

Sent 24/11/21

Dear Shirley-Anne

Thank you for engaging with us in the important discussion regarding the future development of Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh. I think that we both appreciate how important this work is in the educational and cultural life of the city, and in Scotland. Equally, we are both sensitive to the complexities inherent in the various options that are being developed and proposed.

As you are aware we were carrying out a more detailed assessment of the Fettes Police Headquarters and the former Royal Victoria Hospital sites. After discussions with Police Scotland we have ruled out the Fettes site because it will not be available in the timescale to which we are working. Following discussions with Lothian Health we established that the former Royal Victoria Hospital site is available for development but there are two constraining factors which are highlighted below.

The first is the timescale.

Scottish Water are currently on the site carrying out significant infrastructure works which will continue for approximately another 12 months. This will obviously extend the timescale for the building of a new school, see below for an initial estimate of the timescales involved to construction.

- Scottish Water complete works – 2022
- Agreement for land transfer and associated funding – 2022
- Concept Design – 2023
- Detailed Design – 2024
- Construction – 2025 & 2026
- New School Opening – 2027

The estimated completion time for building the new school on the Liberton site is 2025. Extending the timescale for delivery of a new school will increase accommodation pressures at James Gillespies High School. Our present estimate is that the school will be beyond capacity by 2025 meaning if we extended the timescale it would lead to overcrowding which could adversely affect the quality of education.

The second factor is Finance.

NHS have confirmed the capital receipt from the Royal Victoria Hospital site disposal is expected to be part of the funding package for the Western General Masterplan. Therefore, if this site is to be used for a GME secondary school the Scottish Government would have to be involved in agreeing the site can be transferred to the Council and that agreement would need to include meeting the funding gap which would then exist in the Western General Masterplan funding package. The process to secure this agreement would need to be concluded expeditiously otherwise it will be an added pressure on the timescales identified above.

The likelihood is that this option, mainly due to the cost of acquiring the site and additional building costs, would amount to between £20-£25m more than the Liberton option for a new school.

Assuming the level of GME capital grant provided by the government for building the new school is similar irrespective of where it is constructed then this estimate of £20-£25m is the additional funding the Government would need to provide in order to make this option work (bearing in mind this should be index linked to recognise rising costs). If the capital grant is not forthcoming then a GME secondary school, irrespective of the site, becomes undeliverable because the Council does not have the capital funding to deliver a GME secondary school by itself.

However, at this point I must bring to your attention that we are still of the opinion the best educational option for the development of Gaelic is the co-located campus we are proposing for the Liberton site for all the reasons we have outlined in our previous correspondence and discussions.

We are planning to bring a report to the Education, Children and Families Committee on 7 December 2021. This report will identify the council sites that are available. It will offer outline costs, with an appraisal of each option, and I will ask committee to consider starting the statutory consultative process with the Gaelic and school communities. Consequently, in order to allow the officials time to prepare a report including recommendations for the content of the statutory consultation, we please need an answer as soon as possible as to whether the Scottish Government is willing to make the former Royal Victoria Hospital site and the extra funding required to deliver a GME secondary school at that location available to the Council. .

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible

Kind regards

Cllr Ian Perry

Convener of Education, Children and Families