

LEARNING ESTATE STRATEGY

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In 2018 the Scottish Government published a Learning Estate Strategy (LES) to set out a joint vision for the learning estate of the future 'Connecting People, Places and Learning'
- 1.2 In line with this National strategy being produced, the Education Change Programme identified Education Learning Estate as a work stream which would produce a bespoke Learning Estate Strategy for Argyll and Bute.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 As part of the Education Change Programme a project board was established to develop a Learning Estate Strategy. Members of the board was made up of cross section of Council services who contributed to the layout and content of the document that has been prepared for approval.
- 2.2 This document sets out the agreed guiding principles for the Argyll and Bute Learning Estate Strategy that aligns with those of Scottish Government. It also confirms the current position of the school estate, projected school rolls and summarises the investment priorities.
- 2.3 This strategy document will lay out the methodology used in relation to school roll forecasting, the statutory process in relation to closing/mothballing and re-zoning a school, the capital investment programme up until 2024 and the future priorities for the Learning Estate.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Community Services Committee consider this paper and agree that it is adopted as the Learning Estate Strategy for Argyll and Bute Council

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The aspiration of the Education Service within Argyll and Bute is to ensure that this is the best place in Scotland for our children to grow up. Our vision is that *together we will realise ambition, excellence and equality for all*. These are

ambitious statements which require supporting strategies in order to help achieve these outcomes.

- 4.2 The Learning Estate Strategy will support the Education Service achieve the ambitions of equity and excellence for all by supporting the physical conditions for wellbeing and learning across learning estates to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The Strategy will set out the principles and priorities to drive the development of the learning estate across Argyll and Bute which aligns with the National Learning Estate Agenda
- 4.3 Our learning estate will support the three key National education and skills priorities which are:
- Getting it Right for Every Child
 - Curriculum for Excellence
 - Developing the Young Workforce
- 4.4 The National Learning Estate Strategy (Connecting people, Places and Learning) sets out ten guiding principles:
1. Learning environments should support and facilitate excellent joined up learning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners;
 2. Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners, meet varying needs to support inclusion and support transitions for all learners;
 3. The learning estate should be well-managed and maintained, making the best of existing resources, maximising occupancy and representing and delivering best value;
 4. The condition and suitability of learning environments should support and enhance their function;
 5. Learning environments should serve the wider community and where appropriate be integrated with the delivery of other public services in line with the place principle;
 6. Learning environments should be greener, more sustainable, allow safe and accessible routes and be digitally enabled;
 7. Outdoor learning and the use of outdoor learning environments should be maximised;
 8. Good consultation about learning environments, direct engagement with learners and communities about their needs and experiences, and an involvement in decision making processes should lead to better outcomes for all;
 9. Collaboration across the learning estate, and collaboration with partners in localities, should support maximising its full potential;
 10. Investment in Scotland's learning estate should contribute towards improving learning outcomes and support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Guided by the above National principles, the LES for Argyll and Bute lays down 5 guiding principles which align to those National strategies and have been developed through collaborative working across all Services of the Council and support from Northern Alliance colleagues. The 5 guiding principles and aspirations for the LES are as follows:

1. Learning environments in all schools should have a suitability grading of A or B
2. High Quality Outdoor learning for 2-18 to be A or B standard for suitability
3. Young People within Argyll and Bute are educated within a fully accessible learning establishment of A or B Grading for suitability
4. Argyll and Bute will maximise the use of the learning estate to benefit the wider community
5. Future developments within our learning estate will create low carbon and digitally enabled schools and campuses

4.5 Capacity Guidance

The Scottish Government has developed guidance on how to determine the capacity for primary schools (this was one of the recommendations from the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education). The aim is to improve consistency and transparency across authorities, improve benchmarking and assist in discussions with housing developers regarding contributions to improve/extend the school estate. In particular it is proposed to establish a planning and working capacity. Cognisance should be taken of this guidance when developing a strategy and specific proposals. This work was completed during the development of this Learning Estate Strategy 2019-21.

4.6 School Roll Projections

As part of the development of this LES a new methodology has been put in place to project future rolls of schools within the Authority for up to 10 years which will be crucial to support decisions for future developments or renovations.

4.7 Educational Benefits

The Schools (Consultation) Scotland Act 2010 Act requires that educational benefits should be at the heart of any proposal to make a significant change to schools. It specifies that the local authority must, for all consultations, prepare an Educational Benefits Statement and publish it within the proposal paper. The statement must consider current and future pupils of any affected school, current users of its facilities and the pupils of other schools in the authority's area; and also to explain how the authority intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects of the proposal.

It is also important to consider the effect upon educational benefit of those schools exceeding 100% capacity.

4.8 Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

The Act establishes a consultation process in respect of school closures and other specified major changes that affect schools. The 2010 Act was amended by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, and the final part of those amendments, relating to the School Closure Review Panels, came into force on 30 March 2015.

It provides for Scottish Ministers to 'call in' a local authority decision; special safeguards for rural schools and sets out a five stage consultation process, including the preparation of an Educational Benefit Statement.

Scottish Government has provided further guidance for Local Authorities on the Act.

This guidance sets out the requirement to thoroughly prepare before undertaking any consultation exercise. Local Authorities will need to undertake significant preparation, have robust information and ensure any proposal demonstrates educational benefits before Item: 7 Page: 37 consulting on any changes. For example, in the case of rural schools if the reason for a proposal to close a school is a falling roll, the authority should demonstrate what it has done to tackle this within any proposals. The authority must also identify other reasonable alternatives, and full consideration should be given to maintaining the current school. The authority is required to invite representations on these alternatives, as well as requesting suggestions regarding other reasonable alternatives.

The 2010 Act makes special arrangements in regard to rural schools, establishing a procedural presumption against the closure of rural schools.

At a Full Council meeting on 14th June 2011 members agreed not to commence any further application of the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010 until such time as new legislation is in place. This would not include schools that had no pupils or were currently mothballed.

Another aspect to consider is changing a school status to mothballed:

In considering alternatives to closure, authorities may choose to consider "mothballing" a school (or a stage of education or a nursery class at a school). This is a temporary closure which does not lead to a consultation under the 2010 Act. It is only appropriate in very restricted circumstances, for example, when a school roll falls very low, the authority may consider that the school is not presently viable but do not wish to close it immediately because there is a reasonable prospect that the number of pupils in the area will increase such that it should be re-opened in the future.

4.9 Outdoor Learning

Every young person in Argyll and Bute should have regular opportunities to learn, play and be outdoors, both as part of their school curriculum and wider life. Our schools should make best use of the natural world around them to personalise and make the best of the curricula.

4.10 Catering

School catering in Argyll and Bute provides a high-quality service to Argyll and Bute's schools and pupils, with an average of upwards of 6,000 meals served daily across the estate. The provision of a catering service throughout Argyll and Bute is challenging with a wide range of school size and rural geography to accommodate. As such there are a combination of different facilities across the estate.

4.11 Overview of Current School Estate Condition/Suitability

Over recent years Argyll and Bute has successfully invested in the school estate in a sustainable way. The most recent condition and suitability surveys are attached as summary documents to the strategy document.

4.12 Community Use of Schools

All establishments within the learning estate should be first and foremost civic and community hubs. The estate should be multifunctional and facilitate both the delivery of education and the aspirations for the wider community.

4.13 Business Planning & Revenue Budget

It is important to consider revenue consequences of investment in the school estate. Given the reduction in revenue budget in the medium term, it is essential that the school estate is fit for purpose and provides best value.

4.14 The LES sets out the background of the current position of the Education estate including the number of establishments, school rolls and occupancy rates, the most up to date condition and suitability surveys of all schools.

4.15 Future Priorities

Significant and transformative investment has been made to the majority of our secondary schools and campuses. Investment has focused on serving the maximum number of pupils and so has been targeted in recent years primarily on mainland schools.

The information collated within the LES has identified future strategic investment should focus primarily on our islands with Mull and Islay as top priority for development. If population growth and investment continue in the Dunbeg area then this will also require investment and longer term ambition would also to be to review estate in Kintyre should future funding from Scottish Government become available.

We will be progressing work on developing more detailed feasibility studies for Islay and Mull to establish the strategic business case and also affordability of both. An essential part of the feasibility will be to engage with communities at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure views on all aspects of a potential development are highlighted. This early feasibility work will provide the Council with sufficient detail later in 2021 to base a decision on whether or not funding from the LEIP3 (Learning Estate Investment Programme) is a potential option.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy - The Learning Estate Strategy links direction to the Council's business outcomes BO107 (The support and lifestyle needs of our children, young people, and their families are met), BO108 (All our children and young people are supported to realise their potential), BO109 (All our adults are supported to realise their potential), BO115 (We are efficient and cost effective) and BO117 (We encourage creativity and innovation to ensure our workforce is fit for the future).

This LES will ensure that we have a learning estate to support excellence and equity for all our young people within Argyll and Bute.

Our LES will provide a framework for future investment in our schools that complies with the National Learning Estate Strategy.

- 5.2 Financial – Investment in the Learning Estate is dependent on capital funding from the Council and all available parties that the Council can engage with which may include: Scotland’s schools for the Future, Scottish Government Learning Estate Investment Programme, Other Public Sector Organisations
- 5.3 Legal – The School Premises (General Requirements and Standards)(Scotland) regulations 1967 were reviewed and update in 2018. The Learning Estate Strategy will ensure that Argyll and Bute adhere to the legal requirements laid out within the regulations
- 5.4 HR - none
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: None
- 5.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – One of the principles laid out within the LES is that Young People within Argyll and Bute are educated within a fully accessible learning establishment of A or B – this will ensure equity for all children and young people.
- 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – none
- 5.5.3 Islands – none
- 5.6. Risk – none
- 5.7 Customer Service – Full engagement will take place in relation to any changes within the LES

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Appendix 1 – Argyll & Bute Learning Estate Strategy 2020-2030