The Highland Council, and some are owned by other parties. After considering a range of relevant criteria (such as site area, flood risk, road access and possible contamination) it was eventually agreed that all but one of the sites that were initially identified should be discounted, namely an area of land off Ferry Road in Dingwall, which is not owned by The Highland Council.

- 4.4 The Ferry Road site was submitted for consideration to a Major Planning Pre-Application Advice meeting in March 2020. The Advice Report was received in April 2020 and it advised that “subject to the site constraints of flood risk and access being suitably addressed, the principle of development of a school on this site is acceptable”. However, it was considered that the nature of these constraints is such that it may not be technically feasible to overcome them; also, if feasible, the cost of addressing them could be significant.
- 4.5 Several meetings have been held in recent months and these were attended by Parents, Members, the Chief Executive, the Executive Chief Officer, Head Teacher and Council Officers. On 2nd March 2021, there was an informal meeting of the Parent Council with the Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning. From that discussion there was a clear preference expressed that the site at Ferry Road should be considered as a preferred option by parents.
- 4.6 It was agreed at a meeting in February with both Parents and Ward Members that a detailed technical assessment of the site at Ferry Road should be undertaken. This will establish if a school development on the site is feasible or not and, if feasible, what the cost of the work required to achieve this would be. Site investigations were carried out early in April and a full report will be available by the end of June. However, some feedback has been received on the site investigations and initial analysis carried out to date.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The initial feedback from the team undertaking the assessment of the Ferry Road site has indicated that it will be challenging to provide a technical solution that fully overcomes the constraints in respect of flood risk and road access. Further dialogue is required with Council Officials and other agencies in the coming weeks to ensure that the completed assessment establishes if a school development on the site is feasible or not.
- 5.2 As there is a risk that a school development on the Ferry Road site may prove to be unfeasible, a further review will be carried out to establish if there are any other sites in Dingwall that could be considered. The review will include any additional sites included in the Main Issues Report for the new Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan that was published in January 2021, and will this time also consider those sites that are zoned for housing. One potential site has already been identified and a similar assessment to that underway at Ferry Road will now be carried out; this will also be the case for any further sites that are identified.
- 5.3 The Highland Council will continue the engagement with parents and other stakeholders in the meantime and will update on the site assessment work as it progresses. A positive working relationship and consensus on the way forward has supported the work now being undertaken, and the outcome of the site assessment process will be key in determining the next steps.
- 5.4 In relation to capital funding, there is at present no budget provision within The Highland Council’s current capital programme, and funding would need to be secured to allow a project to move forward. The Highland Council will continue to engage with Scottish Government in relation to school investment opportunities. It is anticipated that St Clement’s would be a matter to be considered in a future review of the Council’s capital programme.

5.5 Finally, any relocation to a new site would require a Statutory Consultation process, with any decision to commence such a process subject to the outcome of the ongoing site assessment process. The intent would be to seek member approval to commence a Statutory Consultation later this year, from Summer/Autumn 2021, once the site assessment activity referred to earlier completes, and that a Statutory Consultation could move forward in parallel with discussions and actions to secure funding for delivering a new build.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning

Date: 10th May 2021

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