



## **Agenda Item 4**

### **Council of the Future Project Report: Connected Falkirk**

**Falkirk Council**

**Title: Council of the Future Project Report: Connected Falkirk**  
**Meeting: Emergency Executive**  
**Date: 14 May 2020**  
**Submitted By: Director of Children's Services**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of Connected Falkirk, a Council of the Future transformation project to deliver a sector leading, modern & digital learning environment across our schools.

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1 The Emergency Executive is asked to:-**

- (1) note the provisional capital award of £9.6m within the recently approved Capital Programme Budget at the Council Meeting on 26 February 2020;**
- (2) note that this funding covers the initial five years of the Connected Falkirk Project which aims to complete the procurement process for infrastructure, devices, training and ultimately deliver on our digital learning ambitions across all our schools;**
- (3) note that a future capital submission will be made for investment required beyond year five of the Connected Falkirk project in order to ensure longer term sustainability, and**
- (4) agree that the project should proceed and that the Director of Children's Services is authorised to spend the capital expenditure for financial year 2020/21 set out in paragraph 4.3.**

**3. Background**

- 3.1. Wave Two Council of the Future was launched as part of Falkirk Council's Five-Year Business Plan in May 2019. This included a range of projects set up to transform education and learning for communities across the Falkirk Council area. Collectively, these projects are now referred to as the "Succeed Today, Excel Tomorrow" programme of work for Children's Services focusing on transformation in the following areas:-

- Investing in People, Place and Partnership
- Investing in our Workforce
- Investing in our Primaries
- Investing in our Special Educational Schools and Establishments
- Falkirk Technical Academy
- Connected Falkirk

- 3.2 Since May 2019, progress has been made in developing the ambitious blueprint for all elements of Succeed Today, Excel Tomorrow. Connected Falkirk is the front-runner of these projects in terms of timeline.
- 3.3 Linked to Falkirk Council's Digital Strategy, which is a fundamental enabler of change, Connected Falkirk is a transformational digital investment in Falkirk's young people which will transform teaching and learning. The investment in digital infrastructure, connectivity, hardware and software will:
- Ensure Falkirk's young people have the ability to learn anytime, anywhere using the power of technology to reach every learner, ultimately leading to greater engagement, better outcomes and increased levels of attendance.
  - Redefine the way that young people engage with their learning, teachers and peers: increasing creativity, collaboration and real-time feedback on their work. There is a significant amount of research to show that if digital technology is used effectively to increase the quality of feedback a young person receives, this can lead to an additional 12 months of progress over the course of a year. Research also shows that increasing collaboration between young people can lead to an additional 5 months of progress over the course of a year.
  - Ensure equity of digital access across all Falkirk Council schools by providing access to devices for all pupils (P1- S6) at appropriate ratios, supporting the aim to close the poverty related attainment gap. Connected Falkirk will also ensure that all young people across Falkirk are able to access a wide ranging curriculum through a virtual learning offer, studying subjects not previously available in their school.
  - Assist young people who have English as an Additional Language (EAL), Additional Support Needs (ASN) or health (physical or mental) issues with their learning. Connected Falkirk will also assist young people who have been absent from school, maintaining contact with their teachers and ensure that they do not fall behind.
  - Increase parental involvement and engagement and transform how families connect with their child's learning, opening a digital window to their experiences in the classroom. Research has shown that around 80% of the difference in how well children from different backgrounds do at school is dependent on what happens outside of the school, therefore when a parent takes an interest in and has access to the learning taking place, so will their child.
  - Equip our young people with the general and specialist digital skills that they will need to thrive in a transforming and increasingly digital world, which has the potential to contribute to the economic prosperity of the Falkirk area.
  - Create a culture within our workforce which will allow them to develop their digital skills through a sector leading professional learning programme. Connected Falkirk will also help to attract and retain a high quality workforce. Organisations that invest in their workforce achieve better outcomes.
- 3.4 To deliver the overall project a total investment of c.£16m is required. At the Falkirk Council budget meeting on 26 February 2020, a £9.6m capital investment was conditionally approved for the first five years of the project, subject to this follow-up report providing more details of the aims and ambitions of the project.

- 3.5 A further investment of c£6.4m is therefore required beyond year five, to ensure longer term sustainability of the project and ensure that the equipment and infrastructure is kept updated and refreshed.

## **4. Considerations**

### **4.1 What is Connected Falkirk?**

Connected Falkirk is an investment in our young people and our school estate infrastructure. It aims to ensure every young person being educated in the Falkirk Council area has the confidence, skills and knowledge needed to thrive in an ever-changing, fast-paced digital world. It is a response to the national strategy, published in 2016, for enhancing learning and teaching through the use of digital technology.

### **4.2 Why do we need Connected Falkirk?**

- Connected Falkirk will give our young people the confidence, skills and knowledge needed to thrive in an ever changing, fast paced digital world, impacting on the destination profile of the Falkirk Council area. It will provide a digital environment that allows classrooms, children and young people to collaborate and connect locally and globally bringing learning experiences and access to qualifications that may not otherwise have happened.
- Similar programmes have already been rolled out in Scotland, across the UK and the world. Results from these programmes show better outcomes, improved engagement and motivation amongst children and young people.
- The current COVID-19 situation has increased the need for the progression of the Connected Falkirk programme – there is now an imperative to ensure that we action out plans to ensure that ALL of our young people can continue to engage with their learning, no matter if they are at home or at school.

There is no doubt that some pupils will have difficulties with access to IT and connectivity. This could be because they do not have access to a device or WiFi or there may only be one device in the household with several people requiring access to it, including parents and carers having to work from home.

We need to accelerate Connected Falkirk to transform the way in which we deliver learning & teaching during this COVID-19 emergency and so that we can continue to engage with ALL young people when schools 'return'. Having Connected Falkirk in place as soon as possible also allows us different models of that 'return', giving the greatest flexibility in ensuring learning continues for all pupils.

### **4.3 Return on Investment**

- For this initial investment of £9.6m, Connected Falkirk has the potential to improve outcomes for our young people and deliver revenue savings.

- The current planned investment schedule is shown below:

**Connected Falkirk - Planned Investment Schedule 2020/21 – 2024/25**

<b>Workstream</b>	<b>20/21 £000's</b>	<b>21/22 £000's</b>	<b>22/23 £000's</b>	<b>23/24 £000's</b>	<b>24/25 £000's</b>	<b>Total</b>
(i) Mobile Learning Devices and Support Systems	2,400	1,500	1,000	1,060	1,200	<b>7,160</b>
(ii) Wi-Fi Infrastructure & Network enhancements	1,000	740	110	-	200	<b>2,050</b>
(iii) Audio Visual Equipment	200	-	-	-	200	<b>400</b>
	<b>£3,600</b>	<b>£2,240</b>	<b>£1,110</b>	<b>£1,060</b>	<b>£1,600</b>	<b>£9,610</b>

- Given the nature of the programme, there is a requirement for front-loading of the total cost so that the necessary devices and infrastructure are procured and rolled out at the start of the project.
- As part of regular self-evaluation, schools use frameworks to benchmark progress in how successfully they embed technology in learning and teaching. As part of the Connected Falkirk programme, all schools will work towards Digital Schools Award status, an independently verified national accreditation and the number of educators gaining accredited training certification from Apple, Google and Microsoft will also increase.

4.4 **Supporting Children's Services Achieve Agreed Savings Targets** Connected Falkirk as well as supporting and improving outcomes for young people will also help support Children's Services achieve savings and efficiencies across a number of its savings projects within the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

	<b><u>MTFP Total Savings Target</u></b>
Reimagining Secondary Learning	<b>£2.987m</b>
Primary Learning – Bright Starts Bright Futures	<b>£4.180m</b>
Support and Learning for All - Review	<b>£0.770m</b>
<b>5 year savings target (20/21 – 24/25)</b>	<b>£7.937m</b>

- It is expected that savings will be achieved from a number of work areas:
  - Reduced need for desktop PC's, 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.

4.5 **Timeline**

This will be managed through robust project planning. Subject to successful procurement outcomes, the following illustrates the high level roll out plan for Years 1 – 5 of the project.

Note any delay in the decision making process to finalise the capital award will result in significant project slippage (including the installation of the necessary infrastructure during the school summer holidays in 2020) and a detrimental delay in improving outcomes for young people.

School Session	Quarter	Activity	Deployment
2019/20	Q4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>procurement of infrastructure, connectivity and devices</li> <li>development and delivery of training plan</li> <li>consultation with parents, employees and children and young people</li> </ul>	
2020/21	Q1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>installation of Wi-Fi and delivery of devices</li> <li>initial implementation of training plan</li> </ul>	
	Q2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>installation of Wi-Fi and delivery of devices – essential work during school summer holiday period</li> <li>staff and pupil training and development</li> </ul>	roll out to groups 1 and 2
	Q3		roll out to groups 3 and 4
	Q4		roll out to groups 5 and 6
2021/22	Q1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue professional learning programme</li> <li>development of case studies</li> <li>implementation of family learning programme</li> </ul>	roll out to groups 7 and 8
	Q2		
	Q3		
	Q4		
2022/23	Q1-Q4		
2023/24	Q1-Q4		
2024/25	Q1 / Q2		refresh of devices

- In order to ensure longer term sustainability a refresh of devices is required at the end of their normal life-cycle, typically four years. Therefore as outlined in Section 3.5 an additional capital investment will be required in future years. A future capital bid will be submitted to Falkirk Council for consideration of this.

#### 4.6 Benchmarking , Best Value and Procurement

Extensive benchmarking was undertaken to inform the procurement exercise and ensure the successful delivery of this project. Existing Scottish Government procurement frameworks will be leveraged in order to achieve best value and expedite the procurement.

## 5. Consultation

### 5.1 Consultation has taken place across all key stakeholder groups including:

- Parental Hackathons
- Digital Skills Staff surveys
- Digital Sparkathon
- Elected Member Seminars and Briefings
- Council of the Future Board Presentations
- Head Teacher Seminars
- Children and Young People

## **6. Implications**

### **Financial/Resources**

- 6.1 As per the table in Section 4.3 a capital bid of £9.6m has been conditionally approved by Falkirk Council as part of the 2020/21 budget. In addition an estimated £6.4m of further investment will be required beyond year five of the capital plan. This project also needs a level of revenue funding to sustain the “Project Team” currently in place to deliver this. The funding of the Project Team is currently being met from the Council of the Future Change Fund.

### **Legal**

- 6.2 No legal implications arise from the report recommendations.

### **Risk**

- 6.3 If the capital investment is ultimately not approved, children and young people will ultimately be disadvantaged and will be deprived of opportunities to improve positive destination profiles. As previously noted any delay in the decision making process to finalise the capital award will result in significant project slippage (including the installation of the necessary infrastructure during the school summer holidays in 2020) and a detrimental delay in improving outcomes for young people.

### **Equalities**

- 6.4 This project will provide significant resources that will support young people and will also help address inequalities. New ICT equipment and devices will also provide additional assistance to young people who have additional support needs.

### **Sustainability/Environmental Impact**

- 6.5 None.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1 This £9.6m of capital funding will support a very challenging but ambitious transformational project that will further the Council’s aims and ambitions in supporting children and young people learn, develop and aspire towards making successful contributions to life and society.

It is hoped that the Emergency Executive will support this much needed investment in Digital Learning and in our young people’s future.

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**Appendices**

None

**List of Background Papers:**

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- None