Agenda Item 8

Connected Falkirk

Falkirk Council

Title:	**Connected Falkirk**
Meeting:	**Emergency Executive**
Date:	**25 June 2020**
Submitted By:	**Director of Children's Services**

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to ask the Emergency Executive to approve the re-profiling of the capital investment required for 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) Approve the re-profiling of the capital investment in order to accelerate the roll-out of Connected Falkirk.

(2) Note that a future capital submission will be made for further investment required beyond year four of the Connected Falkirk project to ensure longer term sustainability.

3. Background

3.1 Succeed Today, Excel Tomorrow is one of the Council of the Future's priority projects. Connected Falkirk is the transformational digital arm of this to provide a sector leading digital investment in Falkirk's young people which will transform teaching and learning.

3.2 The project requires investment in digital infrastructure, connectivity, hardware and software to deliver a number of benefits to young people in Falkirk, as previously reported to the [Emergency Executive 14 May 20](). Moreover, the partial closure of schools during lockdown, as well as the proposed blended learning approach as we exit lockdown, has demonstrated the importance of enabling equal access to technology for remote learning and home schooling.

3.3 This project will run for eight years, based on the lifecycle of the devices likely to be procured (four years) and will run on this basis for two cycles initially. The overall investment required for this is estimated at c. £16m.

3.4 At the Falkirk Council budget meeting on 26 February 2020, a £9.6m capital investment was conditionally allocated for the first five years of the project.

3.5 Based on this, at the Emergency Executive on 14 May 2020, the first-year capital funding of £3.6m was approved.

4. Considerations

What's been achieved

4.1 During lockdown and since the award of year-one funding, the following has been actioned:
- Appointment of Sprint Team to develop a deployment model, a digital teaching training programme, and support resources for all Falkirk Council educators.
- Engagement with schools has begun in order to plan their individual deployments.
- Development of procurement strategy.
- Engagement with suppliers of mobile learning devices through procurement frameworks.
- Engagement with suppliers of Wi-Fi and connectivity to schools through procurement frameworks.

Procurement Progress – Re-profiling of Capital

4.2 Since the approval of year-one funding, negotiations with suppliers through the Scottish Government procurement frameworks have resulted in quotations being offered to the Council.

4.3 These negotiations identified an issue in the Wi-Fi hardware in schools which is now at "end of life", meaning that support can no longer be provided by the manufacturer. This has impacted the profile of the original capital spend on the project. The previous plan to build on the existing Wi-Fi, whilst gradually upgrading over the period of the programme, is no longer sustainable. Instead, to support Connected Falkirk fully over the 8-year planned project, a new foundation of Cloud-managed Wi-Fi provision needs to be procured. Whilst this will increase spend in the initial phase of the project, the total cost of ownership over the lifetime of the project will be less.

4.4 This, along with the recovery plan action to accelerate elements of Connected Falkirk in light of COVID-19 to deliver on the blended learning model now required for schools, has resulted in a requirement to re-profile the full capital award.

<u>Capital Funding Implications</u>

4.5   The estimated re-profile for the five-year capital budget is set out below:

	Year 1 20/21	Year 2 21/22	Year 3 22/23	Year 4 23/24	Year 5 24/25 (Second Roll-out Phase begins)	Total
Allocated Capital Funding	£3,600,000	£2,240,000	£1,110,000	£1,060,000	£1,590,000	£9,600,000
Re-profile	£8,400,000	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000	£750,000	£9,600,000

4.6   This capital spend is subject to school estate surveys taking place in each school for connectivity, as per para 4.3 above. Any material changes on the capital requirement associated with this risk will be reported back to the Executive.

<u>Revenue Budget Implications</u>

4.7   Alongside capital expenditure, c.£1.7m of revenue costs are projected over the first five years of the project. This doesn't include borrowing costs, which are already accounted for in the budget. It is anticipated that this will be subject to ongoing monitoring and management and can be partially funded from the Council of the Future Change Fund, as appropriate, and Scottish Government funding through the "Connecting Scotland" programme. A breakdown of the estimated revenue costs are as follows:

Revenue Cost	Year 1 20/21	Year 2 21/22	Year 3 22/23	Year 4 23/24	Year 5 24/25 (Second Roll-out Phase)	Total
Internal	£200,000	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000	£800,000
External	£343,000	£162,000	£141,000	£141,000	£101,000	£888,000
Total	**£543,000**	**£312,000**	**£291,000**	**£291,000**	**£251,000**	**£1,688,000**

4.8   As well as supporting and improving outcomes for young people, Connected Falkirk 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). The updated savings profile for the next five years is as follows:

	MTFP Total Savings Target
Succeed Today, Excel Tomorrow – 5-year savings target (20/21 – 24/25)	£7.937m

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.

<u>Timeline</u>

4.9   The project is being managed through robust project planning. Subject to successful procurement outcomes, the following illustrates the high level roll out plan for Years 1 – 5.

4.10   As per recovery plans, when schools re-open, there will be a "blended model" with continued extensive remote learning. To ensure equity for all our learners in this new situation, it is proposed to accelerate the programme as per the schedule below:

School Session	Quarter	Activity	Deployment
2019/20	Q4	• procurement of infrastructure, connectivity and devices begins • development of training plan	Complete
2020/21	Q1	• initial implementation of training plan • briefings for parents, employees and children and young people	Underway – Delayed by Covid-19
	Q2	• installation of Wi-Fi and delivery of devices – essential work during school summer holiday period • staff and pupil training and development	• roll out to groups 1, 2 and 3
	Q3		• roll out to groups 4, 5 and 6
	Q4		• roll out to groups 7 and 8
2021/22	Q1	• continue professional learning programme • development of case studies • implementation of family learning programme	
	Q2		
	Q3		
	Q4		
2022/23	Q1-Q4		
2023/24	Q1-Q4		
2024/25	Q1 / Q2		• refresh of devices

4.11   To ensure longer term sustainability, a refresh of devices is required at the end of the lifecycle of the device, at four years. As the project continues an evaluation will be completed and consideration given to the best way to refresh the devices. The figures at 4.5 include costs for year five to start the refresh phase with the remainder of the existing capital allocation. Further reports will be submitted to Council as required for further consideration.

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   A capital bid of £9.6m has been conditionally approved by Falkirk Council as part of the 2020/21 budget. In addition, further investment will be required beyond year four of the project. This project also needs a level of revenue funding to sustain the "Project Sprint Team" currently in place to deliver this. The funding of the Project Sprint Team is subject to a current Council of the Future Change Fund bid – and potentially future bids. These costs are included in 4.7.

Legal

6.2   No legal implications arise from the report recommendations.

Risk

6.3   If the capital investment is not approved young people will ultimately be disadvantaged and will be deprived of opportunities to improve outcomes and positive destination profiles. Any delay in the decision-making process to finalise and re-profile 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 of access. New ICT equipment and devices will also provide further assistance to young people who have additional support needs.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.5   No sustainability/environmental implications arise from the report recommendations.

7. Conclusions

7.1   This £9.6m of capital funding will support a challenging and ambitious transformational project that will further the Council's aims in supporting young people to 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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Director of Children's Service

Author – Jon Reid, Project Manager, jon.reid@falkirk.gov.uk
Rebecca Mcdonald, Change Manager, rebecca.mcdonald@falkirk.gov.uk

Date: 18th June 2020

List of Background Papers:

Council of the Future Project Report: Connected Falkirk, Emergency Executive, 14 May 2020

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

- None