

Consultation proposal by Aberdeen City Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to rezone the northwest part of the Scotstown School Area to Greenbrae School and consequently from Bridge of Don Academy to Oldmachar Academy.

Context

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aberdeen City Council proposes to rezone the northwest part of Scotstown School to Greenbrae School and from Bridge of Don Academy to Oldmachar Academy.

1.2 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the sites of Oldmachar Academy, Greenbrae School, Bridge of Don Academy and Scotstown School including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 Parents, staff, children and young people in all four schools affected were broadly supportive of the proposal with some reservations. All could see a clear rationale for rezoning due to a housing development in the Dubford area. Rezoning would result in children being able to attend the school closest to their homes. The main concerns raised related to the need for an extension to school accommodation at Greenbrae School resulting from the proposal, the need for assurances over the timing and adequacy of the extension, questions over existing entitlement to school transport and neighbourhood road traffic issues. Those at Scotstown School expressed the view that failure to implement the proposals could be detrimental to children's education as a result of capacity issues at Scotstown School related to additional new housing developments. Broader issues were raised by the two secondary schools concerning the number of potential new housing developments in the Bridge of Don area and the need for a more strategic overview for the future of secondary schools serving the area.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 Aberdeen City Council's proposal provides a clear rationale for responding to the impact of new housing developments on school rolls in the area. The housing development at Dubford will result in a forecast of an additional 165 primary and 55 secondary pupils. Other housing developments in the Bridge of Don area are contributing to a forecast rise in Scotstown School's roll. If no action is taken to alter zoning arrangements, Scotstown School will exceed capacity to accommodate pupils. If implemented, the proposal will more evenly distribute pupils across schools involved and reduce the potential for overcrowding. More children will be enabled to attend school within their own neighbourhood. The impact on the two secondary schools in the area is minor since pupil numbers can be accommodated within existing provision. All four schools have been allocated the same accommodation rating of satisfactory by Aberdeen City Council.

3.2 Greenbrae School will require additional accommodation at a future date to accommodate the additional pupils from the new housing development at Dubford. However, the council has not specified the date of the building work in its proposal. The council states that Greenbrae School is currently able to accommodate an additional 50 pupils but estimates that an additional 160-170 pupils will result from the development. The council's proposal states that fully costed plans will be drawn up prior to a final decision. However, parents, staff and children at Greenbrae School have expressed the need for assurances over the timing of work and the nature of additional accommodation. Parents are also concerned that building work, if undertaken during term time, could prove disruptive to their children's learning. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to ensure it works with stakeholders at Greenbrae School on their accommodation plans to ensure that the work takes place in advance of potential overcrowding and that the educational benefits resulting from additional classrooms and enhancement to dining and physical education areas are achieved timeously.

3.3 Staff, children and parents at Greenbrae School value the ethos of the school and have some concerns that substantially increasing the size of the school could have a negative impact. The council will need to consider ways to involve all stakeholders in shaping and managing changes at the school.

3.4 Parents at Greenbrae School expressed concerns over existing traffic congestion at Greenbrae Crescent and how increased numbers of pupils might exacerbate the current situation. The Parent Council is of the view that a robust traffic management solution is required. There are also concerns about safe crossing routes at Dubford Road and Greenbrae Drive. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to consider the views of parents in its transport assessment.

3.5 A number of parents from the rural northern part of the catchment area currently have entitlement to school transport to Scotstown School and are concerned that this might not be the case if the rezoning proposal is implemented. There are related concerns that there is no alternative safe walking route. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to consider these matters fully to ensure that all pupils have a safe means of getting to and from school.

3.6 The council's proposal states that 'all children currently attending Scotstown School and Bridge of Don Academy will continue their education at their current school, unless parents/carers choose to make an application to another school or, in the case of primary aged pupils, they reach the end of primary 7'. The council will need to consider providing assurances to parents and children in Scotstown School that pupils affected by the proposals will be fully entitled to move onto Bridge of Don Academy should they wish at the end of P7. Similar assurances may need to be provided in the case of siblings who wish to attend the same school.

3.7 The council's proposal states that 'all provision for pupils with additional support needs will continue in their present format should this proposal be implemented'. However, staff have expressed the concern that Scotstown School currently has a pupil support base whilst Greenbrae School does not. The council will need to give full consideration of this matter in its final report.

3.8 The council's consultation document states that their rezoning proposal is part of a long term, city-wide strategy. However, staff in Bridge of Don Academy and Oldmachar Academy do not feel sufficiently clear on the overall strategy for secondary education in the Bridge of Don area. They have concerns that ongoing and proposed housing developments in the area make accurate school roll forecasting difficult. They wish to avoid a piecemeal approach to individual housing developments. They have concerns that short or medium term fluctuations in school rolls could have a potentially detrimental impact on staffing and therefore on their ability to offer a sufficiently attractive range of subject choices in the senior phase. A significant proportion of Bridge of Don Academy pupils reside in the Aberdeenshire Council area. There are concerns that planned changes to provision in Aberdeenshire Council could have a strong impact on school roll levels in Bridge of Don Academy. Headteachers are of the view that parents need confidence in the long term viability of the two secondary schools. It will be important that the council gives appropriate consideration to these concerns in its wider approach to determining school zones in the area.

4. Summary

The proposal to rezone the northwest part of the Scotstown School Area to Greenbrae School and consequently from Bridge of Don Academy to Oldmachar Academy has clear educational benefits. It will achieve a more balanced approach to school rolls in the area and avoid the risk of overcapacity at Scotstown School. The additional accommodation proposed at Greenbrae School has the potential to enhance the learning experiences of children. In implementing its proposal Aberdeen City Council will need to give full consideration to issues raised by stakeholders during the consultation including the scheduling of works and adequacy of the additional accommodation at Greenbrae School, road safety and transport issues and the entitlements of pupils and their siblings to continue with existing schooling arrangements should they wish. In taking forward the proposal Aberdeen City Council will need to ensure that its long term strategy for education in the wider Bridge of Don area is clearly communicated and understood.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
January 2014**