Corporate Project Management

Northfield Community Campus Business Case

Background

This paper provides information for residents and community groups on why the business case for a new Northfield Community Campus is being carried out and details the options currently under consideration. To help with writing the business case and to ensure that the views of the community are given full consideration, we would welcome your feedback on the proposals and on the options set out below. You can provide your views and comments using our online questionnaire, which can be found here:

https://aberdeencouncilconsultations.commonplace.is/

The business case will set out some options for creating a new community campus for Northfield and will look to set out the advantages and disadvantages of each option. These will be presented to Councillors for consideration in March 2026, whereby it will be decided whether to accept the identified recommendations by officers, and what action if any, should be taken next.

The business case will take account of feedback received from stakeholders including pupils, parents, community members and groups, partner organisations, local businesses etc, alongside core data on the condition, suitability and utilisation of the existing Council properties in the area and how they may continue to support the services they currently provide.

Within the Northfield area, actual pupil numbers at Bramble Brae, Muirfield, Quarryhill and Westpark Schools are significantly lower than the available numbers of pupil spaces at these schools, which means they each have a significant amount of excess unused space within them. Pupil numbers at these schools are expected to continue to fall significantly over at least the next eight years, making them inefficient to run. Pupil numbers at Manor Park and Heathryburn Schools (also within the Northfield ASG) are also expected to fall over the same time period.

The Council's School Roll Forecast, which shows the numbers of pupils expected to be attending each school in the city over the next eight years, is available to download from the Council's website, here: https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/education-and-childcare/schools-and-education/schools-pupil-roll-forecasts

In the Council's approved School Estate Plan, the need to reduce the excess capacity in primary schools in the Northfield area has been identified, to help ensure that our school buildings can continue to be run as efficiently as possible, and to avoid schools having too much unused capacity. There is also a requirement to provide a long term solution to the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) which is known to be present in parts of the Northfield Academy building.

As such the following Project Objectives have been identified:

- Remove the RAAC within Northfield Academy
- Support for the principles of the Council's Community Campus model and Family Support Model
- Deliver an overall revenue saving in terms of building running costs
- Contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions and the Council's net-zero ambitions
- Maintain occupancy levels in the primary schools in Northfield at between 80% and 95% of school capacity, for at least 6 years following implementation, as determined by the most recently available school roll forecast data
- Ensure primary school provision is below 2 miles' safe walking distance from homes within the catchment area

What does this mean for the existing buildings in Northfield?

Most of the options to be included in the business case involve providing new school and community facilities, to replace some existing buildings, reduce unused capacity, and provide a new way of delivering and accessing education and other Council services.

If after considering the business case, elected members were to approve one of the options to be taken forwards, this could lead to a proposal for some existing schools or Council services to be relocated to the new facilities.

Exactly which of the existing schools or services would be affected by this, will depend on which option is taken forwards. For example, if a new community campus is built on the existing Northfield Academy site, it may be preferable for some of the primary schools closest to this site to be considered for relocation to the new building, so that walking distances to school are kept to a minimum. If, however a new school is built on the Greenferns Development site, it may be more appropriate for some of the schools closer to that site to be considered for relocation.

The business case will set out which schools and Council services could be relocated to new buildings, for each of the options being considered, and this will consider the location of existing buildings, as well as their current condition, suitability, and utilisation.

The business case will also consider the Council's Family Support Model, which is currently in development, and which highlights the need for community spaces which can be used by families and members of the community to quickly and easily access Council services and support. The options to provide community campus facilities will include the provision of community spaces which can be used for this purpose, and any proposed relocation of existing Council services will be focused on delivering the Family Support Model.

Any proposal to relocate schools to a new site will require a further formal consultation with pupils, parents, staff and the school communities collectively, before a final decision can be taken on whether the schools should be moved. If elected members approve one of the options

in the business case when they consider it in March 2026, and if this would require any schools being relocated to a new site, then the decision would be subject to the outcomes of a formal public consultation, which would likely be carried out later in 2026.

Given the amount of design and construction work that would be required to deliver some of the options being considered, it is unlikely that any new school building would be completed and open for use before 2029 at the very earliest, and any relocations of existing schools or Council services would not take place before the new facilities are completed.

Options

To achieve the objectives outlined above, the following options will be considered in detail in the Outline Business Case, and we are keen to gather your views on these options, to help elected members decide on which option could be taken forwards.

Option 1: Do Nothing

All business cases need to demonstrate what impact there could be if no action is taken at all, and what the advantages or disadvantages of this might be, so the first option would be to 'do nothing'. This would mean that the Council would continue to maintain the existing primary and secondary school buildings, including regular inspections of the RAAC within the roof structure at Northfield Academy, but no further action would be taken to consolidate assets in Northfield.

Option 2: Do Minimum / Health & Safety Works at Northfield Academy Only

This option would involve carrying out the minimum works necessary at Northfield Academy only, to make the existing building structurally sound (i.e. to address the presence of RAAC). No further action would be taken to consolidate assets in Northfield.

Option 3: New primary school facilities and enhancement of Northfield Academy

This option would involve upgrading the existing Northfield Academy (refurbishment and extension) and building a separate new two or three-stream primary school and community space adjacent to the Northfield Academy site, to consolidate existing assets. Some of the existing primary schools would then relocate to the new primary school building, to help reduce the unused capacity in the existing buildings.

Option 4: New Community Campus with primary and secondary school provision on a single site

This option would involve constructing a new community campus building, to provide new secondary school facilities which would replace the existing Northfield Academy. The campus would also include new primary school provision on the same site, which some of the existing primary schools would relocate to. The community campus would also provide access to community services, in a single campus location, which could lead to some of the existing Council services in Northfield relocating to the new building.

The new community campus would be built on either the existing Northfield Academy site (Option 4a), or the Greenferns Development site (Option 4b). See the maps below for the location of these sites.

Option 5: New primary and secondary school buildings with community campus facilities on separate sites

This option would provide a new two or three stream primary school, which some of the existing primary schools would relocate to, along with a replacement Northfield Academy, on separate sites. The new buildings would also provide space for community services, acting as a community campus across two separate sites, which could lead to some of the existing Council services in Northfield relocating to the new building.

The new facilities would be built on the existing Northfield Academy site and the Greenferns Development site (see the maps below for the location of these sites).

Option 5a would involve the new primary school being built on the Greenferns site, and the new secondary school being built on the existing Northfield Academy site. Alternatively, the new secondary school would be built on the Greenferns site, with the new primary school then being built on the current Northfield Academy site (Option 5b).

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The business case will address the following key questions. You may wish to consider these questions when providing your feedback in the online questionnaire.

What are the advantages / disadvantages of each option?

- Consider costs / savings, benefits / difficulties with each option
- Consider impact on carbon emissions and contribution to the Council's net-zero ambitions
- Which schools could be relocated and how could the existing catchment areas be realigned, to maintain reasonable safe walking distances to school?

Which would be the best site(s) to be developed for new Community Campus facilities?

- Consider running costs, carbon emissions, accessibility, sustainable travel
- Requirements for improvement / refurbishment of buildings
- Consider forecast pupil rolls and capacity of existing sites to accommodate future pupil numbers

What would be the impact of relocating existing schools and Council services to new Community Campus facilities?

- Consider the impact on individual schools and services, and the families and communities who use them, if they were to be relocated
- Consider whether there would be safe walking routes from pupils' homes to the new school facilities