
EYEMOUTH PRIMARY SCHOOL – NEXT STAGES

Report by Service Director, Young People Engagement & Inclusion
and Service Director, Assets & Infrastructure

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

27 August 2020

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report seeks approval to undertake an options appraisal and detailed feasibility study regarding the replacement of Eyemouth Primary School and Early Learning & Childcare provision as part of the Council's Learning Estate.**
- 1.2 In April 2019 approval was given to detailed costing and design work being carried out regarding the construction of a new Primary, Early Learning and Childcare setting (ELC) and Community Campus on the site of the former High School in Eyemouth.
- 1.3 Since that date however, cost pressures regarding delivery of the project have arisen, along with local community opposition to some elements of the proposal. It is therefore proposed to undertake a detailed feasibility of all of the options potentially available to replace the primary school, including the consideration of campus or hybrid models, alongside the option that was currently under development.
- 1.4 It is intended that further community consultation will be undertaken before any subsequent report is brought back to Council.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:-

- (a) **Approval is given to the carrying out a detailed feasibility study to consider the following options:-**
 - i. **Continue with the planned ELC and Primary School Community Campus on the former Eyemouth High School site;**

- ii. Creation of a 3-18 Campus located at the current Eyemouth High School;**
 - iii. Creation of a 2 Campus model within Eyemouth comprising ELC, Primary 1-4 and community facilities, as a direct replacement to the current Primary School and a Senior Campus located at the current Eyemouth High School, comprising P5-7 and Secondary pupils.**
- (b) It is noted that a further report will be brought back to Council in December 2020.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Eyemouth Primary School is located within the residual buildings of the former Eyemouth High School, which was replaced through a PPP contract arrangement in 2009. The current Primary School space does not work well for modern day curricular requirements and the setting does not provide a modern learning environment for the children. There are also capacity issues at the school as the roll continues to grow; currently operating at 91% of capacity. It has been further identified that the replacement of Eyemouth Primary School is a priority for the Council, given that it is also ranked as Category C (Condition), Category C (Suitability) and with a current capacity of 91% in accordance with the annual Core Facts summary submitted to Scottish Government annually.
- 3.2 The new Eyemouth High School opened in March 2009 and was constructed as part of the Council's 3 High School PPP project. The repayment of the private finance is now approximately midway through the 25 year payment period. The High School was originally promoted as a 500 capacity school but to a style of accommodation schedule that under estimates capacity in certain general teaching spaces. Based on a current assessment, the school is reported as having capacity for 770. The pupil roll since then has not reached this level with occupancy averaging 57% since opening. The current roll is 495 (64% occupancy).
- 3.3 In 2015, a feasibility study was undertaken as part of early preparatory work regarding the replacement of the Primary School. The preferred option identified at this time was a new build Primary School on the former High School site. Consideration was given, at this time, to a campus style model where the High School would take up space more efficiently allowing one of the wings of the School to be used for primary/ELC. This was technically feasible at that time, but not considered further on the basis of:-
- i. Comparable cost with a new build, on the current Primary School site then considered to be circa £8M;
 - ii. Moderate legal and financial complexity of re-negotiating part of the PPP contract and the additional revenue costs this would incur;
 - iii. Perceived community nervousness for a campus style model, essentially relocating all education provision to the 'edge' of the town;
 - iv. The benefits of developing the former High School site, which had remained underutilised and undeveloped since the opening of the new High School; and
 - v. Detailed discussions had been held with Berwickshire Housing Association and Trust Housing Association to prepare an overall masterplan for the site, which would meet the needs of the three partners and the community.

- 3.4 A new build Primary School on the site of the former Eyemouth High School was included in the Capital Financial Plan in February 2019 at a budget of £16M. A report was presented to Executive Committee on 16 April 2019 recommending that the detailed design and costing process begin for the proposed new school. Recommendation 2.1 (e) of that report specifically encouraged Officers to consider all potential options for property asset consolidation in accordance with the principle of 'Fit for 2024'.
- 3.5 In parallel with the development of the new ELC and Primary, Officers continued discussions with Trust Housing Association, for the delivery of circa 40 Extra Care Housing (ECH) units as part of the current programme, which will see ECH developments being undertaken in Duns (under construction), Galashiels (under construction), Kelso (planning), Eyemouth (pre-planning), Hawick (pre-planning) and Peebles (feasibility), with an aspiration that would have seen 240 units delivered in total. At the moment on the projects in Duns and Galashiels have received Council approval and the rest will be brought to Council for consideration in due course. This is a tri-partite arrangement with both Trust Housing Association and Eildon Housing Association as development partners and the Council is generally providing support for these developments through the use of 2nd Homes Council Tax.
- 3.6 In addition, Officers have continued to engage with Berwickshire Housing Association (BHA) on the provision of circa 60 or so affordable and social housing units on part of the site. While an area of land was previously sold to BHA by SBC at the time of the PPP contract award, this was denoted as a 'floating parcel' to be defined through a master planning exercise. The provision of social housing on this site has also met with local resistance, despite it having been identified with the Planning LDP and SHIP for a considerable number of years.
- 3.7 Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, it had been intended to present to Council two reports on the proposed SBC Learning Estate Strategy - a response to the Scottish Government's national Learning Estate Strategy published in September 2019 - as well as a report on the Council's planned Asset Rationalisation programme as an integral part of both the Corporate Landlord functions and also the Fit for 2024 workstreams. Both these reports are being updated in light of Covid-19 and it is currently intended to bring these to Council in September 2020.
- 3.8 The design process of a replacement facility, on the site of the former High School, has continued since April 2019, and includes space within the building for 4 additional classrooms (assuming some form of consolidation of Primary School provision within the wider Eyemouth cluster in accordance with emerging Learning Estate

Strategy and FF24 Property Asset Rationalisation proposals), as well as direct replacements for the nearby Family Support Centre, the ageing Community Centre (itself a former school) and Library as part of the overall property asset rationalisation proposition within Eyemouth town centre. The Project Team are finding it difficult to deliver the project to this original £16M budget, given the time which has elapsed and the delays incurred to date, for example, Covid-19 lockdown.

- 3.9 In late 2019, some local opposition to the overall use of the former High School site on the basis of “loss of key green space” and the provision of social housing became apparent to Officers. While this perceived loss has been mitigated by the retention of a full size grass pitch outwith the secure school boundary (similar to the recent Broomlands Primary School development), there is also some opposition to any development that introduces social housing in that area, despite the fact that Council sold land to BHA during the formative stages of the PPP High School project and this has been made clear in both the LDP and SHIP since that period.
- 3.10 It should be noted, that in order to allow the Trust Housing Development to be delivered on the current site, without the parallel investment in new education and community facilities, it is likely that the Council may have to provide additional financial support beyond that already committed through 2nd Homes Council Tax due to increased infrastructure costs that were originally going to met as part of the intended ELC and PS investment.
- 3.11 Immediately prior to lockdown in March 2020, it had been intended to carry out a series of consultation meetings to present the latest proposals for the site – both the overall master plan configuration and the designs for the new Eyemouth Community Campus. Participation requests under the Community Empowerment Act had previously been agreed with both Eyemouth Community Council and Eyemouth Development Trust to be involved in the design development of the scheme.
- 3.12 There are now several issues that need to be considered:-
- a) The continuing community opposition to the current proposal for the former High School site; primarily regarding the housing and green space elements;
 - b) The financial pressure regarding the current proposal – both capital and revenue, post Covid-19; and
 - c) Whether there would be community support for a single 3-18 campus style education model, located as the current High School, given the similarities of the size of the town/catchment with Jedburgh.

3.13 SBC will also require to enter into discussions with Scottish Borders Education Partnership (SBEP), who are currently responsible for the management and operation of the PPP contract arrangements, to explore the proposals set out in this report.

3.14 Accordingly it is proposed that a further feasibility study is undertaken regarding delivery of education in Eyemouth, which will comprise consideration of both the current proposal and campus/hybrid models as well as all technical, educational, financial, asset rationalisation and legal issues. A report will be presented back to Elected Members in December 2020.

4 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

It is proposed that costs associated with this proposal are met from within the existing capital budget, given the recommendation 2.1(e) from the Report to Executive Committee dated 16 April 2019.

4.2 There are financial pressures on both the Capital project for the new build and associated revenue staffing and property related operating costs over two education buildings in Eyemouth. These can be potentially mitigated by reconsidering a Campus model.

4.3 In the event that a Campus model, located at the Secondary School, proves to be the preferred option, options regarding finance and delivery of the preferred solution will require to be considered. The Council currently make revenue based unitary charge payments for the underutilised High School; these will require to be re-modelled and increased to reflect a change in the contractual relationship of any additional floorspace, depending on the funding and contractual solution. A further report will be submitted regarding these options.

4.4 Any change to the current PPP arrangements would likely require to be contained within the balance of the PPP contract period, unless there was a desire by SBC to extend it. If not, then consequently the ongoing revenue costs are likely to be higher, given a shortened contractual time period, of circa 8-10 years post completion in lieu of more normal 25-50 year periods.

4.5 If the work undertaken to date on the current High School site is abandoned, then all costs may require to be written off to revenue. In addition, a greater contribution from SBC may be required towards the planned Extra Care Housing being developed by Trust Housing Association to reflect higher site and infrastructure costs.

4.6 This proposal will result in re-profiling of the planned expenditure for the School Estates; which will include, inter alia, consideration of the model to be delivered at Galashiels Academy and/or the acceleration of Earlston Primary School.

4.7 The creation of a 3-18 Campus would likely mean that further asset rationalisation within the town, i.e. Community Centre and Library would not be feasible due to the distance between the various sites and would need to be factored into a detailed capital/revenue financial assessment.

Risk and Mitigations

4.8 There is a potential reputational risk in proposing a further review, not only with the community, but partners such as Berwickshire Housing Association and Trust Housing Association. This can be mitigated by ensuring that the review is completed quickly and that there is open communication regarding the reasons behind the decision, which reflect that community opinions are being taken into account in the process.

4.9 There are time risks associated with the planning process for the new build school. If community opposition to development on the overall former High School site are maintained, although, as noted, this seems primarily directed at social housing which could be dealt with through the planning process.

Integrated Impact Assessment

4.10 An Integrated Impact Assessment will be completed in respect of the new school proposal.

Acting Sustainably

4.11 Acting sustainably is embedded within all actions contained within the School Estate Review.

Carbon Management

4.12 Carbon management assessments will be contained within the individual proposals for new schools.

Rural Proofing

4.13 Rural proofing is embedded within all actions contained within the School Estate Review.

Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

4.14 There are no changes to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

5 CONSULTATION

The Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR & Communications, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Signature

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Background Papers: Executive Committee Report 16 April 2019

Previous Minute Reference: Executive Committee Minutes 16 April 2019

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