

**Protocol for Selection of Major Works  
Projects to Proceed in Planning 2016**

## **1. Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 The Schools' Estate is substantial, comprising 1,164 schools (96 nursery, 827 primary, 202 post-primary and 39 special) (as at 2015/16) of varying sizes, of differing types and under the control of various Managing Authorities.
- 1.2 The Department's strategy for capital investment for the coming years will continue to be focused on supporting the development and delivery of a network of viable and sustainable schools, in the context of 'Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools' and shaped by the outworking of the Area Planning process.
- 1.3 This protocol is a refresh of the protocol applied in 2014. The 'Gateway' checks, scoring frame and weightings used then remain unchanged.

## 2. Context

2.1 The most recent major capital announcement in 2014 operated in 4 stages:

Stage 1 – Proposed priorities from Managing Authorities;

Stage 2 – Gateway Checks;

Stage 3 – Assessment & Scoring of Proposed Priorities; and

Stage 4 – Approval of Projects to Advance in Planning.

2.2 Progress in respect of many of the schools announced in the 2014 list has been swift by comparison to many of the projects announced previously in 2013 and 2012. It is considered that this is largely due to the introduction of the 'gateway' stage prior to scoring project proposals. The underlying rationale for the gateway is a school cannot be designed until the size of the school is known, and in cases where schools were (and in many cases, still are) subject to development proposals (DPs) to change their size or constitution, projects become stalled.

2.3 Therefore prior to scoring project proposals, a number of 'gateways' have been incorporated into this protocol that must be confirmed before any proposal can progress to the scoring stage. A key 'gateway' is confirmation that a proposal relates to a school (or rationalisation of a number of schools) that is viable, and sustainable in the context of the Department's 'Policy on Sustainable Schools' and confirmed as forming part of the area solution as set out in the relevant Area Plan.

2.4 The basic rationale underpinning an investment decision is that all projects identified must be considered within the context of the emerging area plans and confirmed as forming part of the core provision in an area going forward, including confirmation of the size of the school proposed to be built.

2.5 Therefore in respect of this next announcement (Major Works 2016) it is proposed that schools will not be considered for announcement unless all outstanding area planning issues have been resolved and DPs have been approved.

- 2.6 Initially, this will mean that many schools considered a priority will not be scored. This introduces a risk that schools are effectively 'queue jumped' by other schools that are perhaps less deserving, but 'ready to go'. However this situation is preferable to projects effectively being held due to area planning uncertainties. This will incentivise planning authorities to complete DP processes in a timely manner to ensure that schools where change is anticipated are considered at the next round of the process.
- 2.7 While rationalisation effectively becomes a 'gateway' decision for schools prior to running the protocol, it will also attract additional weighting for schools where area planning issues have been resolved and the schools are being scored. New build proposals which proceed to the scoring process will attract an additional score/weighting of 10 marks associated with rationalisation AND a further 10 marks should current provision be provided over split sites. This will assist in promoting the efficiency savings likely to be gained from single site operation.
- 2.8 It is further proposed that in this protocol emphasis will continue to be afforded to the relative condition and suitability of proposed schools, which will be weighted evenly.
- 2.9 Given the extensive use of mobile accommodation to supplement the shortfall in permanent provision in schools, and quite often sub-standard temporary accommodation<sup>1</sup>, the category and weighting afforded to undue reliance on temporary accommodation has been retained in this protocol as a means of addressing the extensive over-reliance on temporary buildings across the estate.
- 2.10 A further 2 criteria have been added to reflect social issues:
- Percentage of pupils registered level 5 statement of educational need;
  - Percentage of pupils receiving free school meals.

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<sup>1</sup> The condition of many of the mobiles currently in use across the estate is either poor or considerably short of what is the minimum standard of provision set out in the Schools Building Handbook. While mobile accommodation is not specifically referenced, floor area and provision is considerably short by comparison to conventional, permanent build accommodation.

2.11 The scoring system is set out in detail in section 5 of this document.

### **3. Definition**

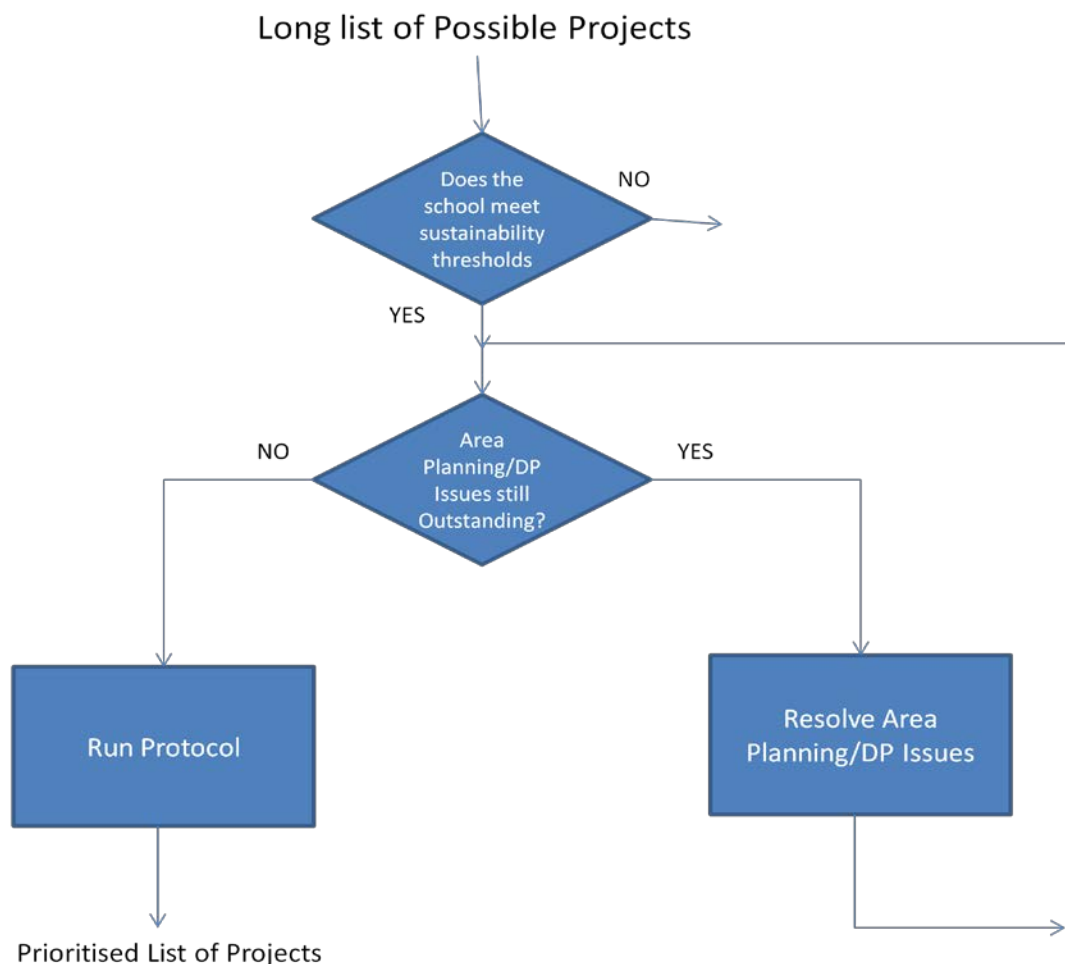
3.1 The process set out in this protocol will consider proposed new build school projects that have a capital value greater than £0.5million.

3.2 All works progressing through this protocol must support at least one of the Minister's priorities for major capital investment as follows:

- Supporting unmet need for educational facilities;
- Addressing serious accommodation inadequacies and substandard accommodation to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum; or
- Effecting agreed rationalisation of schools.

#### 4. Process

- 4.1 The aim of this process is to ensure the Department has sufficient projects at an advanced stage in planning to utilise capital funds as budgets are agreed going forward.
- 4.2 The first stage in the process is the submission of a list of potential new build projects deemed to be 'high priority' by the relevant Area Planning Authority (i.e. the Education Authority) in consultation with the relevant School Authority.
- 4.3 The flowchart below illustrates the process to be applied:



4.4 The process will be taken forward in the following stages:

- i) In discussion with the Education Authority, School Authorities forward a list of priority Primary Schools for consideration as major capital projects. These lists will cover Primary Schools in all school sectors.
- ii) Confirmation of proposed projects as viable, sustainable schools in the context of 'Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools'.  
This assessment will be made not solely in terms of the quantitative assessment of enrolment trends as set out in section 4 (of the above referenced document) but also in respect of the broader criteria set out elsewhere in the document. Particular consideration will also be given to schools in the Irish Medium (IM) and Integrated sectors given the Department's statutory duties under Article 64 of the Education Reform Order 1989 and Article 89 of the Education Order 1998.
- iii) Confirmation that no area planning uncertainties exist in relation to the proposed project.  
*(Assessment of points (ii) and (iii) will be undertaken by a team within the Department including representatives of Area Planning Policy Team, Infrastructure and Investment Directorate and Education Inspectorate. Dialogue with planning authorities will continue during this process as required.)*
- iv) Projects confirmed as viable, sustainable and without area planning uncertainties proceed to detailed assessment within this protocol.
- v) A Single Prioritised List of Primary School projects (covering all sectors) will be presented to the Minister for consideration within the context of the available budget.
- vi) The Minister will decide which projects are to proceed in planning - specifically to completion of a Business Case. Further advancement of these projects would then be subject to a subsequent announcement confirming funding following successful completion and approval of the Business Case.



## 5. Assessment

### STAGE 1 - Proposed priorities from Managing Authorities

- 5.1 Taking account of the work carried out on area-planning to date, the School Planning Authorities have been asked, in conjunction with CCMS and other sector bodies, to provide details of proposed new build school projects within their relevant Education Authority area.

### STAGE 2 – Gateway Checks

- 5.3 All project proposals received from the Planning Authorities will be subject to the following Gateway checks:
- i) Has the project been proposed by the Planning Authority in consultation with the relevant School Authority?
  - ii) Is the school considered to be viable and sustainable in the context of the Minister's Policy for Sustainable Schools and in line with the needs of the area as determined by the emerging area-based planning process? (Note legal provision in respect of IM and Integrated sectors set out in 4.4(ii) above).
  - iii) Have all outstanding uncertainties in respect of area planning decisions been dealt with, specifically, can it be confirmed that no outstanding development proposal (DP) is being considered that could impact school numbers? (*This gateway check will be determined on the basis of the question – can the size of the proposed new build be specified now without the need for further input from a DP process or other input from a planning authority.*)
- 5.4 If the answer is 'No' to any of the above, the proposed project will not be considered for this capital announcement.

- 5.5 If the answer is 'Yes' to all the above, then the proposed project will proceed to assessment within the context of this protocol.

### **STAGE 3 - Assessment of proposed priorities**

- 5.6 The criteria adopted for this stage of assessment have been drawn from the following Priorities for Investment:

#### Rationalisation

- Major works to effect rationalisation proposals. This criterion aims to prioritise re-build of schools which have recently been subject to a rationalisation process.
- Additional weight will be given to schools which are operating on split sites following the rationalisation process.

#### Inadequate/Inappropriate Accommodation

- Immediate/serious accommodation inadequacies (i.e. an assessment of the suitability of the accommodation for the delivery of the curriculum).
- Accommodation in poor or sub-standard condition.
- Undue reliance on temporary accommodation.

#### Social Considerations

- Percentage of SEN registered pupils.
- Percentage of pupils taking free school meals.

- 5.7 Details of the scoring weights applied to each of the criteria are given below.

### ***Assessment Criterion 1 - Rationalisation***

#### *Rationale:*

It is important to note that there are a number of cases where rationalisation has already taken place in advance of area planning, in anticipation of a new build.

Such schools will be afforded the marks available in this criterion as part of this assessment.

*Scoring:*                      *10 points*                      *A 10 points score for schools where recent rationalisation has taken place; 0 points where this is not the case.*

*10 points*                      *A further 10 points where following rationalisation a school is currently operating on split sites; 0 points where this is not the case.*

***Assessment Criterion 2 - Immediate/serious accommodation inadequacies or sub-standard accommodation***

*Rationale:*

Accommodation inadequacies and sub-standard accommodation have historically been considered a priority for capital investment in the schools' estate.

Under this process proposed projects will therefore be assessed on the basis of the relative condition and relative suitability of the current accommodation. This information will be drawn from the Manhattan database. The condition surveys already provide a systematic, uniform and objective basis for getting information on the state condition of premises. How well premises meet the needs of pupils, teachers etc. and how they contribute towards raising standards of education will be assessed using the scoring from the suitability surveys. These surveys assess the degree to which the accommodation meets the requirements for delivery of the curriculum as set out in the building handbook.

Undue reliance on temporary accommodation has been included to take account of the extensive mobile/temporary provision across the estate, some of which was provided as a temporary solution in anticipation of either an “extend and refurbishment” or a “new build” solution.

*Scoring: 30 points Maximum score for poor suitability*

*30 points Maximum score for poor condition*

(In both cases, all scores will be on a range from 0 to 30 points based on the results of the survey data currently held for the school.)

*20 points Maximum score for temporary accommodation*

(Scores will be calculated based on the % of temporary accommodation in use.)

### **Assessment Criterion 3 – Social Issues**

Rationale: Additional weight should be given to schools where pupils are more greatly impacted by social issues. The indicators selected to identify these schools are - the numbers of pupils identified as having special education needs (SEN) and the level of free school meal (FSM) provision within the school.

*Scoring: 15 points To be allocated based on percentage of pupils with a level 5 statement of special educational need.*

*15 points To be allocated on the basis of the percentage of pupils allocated free school meals.*

***Assessment Criterion 4 – Prior Allocation of a Schools’ Enhancement  
Project***

Over 50 schools have recently been given approval to proceed with School Enhancement Programme (SEP) projects. Where these projects have been approved in schools where a major project was a possibility, the project has been configured to conflict in as minimal a way as possible with the potential re-build project. However SEP projects will enhance the facilities at the school when completed and therefore a scoring mechanism to reflect this future improvement has been developed.

*Scoring:                    -5 points                    To be deducted where a school has a SEP  
project underway.*

## **6. Approvals for Projects to Advance**

- 6.1 Projects will be assessed and scored as described above. Projects not filtered out as part of the gateway process will then be prioritised. A single prioritised list of Primary Schools will be prepared.
- 6.2 The final stage in the assessment will be to consider the prioritised list against the indicative available capital budget. The Minister will announce a list of projects to be advanced in planning on the basis of the prioritised lists produced and the availability of indicative capital budget in future years. Projects will initially be announced to proceed to economic appraisal (EA) stage.
- 6.3 Subsequent approvals to advance to design stage and ultimately to the construction stage will be made when firm budget allocations have been confirmed and EA approvals are in place.