



# **Agenda Item 10**

## **Connected Falkirk Update**

**Falkirk Council**

**Title:** Connected Falkirk Update  
**Meeting:** Education, Children and Young People Executive  
**Date:** 9 November 2021  
**Submitted By:** Director of Children's Services

**1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report provides the Education, Children and Young People Executive with:

- an update on progress with the Connected Falkirk programme.
- an update on the overall financial position of the programme.

**2. Recommendations**

2.1 **The Education, Children and Young People Executive is asked to:**

- (i) **note the overall content of this update report;**
- (ii) **note the progress to date of the programme of work.**

**3. Background**

3.1 Connected Falkirk is an ambitious programme that will see personal devices provided for all P6-S6 pupils and shared devices at a ratio of 1:5 for P1-P5 pupils, as well as the supporting infrastructure across our school estate. It will allow teachers to redefine learning, teaching and assessment. Using technology enables deeper learning to take place that leads to greater engagement and better outcomes for young people.

3.2 Connected Falkirk is a programme of work within the overarching 'Succeed Today, Excel Tomorrow (STET)' strategy, within the Council of the Future. Communities workstream, that outlines six transformational sub-projects within Children's Services. This project is intrinsic to delivering on the Council's vision that Falkirk is the place to be – where everyone can fulfil their potential and is grounded in our Communities Priority, which has equalities at its heart.

3.3 Connected Falkirk will transform teaching and learning across Falkirk for the benefit of all teachers, children and young people. Accelerated responses and development of digital capabilities due to pandemic means that we have an urgency to ensure that all of our young people are equipped with a level of general and specialist digital skills that they will need to thrive in a transforming and increasingly digital world.

- 3.4 The Connected Falkirk programme also links with the Digital Communities project, one of the six key priorities set out in our [Digital Falkirk plan](#) that was approved in 2020.
- 3.5 Falkirk Council initially allocated a c. £9.6m capital investment in Connected Falkirk, with £200k of funding allocated to the Connected Falkirk Sprint Team to support the roll-out of the programme to 22,000 young people and 2,500 staff. The current COVID-19 crisis has further strengthened the need and rationale for Connected Falkirk and is an essential part of Council recovery plans.
- 3.6 This report provides the Education, Children and Young People Executive with an update on the four-year programme of work.

## **4. Considerations**

### **4.1 Update on Audio-Visual Deployment**

- The c. £350,000 contract for the fitting of 1,000 Apple TV devices is continuing to schedule, with a target date of December 2021 for completion. These devices are fitted in classrooms across Primary, Secondary and Special stages.
- So far, at the time of presentation of this report, 60% of devices have been configured and fitted.
- Feedback from teaching staff has been very positive, with particular mention of their use to support lesson instruction and feedback. Pupils and staff can now easily share their work on their device with the class from anywhere in a room on existing class display technologies.

### **4.2 Update on Device Deployment**

- Connected Falkirk is more than just a logistics project- it's a transformational learning programme too. During device deployment, the Connected Falkirk Sprint Team works with each pupil to build their device, configure it to their individual preferences, and provide training on how the device can be used in learning and teaching. No pupil leaves the deployment session without their device being ready to use in class.
- Since the school return in August, an increased pupil absence rate due to self-isolation requirements has meant that additional time has been spent ensuring all pupils receive their device on return to school.
- Despite these factors, at the time of presentation of this report approximately 95% of devices will have been issued to pupils across P6-S6.

- Providing that no further detrimental changes are made to COVID procedures in schools, the completion date for device deployment will still be the end of November 2021, as intimated in the previous update paper.

#### 4.3 Update on Connectivity

- An equally important part of Connected Falkirk is the dedicated Internet connectivity and Wi-Fi for each school.
- COVID safety procedures in schools have restricted the periods of time that contractors can complete connectivity work.
- The installation of a new connectivity line required for two school sites, Comely Park Primary and Drumbowie Primary, has now been completed, and final activation of the line is imminent, meaning that all 58 school sites will have their new Connected Falkirk Wi-Fi and connectivity live.
- This brings significant benefits to every school in the programme- reliable Wi-Fi 6 connectivity across every building, greater visibility of the network for support and diagnostics, and high-speed Internet for access to the resources and tools our learners and staff require.

#### 4.4 Update on Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL)

- To support teachers in their use of Connected Falkirk devices and the blending of digital pedagogies into learning experiences, the Connected Falkirk Sprint Team has provided a range of Professional Learning opportunities for staff.
- Sessions with schools on preparing staff and pupils for their new 1:1 device environment are now ending, and the focus has turned to embedding the new technologies and tools into learning and teaching.
- The Connected Falkirk Sprint Team, working with our technology partner XMA Ltd, continue to provide CLPL sessions and activities with each school linked to their individual school development priorities. These sessions-some working with staff, whilst others will be working with staff and pupils, will take place over the course of the 2021/22 school session. All sessions are recorded and made available to the school afterwards, for follow up or to support further learning for those unavailable to attend.
- Content on the Connected Falkirk Twitter account @connectedfalk and YouTube channel continues to grow. Both are regularly updated with tips, techniques, ideas and resources. There has been a significant increase in schools using Twitter to share their use of Connected Falkirk devices in their learning and teaching, and the @connectedfalk Twitter account

allows us to retweet those exemplars to a wider audience to share the knowledge and ideas.

- The Connected Falkirk Sprint Team will be scheduling several online Apple Regional Training Centre (RTC) events in November and December, to staff from not only Falkirk Council, but all over Scotland. This wider audience allows us to share knowledge and experiences with others and helps to grow a community of digital learning excellence.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 In line with COTF project management practices, the project has a communication and stakeholder plan for ongoing engagement during the roll out. For note, consultation was undertaken during the scoping phase of this project with stakeholders including pupils, elected members and other local authorities from a benchmarking perspective. Subsequent engagement, particularly with elected members during consultation on the Corporate Plan priorities, has reinforced the need for this project to help bridge digital inequality gaps across communities.

## **6. Implications**

### **Financial/Resources**

- 6.1 As part of the General Fund Capital Programme, approved by Council on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021, total resources of £12.3m were agreed for this project to 2025/26.
- 6.2 To date, £8.0m of this Capital budget has been spent, covering devices, implementation, connectivity and Wi-Fi for teachers and pupils. This includes:
- Initial £9.6m capital investment in Connected Falkirk agreed by Falkirk Council in 2020.
  - £200k of COTF Change Fund allocated to the Connected Falkirk Sprint Team to support the roll-out of the programme to 22,000 young people and 2,500 staff in 2020.
  - ICT Programme capital investment of c£2.7m in the Connected Falkirk (Digital Learning Environment) agreed by Falkirk Council in 2021.

This Capital spend can be further broken down into the following areas:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Capital</b>
Devices, accessories, configuration, & management system	£6.0m
Wi-Fi hardware and installation	£1.4m
Network equipment improvements	£0.25m
Apple TV hardware and installation	£0.35m
<b>Total</b>	<b>£8.0m</b>

- 6.3 As the impact of the programme is being assessed over the 4 years, there may be a need for future Capital bids in order to sustain the programme beyond 2025/26. It should be noted though that Scottish Government has announced a funding commitment that by the end of this parliamentary session, all 700,000 school-aged pupils in Scotland will have access to an appropriate digital device, and where necessary an internet connection, to support their learning.
- 6.4 The successful roll out of this ambitious and transformational project will allow Children's Services to consider new and alternative methods and improved platforms to support teachers with curriculum delivery. This will be realised through the wider 'Succeed Today, Excel Tomorrow (STET)' programme, enabling the Service and the wider Communities workstream to meet the financial targets contained within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. It is expected that savings will be achieved from a number of work areas:
- Reduced need for desktop PCs, which will reduce the requirement for central ICT support and maintenance.
  - More efficient ways for virtual learning will reduce transport costs.
  - A more efficient curriculum delivery model within Senior Phase.
  - Less need for printing and curricular handouts.

### **Legal**

- 6.5 None.

### **Risk**

- 6.6 The key inherent risks associated with this major programme are:
- delivery of infrastructure projects on time;
  - ensuring that planned expenditure is kept in line with resources;
  - continuing disruption to the supply chain as a result of price inflation or non-availability of materials linked to Brexit;
  - the potential impact that any current or future COVID/lockdown decisions may have on all aspects of the overall programme of work.
  - failure to deliver this programme of work will severely impact the digital capabilities of our young people and their communities.
- 6.7 The Council of the Future governance framework is used in order to track and mitigate these potential issues through the project Risk Log.

### **Equalities**

- 6.8 None.

### **Sustainability/Environmental Impact**

- 6.9 None.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1 Although the programme of device deployment has seen some slippage due to external factors, schools are now benefiting from improved Wi-Fi and connectivity for their existing and new devices.
- 7.2 Despite the significant impact COVID has had on both the supply chain of equipment and limitations on deployment approaches, the programme of work is still progressing to budget and device deployment will complete in November 2021.
- 7.3 The installation of the Audio-Visual elements of Connected Falkirk is well underway and is scheduled to complete in December 2021.
- 7.4 Staff CLPL opportunities have continued throughout the delivery programme, with individual training, tailored to school development priorities, scheduled for the session. As the deployment phase of the programme comes to an end, the focus will turn to developing and embedding digital skills in the classroom and beyond.

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### **Appendices**

None.

### **List of Background Papers**

None.