

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

26 November 1996

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Report No 1029/96

ANDOVER PRIMARY SCHOOL - BID FOR CENTRAL CHALLENGE FUNDING

ABSTRACT

This report provides an updated position on plans for the replacement of Andover Primary School, and seeks Committee approval for a bid to obtain funding for this project from the government's recently announced Central Challenge Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- a notes and endorses the partnerships which have been formed with parental and community representatives from Brechin
- b approves in principle the proposal that the Council should submit the replacement of Andover Primary School as its first priority bid for funding from the government's Challenge Fund.

BACKGROUND

Reference is made:

- i to the meeting of the Education Committee on 15 October 1996 when the Convener of the Education Committee made a statement detailing the Council's position on Andover Primary School
- ii to the meeting of the Council on 7 November 1996 when approval was given to support a delegation of Council, community and parental representatives to meet with the Secretary of State for Scotland

Meeting with Scottish Office Representatives

The Secretary of State for Scotland did not meet the delegation personally in London; instead the delegation was met by the Minister of State in the Scottish

Office with responsibility for Education - Mr Raymond Robertson, MP. The delegation consisted of Mr Andrew Welsh MP, two parents of pupils in Andover Primary School, a representative from the Brechin Community Council, Councillor W Leask, the Chief Executive and myself. Mr Robertson was accompanied by two civil servants.

The delegation travelled to London to meet Mr Robertson on 12 November 1996. The parents' representatives presented an extremely cogent and well argued case, outlining their perceptions of the shortcomings of the current Andover Primary School buildings; this case was well supported by the representative of the Community Council and was fully endorsed by Mr Welsh and by Council representatives. A large number of pupils had written personal letters to the Secretary of State detailing their own perceptions of conditions in Andover Primary School, and over 100 of these letters were delivered to Mr Robertson by the delegation.

The Director of Property Services had prepared a comprehensive Condition Survey Report, and copies of this were also handed to Mr Robertson. A copy of this report is available for any member of the Committee who wishes to peruse it. Councillor Leask handed Mr Robertson the letter of support signed by all Council members on 7 November 1996, and in supporting fully the concerns highlighted by parental and community representatives also emphasised for Mr Robertson:

- the potential of the large Andover project for skewing the Council's overall capital programme, and the resultant difficulties this would cause
- the Council's unswerving commitment to the Andover project as its very highest capital priority
- the potential for revenue savings to accrue to the Council by having a modern, purpose-built, single site Andover Primary School fully operational
- the Council's determination to be financially prudent, evidenced by a willingness to commit itself to applying any proceeds from the disposition of the current Andover Primary School buildings entirely to capital debt repayment

The Chief Executive and I reminded Mr Robertson of the salient points in the two most recent letters sent to the Secretary of State from the Chief Executive (copies attached as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively). In particular, we highlighted the difficulties faced by the Council due to a lengthy delay in processing the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) which had led in turn to the project not being legally committed when it was inherited by Angus Council on 1 April 1996. The need to take account of school security in the context of Lord Cullen's recommendations was also emphasised as was the relative ease of doing this in the construction of a new school building.

Mr Robertson gave the delegation a courteous hearing, and asked a number of pertinent questions. I obtained the clear impression that the delay in processing the CPO has been accepted by the Scottish Office as a less than satisfactory state of affairs for which they are accepting responsibility. The CPO has now been granted,

and Mr Robertson offered the delegation full assurance on this point. Mr Robertson was particularly interested in the proposal that the Council submit the Andover project as its top priority bid for funding from the Central Challenge Fund, the details of which were only announced by the Secretary of State on 8 November 1996. He confirmed that he was very sympathetic to Angus Council making such a bid, that any bid submitted in this context would be eligible for consideration, and that it would be given serious consideration, along with any other bids which may be lodged.

CONCLUSIONS

The very strong partnership of parents, community, Council and local Member of Parliament was commended by the Minister, and there seems little doubt that this partnership can continue to provide a powerful voice in arguing for as much government support as possible for this project.

It is strongly recommended that a bid for Challenge Funding is submitted. Details of the bidding process were only made available after the Secretary of State's announcement on 8 November, and some time is clearly required to ensure that any bid which is submitted is carefully prepared and well presented. Outline bids must be submitted by 29 November 1996, final bids by 17 January 1997, and the announcement of successful bids will take place on or before 31 March 1997. If the Committee approve in principle the submission of a bid, it is proposed that it then be submitted immediately to the Scottish Office in outline form.

CONSULTATION

This report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance, the Director of Property Services and the Director of Law and Administration.

JIM ANDERSON

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

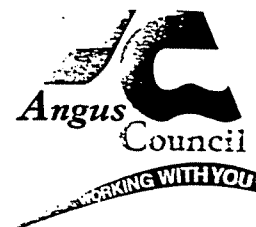
APPENDICES

JAA/CJ

ABW/JW

23 October 1996

The Rt Hon Michael Forsyth MP
Secretary of State for Scotland
The Scottish Office
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DE



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S
DEPARTMENT

The Cross
FORFAR
Angus
DD8 1BX
Tel: (01307 461460)
Fax: (01307 461874)

Dear Mr Forsyth

ANDOVER PRIMARY SCHOOL, BRECHIN

I write to you about the above school which is a matter of great concern to Angus Council and the community of Brechin.

The replacement of the school, at a cost of £2.4m was the highest priority in the Education capital programme of the former Tayside Regional Council.

In normal circumstances the project would have been committed by Tayside Regional Council in 1995/96 for commencement in 1996/97.

However, as the result of a combination of two factors, this regrettably did not happen:

1. Tayside Regional Council did not own the land. The landowner and the Regional Council could not agree a price and Compulsory Purchase proceedings were initiated in March 1995.

The Compulsory Purchase process has in this case taken an inordinate amount of time, and indeed as of today the new Angus Council does not have a decision.

2. As you know, in the final year of the old Councils (i.e. 95/96) the Scottish Office restricted Councils in the extent to which they could enter into legal commitments which would result in capital payments in future financial years. In the context of being allowed to commit only 70% of 95/96 consents, and having no decision on the Compulsory Purchase Order, Tayside Regional Council found itself unable to commit the Andover Primary School project.

For a Council the size of Angus, expenditure of £2.4m on Andover could potentially have a tremendous skewing effect on the Council's capital programme.

I write therefore to urge the following:

1. that steps be taken to expedite the Compulsory Purchase proceedings which have been going on now for nineteen months;

2

23 October 1996

The Rt Hon Michael Forsyth MP

2. that in light of the very unusual position at Andover, with plans prepared, and parents consulted, you take measures to avoid this project being seen as a casualty of local government reorganisation and the slowness of Compulsory Purchase proceedings.

Since the £2.4m project will take some 18 months to build, Angus Council is seeking an enhancement of its S94 borrowing consent for the financial years 1997/98 and 1998/99.

I should be grateful if you or your Minister for Education would agree to meet a delegation of Angus Council, parental and Community Council representatives, together with the local MP, Mr Andrew Welsh, to allow us to expand upon the case.

In the meantime, I have asked my Education, Finance and Property Services colleagues to be in touch with your officials to make sure that they are fully briefed on the background.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



A B Watson
Chief Executive

ABW/JW 07/02/02

5 November 1996



The Rt Hon Michael Forsyth MP
Secretary of State for Scotland
The Scottish Office
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S
DEPARTMENT

The Cross
FORFAR
Angus
DD8 1BX
Tel: (01307 461460)
Fax: (01307 461874)

Dear Mr Forsyth

**ANDOVER PRIMARY SCHOOL, BRECHIN
ACCESS TO CENTRAL CHALLENGE FUND**

I refer to my previous correspondence of 23 October requesting a meeting with a delegation of interested parties and thank you for agreeing to meet the delegation at Dover House at 4.00 pm on Tuesday 12 November 1996.

Given the essential requirement to replace Andover Primary School, officers met with a number of consultants to discuss the possibility of financing the project through the Private Finance Initiative. However the advice given was that the project by itself was not large enough to attract private sector investment, a view which was supported by both COSLA and the Scottish Office.

To assist your consideration, therefore, of providing funds for the replacement of the school, I thought it would be useful to outline some of the major factors in support of the suitability of this project for access to the Central Challenge Fund which is to be established with effect from 1997-98.

Construction of a much needed replacement of Andover Primary School had progressed through the strict capital project appraisal adopted by Tayside and was initially programmed within Tayside's Financial Plan and Capital Estimates to commence in 1994-95, however this was subsequently deferred until late 1995-96/early 1996/97. As you will be aware from my letter of 23 October the project was not legally committed by Tayside Regional Council due to land acquisition complications.

From the above it is clear that Andover formed part of a local, previously published, strategy and addressed a significant defined local need which, I am advised, are key factors for bids to receive Challenge Fund support. Also the expectations of the local community have been raised but as a consequence of the non-commitment by Tayside Regional Council and the severely restricted Section 94 Capital Consents available to Angus Council, it has not proved possible to commence the project.

2

5 November 1996

The Rt Hon Michael Forsyth MP

As stated in my letter of 23 October, for the Council the size of Angus, expenditure of £2.4m on Andover could possibly have a tremendous skewing effect on the Council's capital programme. Expenditure of this level, even if straddled over two financial years, would absorb a significant proportion of the Council's available Section 94 Capital Consents to the detriment of other high priority programmed work designed to assist the development and delivery of the Council's strategy and objectives.

I would highlight that because this project represents an asset replacement it would be affordable in terms of revenue costs. Indeed, some revenue cost reductions can reasonably be expected in respect of energy costs, repairs and maintenance etc. You should also be aware that the current school operates on two separate sites almost half a mile apart. Those buildings which currently house younger children do not lend themselves at all readily to the kind of security improving measures envisaged by Lord Cullen. On the other hand, discussions are already established with the architectural liaison officer of Tayside Police about appropriate designs for a replacement building, and there can be no doubt that the new building which is proposed offers the only real means of addressing adequately the deficiencies identified by any risk assessment of the current school premises.

Whilst acknowledging the capital consent demands faced by the Government, I believe that notwithstanding the unusual circumstances surrounding the non-commitment of Andover, a strong case exists for Angus to access Central Challenge Funding. Andover would be Angus Council's highest priority for Challenge Funding and it would be very helpful if advance agreement could be forthcoming, given that this is a reasonable project with a likelihood of Challenge Fund success.

Please note that my Education, Finance and Property colleagues have been in contact with your officials to make sure that they are fully aware of the position.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



A B Watson
Chief Executive