



Agenda Item 7

Connected Falkirk Update

Falkirk Council

Title: Connected Falkirk Update
Meeting: Education, Children and Young People Executive
Date: 14 September 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 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 Procurement

- The Audio-Visual (AV) elements of the Connected Falkirk programme have now been procured. The c. £350,000 contract for the purchase and fitting of 1,000 Apple TV devices was awarded to XMA Ltd in July 2021. These devices are fitted to existing TV and display technologies within classrooms, allowing staff and pupils to:
 - Wirelessly connect their Connected Falkirk device to the class display screen from wherever they are in the room
 - Aid with demonstration and lesson delivery, without the need for sharing devices or using cables
- The programme of configuration and installation work started in July 2021 and is scheduled to conclude in December 2021.

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.
- The advent of COVID and the subsequent requirement to maintain pupil bubbles in primary schools, plus the additional cleaning required between each bubble's deployment session, has led to device deployments taking longer in each school than the original planned date of the end of August 2021. The number of sessions the Sprint Team were able to deliver in a

school day were reduced, with pupil and staff health and safety taking precedent.

- The additional SQA assessment arrangement requirements implemented in May and June 2021 also restricted access to Senior Phase secondary pupils, meaning that their device deployments were required to be moved to the new school session.
- Due to a worldwide technical failure of the device management system used to build Connected Falkirk devices, several device deployments in large schools were postponed at the start of the new session.
- These factors, whilst out of our direct control, mean that at the time of presentation of this report approximately 65% 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 revised completion date for device deployment will be end of November 2021.

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.
- However, of the 58 school sites covered in the Connected Falkirk programme:
 - 56 schools now have their new Internet lines and Wi-Fi in use
 - 2 schools, Comely Park PS and Dumbowie PS, have their Wi-Fi access points fitted, but are awaiting new Internet lines being completed by our technology partner VirginMedia Ltd. Network capacity issues in the areas surrounding these schools have led to alternative connection technologies being progressed, with longer lead times for installation. It is anticipated that these schools will be connected by the end of September 2021.

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.

- Since our previous update, sessions have been made available to all schools on preparing staff and pupils for their new 1:1 device environment.
- In addition, the Connected Falkirk Sprint Team, working with our technology partner XMA Ltd, have scheduled three CLPL sessions 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.
- In addition to the familiarisation training provided to staff and pupils 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 is regularly updated with tips, techniques, ideas and resources. In addition, it provides a platform for Falkirk schools to share use of their Connected Falkirk device in learning and teaching.
- The Connected Falkirk Sprint Team has also held several online Apple Regional Training Centre (RTC) events, which have been attended by 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.

4.5 Succeed Today, Excel Tomorrow – Next Steps

- Connected Falkirk sits as part of the wider Succeed Today, Excel Tomorrow (STET) programme as described in section 3.2. Further reports on the STET programme will be brought to future Education, Children and Young People Executives.

5. **Consultation**

5.1 None.

6. **Implications**

Financial/Resources

- 6.1 As part of the General Fund Capital Programme, approved by Council on 11th March 2021, total resources of £12.3m were agreed for this project to 2025/26.
- 6.2 To date £7.9m of this Capital budget has been spent covering devices, implementation, connectivity and Wi-Fi for teachers and pupils.

- 6.3 As the impact of the programme is being assessed over the 4 years, if the project has been shown to deliver improvements, there may be a need for future Capital bids 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. It will also enable the Service to consider new approaches to meeting 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.

Equalities

- 6.7 None.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 6.8 None.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 Although the programme of device deployment has seen some slippage due to external factors, 56 of our 58 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.
- 7.3 The installation of the Audio-Visual elements of Connected Falkirk has now begun 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 new session.

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Appendices:
None.

List of Background Papers:
None.