

Meeting of Executive Member for Children & 10 June 2008 Young People's Services and Advisory Panel

Report of the Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

Primary Strategy for Change

Summary

1. This report details the background to the Government's capital programme of investment in primary schools, identifies the proposed initial local priorities for investment and seeks approval for the submission of the Primary Strategy for Change to the DCSF on June 16th.

Background

2. The "Primary Strategy for Change" provides a real opportunity for the local authority to use capital investment to support wider educational transformation. The Strategy is not merely about new buildings, but is an exciting opportunity to make a difference to pupils, schools and communities and to meet the needs of learners in a rapidly changing world. It will build upon existing improvement strategies and be viewed as catalyst to significantly improve both achievement and building outcomes.
3. The Government's Primary Strategy for Change aims to rebuild or refurbish at least half of all primary school buildings in the country by 2022. The expectation is that a small proportion of schools need to be rebuilt completely or taken out of action but that up to half need substantial improvement work. The intention is to create primary schools that are equipped for 21st century teaching and learning, and are at the heart of their communities with children's services in reach of every family.
4. The Government expects Local Authorities (LAs) to target deprivation, closing the gap in educational achievement for children from disadvantaged communities. York is expected to receive up to £37m for the programme for 2008-22 with around £8m in the first four years. To obtain this funding, our initial proposals (based on this report) need to be submitted to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) by June 16th and achieve their approval.
5. Given this, it is important to reflect that the basic methodology for prioritising the Primary Strategy for Change in York has been consulted upon previously and was agreed in principle by EMAP in January 2007. This approach has now been developed and refined in the light of new national guidance issued by the DCSF in December 2007 and in a more recent letter dated March 2008, which is attached at Annex A.

Analysis

Investment In York Schools

6. The Local Authority intends to develop a programme of investment, in line with national guidance, that supports the long-term development and improvement of a range of schools in both urban and village settings.
7. There are 56 primary phase schools in York. These include Infant, Junior and Primary Schools, one Special School and one Nursery School. The funding for 2009 -11, which is to be welcomed, will nevertheless be extremely limited and is only expected to cover a few significant projects.
8. Schools that are not directly engaged in the early phases of the programme will continue to receive their own Devolved Capital, and LA Formula Capital will be available to assist with major capital repairs.

How have our priorities been determined?

9. The DCSF states that *“strategic capital investment should support national and local priorities, deliver the Children’s Plan, drive up standards, enable parents to choose between a diverse range of effective primary schools, and cement the role of the primary school at the heart of the community it serves”*.
10. The LA will use the programme to support the priorities set out in national guidance and the local priorities described in our corporate strategy and the Children and Young People’s Plan 2007-2010. The DCSF expects the LA to ensure that proposals for development *“bring together all the capital investment in primary schools”* and to integrate appropriate funding streams.
11. The Primary Strategy for Change is a 14-year programme. It is clear that priorities will change over time as the needs and circumstances of schools and the LA change. The programme will need to be flexible and adaptable to take into account policy developments and also changes in the demand for school places. The programme will need to be planned carefully by the LA so that delivery is ambitious yet realistic and sustainable.
12. The LA will give a high priority to schools involved in reorganisation proposals that will remove significant surplus places or provide additional spaces to meet unmet local demand. This may involve the federation, merger or closure of individual schools depending upon local circumstances. DCSF expect LAs to *“ensure that no school has more than 25% surplus places”* and that LAs should *“reduce overall surplus places to less than 10% across the LA area”*.
13. The LA will wish to support proposals for integrated services (for example Children’s Centres) or where proposals for special educational needs or learning support are being developed in partnership with the local authority. We must take the opportunity to enhance the level of locally available integrated services.

14. The LA will also wish to consider ways in which the programme can address issues of wider community need, through stronger community links and partnerships with “extended schools”, through the development of the Library Service and through the provision of additional facilities for young people. The LA has previously for example, taken the opportunity to provide a new Library Learning Centre in New Earswick within the primary school, and also a new Library facility at St Oswald’s School in Fulford. The LA will wish to consider further opportunities in planning for the replacement or upgrading of the other centres. New primary school developments may provide the opportunity to enter into new arrangements for community level delivery where suitable partnerships can be established.
15. The LA will also support proposals that assist schools needing to replace temporary buildings with permanent accommodation. A high quality education system benefits from high quality teaching facilities, facilities less likely to be available in temporary accommodation.
16. In order to inform our priorities we have updated the previously approved prioritisation methodology (EMAP - 22 January 2007), adding the additional requirements described in the national guidance. This provides an initial base-line assessment that ranks schools on a points scoring system. The initial ranking, and a brief summary of the methodology used, is included at Annex B (i) and (ii).
17. The assessment takes into account:
 - various building issues including size, condition, suitability, access and carbon emissions
 - sufficiency issues i.e. whether schools are oversubscribed or holding surplus places
 - the extent to which schools meet the “core extended offer”
 - the levels of deprivation in the communities served by schools (methodology determined by DCSF)
 - OFSTED judgements of school performance
 - plans for federations leading to mergers of schools
18. It is recognised that the ranking is based on measures and judgements and is not, of itself, a precise or scientific measure of investment need. This assessment provides only a snapshot in time and will be revised every two years through discussion with individual schools.
19. In accordance with the DCSF guidance, schools that have been replaced in the last ten years, or have been significantly remodelled, will not normally be considered for significant investment unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Working with Schools to develop proposals for investment

20. The DCSF anticipates that priorities will be “*emerging*” from local strategic plans and from “*school’s premises development plans and local consultation*”. The Department “*will expect local authorities to have taken the opportunity to think long term and strategically about the transformation of teaching and learning in the primary sector. This is a unique chance to be bold, innovative and consider radical options, with the opportunity of careful implementation over up to 14 years*”.

21. The baseline analysis will, therefore, be used to inform our discussions with schools and elected members in developing proposals for investment. The ranking (Annex B) provides only an indication of the relative position of individual schools.
22. Proposals for investment will take into account wider considerations including; strategic priorities, long-term demographic trends and demand for school places and the ability to deliver investment proposals.
23. The LA will work with schools to develop their vision for high quality educational transformation. These individual visions will be incorporated in School Improvement Plans and will form the framework for all capital investment.
24. As individual schools are identified and prioritised for development, it will be necessary to assess the extent of investment needed and the following framework broadly outlines the process to be worked through in partnership with the individual school:
 - a. **Challenge** Is the school viable? Consider long-term projections to determine surplus places/capacity issues.
 - b. **Vision** Does the school vision for educational transformation reflect local priorities? Is it realistic and achievable? Is it innovative and inspirational? Is there evidence of stakeholder involvement?
 - c. **Needs** What are the specific needs of the school to achieve their vision for effective learning and teaching to take place, motivating and engaging learners to achieve their full potential? What are the needs of the community and what are the opportunities to involve the community?
 - d. **Building** How can these needs be supported by the building? What needs to change? Can the vision be achieved by refurbishment? Is there a need for new build and, if so, what is the extent of the build?
 - e. **Objectives** What are the specific objectives of the vision in terms of educational standards, learning and teaching, achievement opportunities, building, school management, change management, ICT?
 - f. **Targets** Compile a list of agreed measurable targets both in terms of long-term achievements in educational standards and of specific targets for the proposed project. These targets will form the framework of the PID (project initiation document) and, in turn, the outline business case for procurement.
 - g. **Evaluation** Complete evaluation of project in meeting educational outcomes.

Initial Investments - Phase 1

25. As its immediate priority the LA will bring forward proposals to provide a new school building to replace those used by the federation of Rawcliffe Infant and Clifton Junior Schools. The proposal assumes a merger of the Infant and Junior schools on a site adjacent to the existing Rawcliffe Infant School. Both schools are highly ranked in the base-line assessment (3rd and =7th respectively).
26. EMAP supported the federation of these schools at its meeting of February 2005. This was seen as a first step to merger. Indeed, at that time, the Governing Body stressed their ultimate ambition to establish one school on a single site, once the necessary capital could be identified. The LA believes that a new building on one site will support a merger of the existing schools, improve the use of resources, meet local demand and greatly improve the school environment for all pupils, staff and the community.
27. If this proposal is approved and funding secured from DCSF, it is anticipated that work on the new school would start in 2009, with completion in early 2011.
28. As its second priority, the LA will seek to support a merger of Our Lady's VA RC and English Martyrs' VA RC Primary Schools, which are currently federated. EMAP supported this federation, with the longer term aimed amalgamation, at their meeting on 21st March 2006. The LA will support the diocese in bringing forward proposals for a new school that will be located on the existing site of English martyrs' VA RC school. A feasibility study will determine whether this would be a new build or a major refurbishment and extension of the existing building.
29. Both schools appear as =7th in the base-line assessment. Our Lady's VA RC school carries a significant number of surplus places although there is significant fluctuation in the demand for places at Our Lady's VA RC school in recent years, partly due to an increase in the number of children of families from Poland and other eastern European countries. Discussions are underway with the Governing Body and the Diocese to consider the capacity of any merged school. Subject to the necessary planning permissions, it is possible that the diocese will generate a capital receipt, from the sale of the Our Lady's VA RC school site, which may contribute to the overall investment that will be needed.

Phase 2

30. During 2008/09 the LA will complete a strategic review of primary provision in key areas of the city in response to current and anticipated changes in demand for school places. The review will consider changing population patterns within the city and will consider the number of primary school places needed in the light of latest and projected birth rates, parental preferences, current levels of surplus places and the major building developments that are underway or planned for the city. The initial focus will be on the east and south of the city. The review will consider the impact of the planned

Derwenthorpe, Germany Beck, and University developments on local primary schools.

31. The LA expects to consult on the findings of this review during 2009. Investment proposals arising from the review will take into account the priorities described above and will seek to ensure that primary school provision continues to meet local demand for school places. Wherever possible, it should also take the opportunity to address other local community needs. It is recognised that local choices will not be simple or easy and that difficult decisions will need to be made to ensure that investment helps the communities and children that need it most.
32. Once the outcome of the review is known, the LA will need to consult fully on any changes that may be proposed to school organisation. The LA will then need to select construction partners through a procurement process, complete design works and secure any planning approvals needed in order to commence works in early 2012.

Phase 3

33. The next phase of the LA's review will consider primary provision provided by schools in the centre, north and west of the city. This review will commence in 2009/10 and will also need to take into account the potential impact of the York Northwest development. This is a major area for regeneration and development over the next fifteen years and includes two large Brownfield sites (York Central and British Sugar) that may include significant residential development. The City Council is currently developing detailed proposals for the development of the sites that will be published during 2009.

Consultation

34. The LA has consulted with stakeholders during this term, both through a key issue paper for Governing bodies and through the Council's internet site. At the time of writing the LA had received 37 separate submissions. 30 Governing bodies had responded and in addition various responses from individual governors and others were also received. Responses for each question are summarised at Annex C. Views of young people were also sought through facilitated discussion with several School Councils. Any responses received will be reported verbally to the meeting.
35. The responses included a wide range of views concerning both the LA's proposals and the objectives of the Strategy as determined by DCSF.
36. Annex C indicates that the majority of Governing Bodies supported the methodology for prioritising schemes, with comments describing the approach as "*a sensible, thought out approach to the criteria and ranking*" and "*a reasonable way forward*". Several schools raised concerns regarding the accuracy of building condition surveys. Some schools felt that deprivation should not be used as a ranking measure and that this could penalise particularly smaller, rural and successful schools. Alternatively, other schools considered that deprivation should carry a heavier weighting.
37. Interestingly, some schools considered that the strategy did not weight building related issues highly enough, arguing, for example, that "*the so called lower priority schools should have a higher weighting since they are related to*

buildings and structures". Other schools, conversely, suggested that the criteria was "*heavily based upon the state of the building, rather than ways of raising standards. Ofsted inspection outcomes and standards should have more weighting in this strategy for change*".

38. The majority of respondents did not wish to suggest an alternative approach. A small number of respondents suggested that investment should be prioritised towards high performing schools. One respondent suggested "*the better strategy is to invest in high performance where success is robustly founded ...each school should firstly be ranked by performance and then assessed as a potential focus for the objectives of this programme*".
39. The majority of respondents agreed that the ranking should be revised every two years. A few respondents suggested an annual review to reflect schools' changing circumstances, whilst another suggested a three year cycle would be more appropriate.
40. Again, the majority of schools agreed that the LA should give a high priority to schools engaged in re-organisation proposals. One school noted "*in principle, yes, as this gives wider scope for offering pupils a better education through improved facilities. However, schools ought to be central to the local community...*". Several schools felt that this approach may not be appropriate for rural schools and one school suggested that "*hasty action to remove surplus places could well be counter productive*" given the expected population increase in the greater York area.
41. Most schools supported the priority given to integrated services. Several schools voiced concerns that small schools may be overlooked and others suggested the need to protect "*the core mission of effective education*". One respondent suggested "*money designed for primary school re-building/refurbishment should not be diverted to the provision of children's centres under any circumstances*".
42. The majority of respondents agreed that schools that have been replaced in the last ten years or who have been significantly remodelled would not normally be considered for further investment unless there were exceptional circumstances. Several schools have asked for a definition of "*significantly remodelled*" and one respondent considered that their school had been remodelled as a children's centre but "*this had not been to the advantage of learning in the school*".
43. Schools and other respondents accepted the need for a strategic review of primary provision in key areas of the city, given changing population patterns and the impact of planned developments. Many schools felt that they would be affected by these issues and listed various developments in their responses. Three respondents disagreed with this approach. One commented "*areas do not exist, except in planning, and this programme is to review plans and planning*" and "*an area approach could tend to ghettoise deprivation as an area into which more and more resources are sunk*"
44. All Governing Bodies that responded highlighted specific issues regarding their vision for the school and priorities for investment. This information will be used in our on-going dialogue with individual schools about their local needs which may be met through this programme, or through devolved capital or the LA's on-going repair and maintenance programme.

45. Respondents made several general comments about the proposals. One Governing Body was concerned that *“larger schemes/flagship projects may have a higher priority than smaller initiatives albeit just as valuable to the school community. We question the relevance of deprivation as a criteria”*. Another Governing Body noted *“relatively small amounts of carefully targeted capital investment can make a huge impact on teaching and learning outcomes”*.
46. A further Governing Body observed that *“as a listed Victorian building, we are very disappointed that neither the DCSF nor the LA have made any reference in the documentation so far to schools in listed buildings. It would seem to us that our building will struggle to meet the needs of a flexible 21st century education system.”*

Options

47. The proposals set out in the report reflect the criteria determined previously by EMAP (January 2007). Members have the option to reconsider the criteria and to request Officers to develop alternative proposals.

Corporate Priorities

48. The Primary Strategy for Change makes a significant contribution to the following corporate priorities:
- Increase people’s skills and knowledge to improve future employment prospects.
 - Improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children, young people and families in the city.
 - Reduce the environmental impact of council activities and encourage, empower and promote others to do the same.

Implications

Financial

49. The resources available to support the Primary Strategy for Change are described above. More detailed reports will be brought as the programme develops and individual projects are progressed.

Human Resources (HR)

50. There are no HR implications.

Equalities

51. There are no specific implications for equalities at this stage but detailed school developments will address this issue.

Legal

52. There are no legal implications.

Crime and Disorder

53. There are no crime and disorder implications at this stage, but detailed school developments incorporate the principles of 'Safer by Design'.

Information Technology (IT)

54. There are no IT implications at this stage, however, consideration of it will be a key feature of the strategy.

Property

55. The programme will have a range of property implications and officers in LCCS will be working closely with the corporate landlord.

Other

56. There are no implications.

Risk Management

57. The key risk at this stage concerns the strategy not being approved by the DCSF. If the strategy is approved, and funding made available, the principles of risk management will be applied to individual schemes as they progress.

Recommendation

The Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member to:

- a) note the development of the Primary Strategy described in this report.
- b) consider the responses received during the consultation process, as summarised in this report and Annex C.
- c) approve the initial priorities for investment as set out in the report (paragraphs 25-33 above).
- d) confirm submission of the initial priorities and strategy to the DCSF for approval.

Reason: to progress the Primary Strategy for Change.

Contact Details

Authors:

Maggie Tansley
Head of Planning & Resources

Kevin Hall
Assistant Director, Resource
Management

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Peter Dwyer
Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

Report Approved Date

Specialist Implications Officer(s) *None*

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

EMAP Report Building Schools for the Future – Prioritising January 2007

EMAP Report Federation of Rawcliffe Infant and Clifton Without Junior Schools: Consultation (February 2005)

EMAP Report Federation of Our Lady's Catholic Primary School and English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School

DCFS National Guidance Primary Capital Programme December 2007

The Children and Young People's Plan 2007 – 2010 (December 2007 update)

Annexes:

Annex A: Guidance December 2007/Letter from DCSF March 2008

Annex B: School Ranking and Methodology

Annex C: Summary of Consultation Responses