



Agenda Item 11

Connected Falkirk Update

Falkirk Council

Title: Connected Falkirk Update
Meeting: Education, Children and Young People Executive
Date: 23 March 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. With the onset of the 'fourth industrial revolution' 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 Following a c. £9.6m capital investment in Connected Falkirk, £200k funding was 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 Procurement

- With the confirmation of budget reprofile in June 2020, two separate procurement exercises for Connected Falkirk were undertaken:
 - Devices and Services- Awarded in to XMA Ltd in August 2020, for a period of 4 years, to August 2024. The value of the contract is £6.4million.
 - Connectivity and Wi-Fi- Awarded to VirginMedia Ltd in October 2020 for, for a period of 5 years, to October 2025. The value of the contract is £1.9million.
- Although both procurement exercises were lengthy, significant benefits, such as being able to procure the latest “8th Generation” Apple iPad model and install the latest “Wi-Fi 6” standard access points, were realised for the Council through a rigorous procurement process.

4.2 Update on Device Deployment

- The advent of COVID and the subsequent health and safety measures put in place in schools led to several early challenges for the programme of work. The original deployment plan of face to face group deployments for clusters of schools was no longer possible within this new normal.
- Additionally, the IT supply chain was impacted globally, with manufacturers reducing output coupled with a significant increase in the demand for mobile technologies due to home and remote working practices.

- To ensure the deployment of the reduced available stock of devices remained on track, the plan was pivoted to instead focus on deployment to teaching staff and our most vulnerable pupils.
- Over the course of November 2020 to January 2021, the Connected Falkirk Sprint Team undertook:
 - The deployment of 1,873 devices and familiarisation training to all Primary and Secondary stage teaching staff
 - The deployment of 1,500 devices and 600 Internet connectivity packs, funded by Connecting Scotland, to those pupils most in need.
- The positive impact of the distribution of these devices and training was clearly evident in the latest period of lockdown, with both teachers and pupils using their new devices to create and access learning resources.
- For our most vulnerable pupils, the connectivity and devices provided to their families allowing a high level of engagement, but also provided those families with a means to access wider support resources online.
- As the supply chain of devices begins to ease, and the pupils begin their phased return to schools, the wider pupil device rollout can begin in March 2021. Currently, we remain on target for the full pupil deployment of devices by the end of August 2021, in line with the original projected completion date.

4.3 Update on Connectivity

- An equally important part of Connected Falkirk is the dedicated Internet connectivity and Wi-Fi for each school, specifically allocated to devices in the programme.
- Although the installation of communications networks is deemed an essential service during lockdown, putting contractors into school buildings remains restricted to very limited periods of time.
- Of the 58 school sites covered in the Connected Falkirk programme:
 - 14 schools have their new Internet lines installed and ready for connection to new Wi-Fi
 - 25 schools have their cabling groundworks underway
 - 19 schools are in the planning phase with installers.
- In terms of Wi-Fi installation in the 58 school sites:
 - All Secondary schools have their cabling and installation works underway

- Victoria Primary School has been completed as reference site for the design of all other primary school Wi-Fi installations.

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 teaching staff.
- Every school has attended Culture and Vision workshops, assessing their current use of digital technologies, and setting out their key digital values and priorities going forwards.
- In addition to the familiarisation training provided to teachers during device deployment, a series of tutorials on key tools and techniques have been created and are available on the Connected Falkirk YouTube Channel.
- The Connected Falkirk Twitter account @connectedfalk has been created to provide educators with easy access to tips, techniques, ideas and resources. In addition, it provides a platform for Falkirk teachers to share use of their Connected Falkirk device in learning and teaching.
- All schools have access to a programme of CLPL, curated and delivered by the Sprint Team, providing a range of opportunities- from short one-off 20-minute learning sessions to a more extended series of sustained collaboration sessions.
- Recently, the Connected Falkirk programme has been awarded Apple Regional Training Centre (RTC) status. This recognition of the work already undertaken by the Connected Falkirk Sprint Team means that the programme can deliver Apple-accredited training, bespoke to our Falkirk educators. In addition, all four of our Sprint Team members now hold Apple Professional Learning status.

5. **Consultation**

- 5.1 None.

6. **Implications**

Financial/Resources

- 6.1 Capital Resources of £9.610m were agreed over a 5 year programme as part of the Councils 2020/21 budget.

- 6.2 As outlined in Section 4.1 longer term 4 and 5 year contracts totalling £8.3m were awarded for devices and connectivity respectively.
- 6.3 The balance of £1.310m will be used to purchase devices in Year 5, as the current contract only covers a 4 year period.
- 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. It will also enable the Service to consider new approaches to meeting the financial targets contained within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

Legal

- 6.4 None.

Risk

- 6.5 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.

Equalities

- 6.6 None.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 6.7 None.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 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 and to schedule.
- 7.2 As the constraints in the supply chain ease and the phased return to schools progresses, the pupil device deployment programme will respond accordingly, to meet the original planned target date of the end August 2021 for all pupil devices to be distributed.

- 7.3 The devices deployed to our learners most in need and to our teaching staff, coupled with professional learning resources created by the Connected Falkirk Sprint Team, have been vital in supporting the latest period of Remote Learning.

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Appendices

None.

List of Background Papers:

None.