



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

10 MARCH 2020

OUTCOMES OF INFORMAL CONSULTATION ON OPTIONS FOR WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL

Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services - Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member: Councillor Wayne Daley

Report prepared by Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources

Purpose of report

This report sets out the outcomes of the informal consultation approved by Cabinet at its meeting of 2 December 2019 on proposed options for the future of West Woodburn First School. This consultation has arisen as a result of the significant drop in pupil numbers at the school since the previous statutory consultation on a formal proposal to extend the age range of West Woodburn was undertaken in September 2019. The report also includes a request to Cabinet to permit the publication of a statutory proposal.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Consider the responses to the informal consultation that took place between 12 December 2019 and 15 January 2020 and the analysis of this feedback set out in this report:
 - Decide in the light of this report and any recommendations from the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee whether to permit the publication of a statutory proposal on 12 March 2020, setting out the intention of the County Council to implement the following proposal:
 - Close West Woodburn First School with effect from 31 August 2020;
 - As part of the above, include the proposal to allocate the catchment area of West Woodburn First School to Bellingham Primary School from 1 September 2020.

2. Note that West Woodburn First School is categorised as a Rural School within the Department for Education's List of Designated Rural Schools 2019. Therefore, should Cabinet decide to approve the publication of a statutory proposal to close the school, as recommended in making the final decision at the end of the statutory period, Cabinet would need to take into account the DfE's guidance on rural schools and the presumption against closure, as set out in para. 28 of this report.
3. Note the implications of the recommended statutory proposal in relation to Home to School Transport as set out in this report.
4. Note that should Cabinet approve the publication of the recommended statutory proposal, the outcomes of the formal consultation would be brought back to Cabinet in May 2020 for a final decision.

Link to Corporate Plan

5. This report supports the Council's priorities *Residents First, Excellence and Quality and Respect*.

Key issues

6. The background to previous consultation on options for the school, including the proposal to extend the age range of the school is provided in the Executive Director of Adult and Children's Services Report of 10 December 2019.
7. Cabinet approved commencement of a five week informal consultation beginning on the 11 December 2019 and closing on 15 January 2020 in the light of only three (3) children being on roll at the school by December 2019. The purpose of the consultation was to gather the views of the staff, the Governors of The River Rede Federation, parents and the wider community on the following 3 proposals for the West Woodburn First School:

Option A - the school continues as a first school (status quo)
Option B - the school extends its age range to become a primary school
Option C - the school closes
8. The relevant stakeholders (including staff, parents and Governors of schools in The River Rede Federation) were informed of the consultation via email containing a link to the consultation document; the relevant stakeholders are recorded in the Consultation Register attached as Appendix 1 of this report. The consultation document was made available on the Council's website so that any interested party was able to respond should they wish to do so, and electronic and hard-copy versions of the document were available if requested. The consultation document is attached to this report at Appendix 2.
9. In relation to each of the three proposals set out at para. 2 above, consultees were asked whether or not they agreed with the proposal, whether they had comments to support their view and whether they had any alternative proposals. In relation to the

proposal to close West Woodburn, consultees were asked for their views on how the school's catchment area should be allocated should closure be proposed.

10. In addition to the publication and distribution of the consultation document, three separate meetings were held at West Woodburn First School for staff (including union representative), the federated Governing Body, and parents of pupils recently on roll at the school and potential future parents of the school.

Summary of responses to the consultation

11. 10 responses to the consultation were received from stakeholders and members of the public as follows:

- a response from the Chair of Governors of The River Rede foundation on behalf of the Governing Body
- 4 responses from parents at Otterburn First School
- 2 responses from parents of a child in the Haydon Bridge Partnership
- 2 responses from members of the local community
- 1 response from a member of the general public.

9 out of the 10 responses received supported the option C the closure of West Woodburn. The response that didn't support the closure was from the Governing Body of the River Rede Federation as they are supportive of the school becoming a primary school (option B)

Summary of the response from the Governing Body of The River Rede Federation

12. The federated Governing Body does not support Option A to retain West Woodburn First School;

"It would be the only First School in the West Partnership which would disadvantage it."

13. The federated Governing Body supports Option B to extend the age range of the school to become a primary school;

"Becoming a Primary would show the local community that NCC had confidence in the school and would encourage more parents to choose this school and avoid their children having to travel outside the village."

14. The federated Governing Body does not support Option C to close the school;

"The Governors of the River Rede Federation discussed this issue at our meeting on 02/12/19. We object to the closure option for the following reasons. The previous governing bodies of West Woodburn First school and Otterburn First School were persuaded by NCC that the way forward for both schools was to federate. This caused both staff and governors considerable stress and anxiety. When concerns about the quality of education for such low pupil numbers, especially in Early Years, was expressed by governors their arguments were dismissed. Now those same arguments are being used to advocate closure. The Federation is now operating

successfully, the staff of both schools are working together to provide a full education for all the children. The children are happy and settled in the new arrangement. If West Woodburn First School closes this will dissolve the Federation and undo all the good work achieved so far.”

Summary of responses from other consultees:

Main responses to Q1 ‘Option A - Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area for the school to remain as a first school within the Haydon Bridge Partnership

15. All responses (other than the Governing Body above) were against this proposal for the following reasons:

- Small pupil numbers, detrimental to their educational and socialisation needs; school too small to provide a good quality of experience.
- Transport from one school to another losing valuable teaching time.
- How can play based learning be achieved?
- No longer viable due to falling pupil numbers

Main responses to Q2 ‘Option B - Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area for the school to become a primary school within the Haydon Bridge Partnership

16. Again, all consultees who responded (with the exception of the Governing Body) disagreed with this proposal for the following reasons:

- Let the children go to Bellingham as a 3 tier school, I do team games etc, nothing like that at Otterburn; good for the children to mix with more pupils; how would children feel going from that size school to a school with perhaps 1000 pupils.
- Don't believe parents would send their children even if a primary school
- Told school would not be considered a viable Primary school, prompting many parents to remove their children.
- School too small to provide a good quality of experience; do not believe the predicted figures for the number of children attending in future years is accurate; parents will choose to send their children to other schools
- Told building isn't suitable to be a primary
- How could correct education be given with such poor numbers
- Questioned the validity of consulting again on this option
- Questioned the success of the Governing Body and Headteacher in improving provision at West Woodburn First School

Main responses to Q3 ‘Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area for the school to close

17. All consultees (with the exception of the Governing Body) agreed with the proposal to close the school for the following reasons

- Cost
- Don't believe the predicted figures for the number of children attending in future years is accurate, parents will choose to send their children to other schools.
- School can no longer provide the whole curriculum onsite resulting in children having to be transported to Otterburn
- Parents against federating; not listened to and children's wellbeing, consistency and quality of education were not taken into account.
- No community use or value; parental mistrust of LEA
- Entitlement to transport to more suitable schools will encourage people to consider moving back to the village.

Responses to Q4 'If a proposal to close West Woodburn First School was published, please state which school or schools its catchment area school/schools should be allocated'

18. 6 consultees favoured the catchment area being allocated to Bellingham (primary and middle), while 3 consultees favoured Otterburn. 1 consultee did not express a preference, but commented that the nearest school in relation to home to school transport may not be able to provide appropriate education.

Alternative options

19. There were no alternative options put forward by those consultees who responded to the consultation

The full comments from consultees who responded are set out in the Background Papers to this report.

Comments from Staff Meeting, 9 January 2020

20. Council officers organised a Staff Meeting at West Woodburn First School on 9 January 2020. As well as NCC officers, two members of staff attended and an HR Adviser and a union representative attended to support staff. Understandably, staff were most concerned about what the most likely outcome of the consultation would be and what would be the implications for their personal situation. The HR Adviser and Union representative were able to offer personal advice at the close of the meeting.

Comments from The River Rede Federated Governing Body Meeting, 9 January 2020

21. 4 Governors attended the meeting for The River Rede Federated Governing Body on 9 January 2020. Their main views and questions were as follows:
- Governors expressed annoyance that the issues of some parents had resulted in other parents withdrawing their children from West Woodburn.
 - Some parents who had moved children just wanted free transport.
 - Governors queried what would happen to the catchment area in the event of West Woodburn closing.

- Governors had concerns about the number of governors that would be available should the federation dissolve
- Governors noted that they had been invited to become a federation by NCC.
- Governors noted that the children of West Woodburn and Otterburn enjoyed being taught together, children have not missed out [by being part of the federation].
- Who is responsible for redundancies in the event of closure?
- What would happen to the contents of the school if closure?
- What would happen to the building?

Parent meeting and Community Drop-in Event

22. No local former parents of recent children in the school or potential future parents of West Woodburn attended the scheduled meeting for parents. One member of the local community attended the drop-in event for further information.

The full notes of the staff and Governing Body meetings are available in the Background Papers of this report.

Conclusions and Recommendations

23. The parents, staff and Governors of West Woodburn First School and the wider community have now undergone four consultations since early 2018 on the future of the school; three consultations relating to proposals for the organisation of the school and one consultation relating to the proposal to federate with Otterburn Primary School. There has been a clear lack of support for West Woodburn First School from parents of first-school age children in the village during this and the previous consultation.
24. Furthermore, while the federated Governing Body believe that the establishment of The River Rede Federation between West Woodburn and Otterburn has been successful, local parents in West Woodburn have not supported the new arrangements (see responses to consultation in paras. 10-12). While the school had three children on roll in the Autumn Term 2019, these children have now been enrolled at different schools in the local area (although one transfer was as a result of a house move to a different village).
25. Former parents of pupils in West Woodburn and members of the community have now expressed in the most recent consultations that they do not support the federation between Otterburn and West Woodburn, and have made it clear that they would not send their children to the school. There are no applications for a place in Reception Class at West Woodburn for September 2020 and the lack of attendance of any potential parents at the scheduled meeting on 9 January 2020 is a concern.
26. While theoretically the school could in fact continue to remain open due to the allocation of the lump sum through the school's budget share, in reality and given that there are no children on roll at West Woodburn, and the lack of parental and community support for the current arrangements, it no longer appears reasonable for the school to remain open.

27. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet agree that there are no other viable alternatives to the closure of the school and that it agrees to the next stage in the process which is to approve the publication of a Statutory Proposal setting out the intention to close West Woodburn First School to take effect from 31 August 2020 in line with the following timeline:

- Statutory consultation on closure: 12 February - 9 April 2020 (4 weeks)
- FACS meeting - 7 May 2020
- Cabinet meeting, final decision - 12 May 2020

28. Cabinet should note that West Woodburn First School is listed as a Rural School within the DfE's List of Designated Rural Schools 2019. Therefore, should Cabinet decide to approve the recommendation to publish a statutory proposal for the closure of West Woodburn First School, in making the final decision with regard to that proposal, Cabinet would need to take account of the DfE's guidance on rural schools and the presumption against closure, as set out below:

Decision-makers should adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and a proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. When producing a proposal to close a rural primary school, the proposer must consider:

- *the likely effect of the closure of the school on the local community;*
- *the proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community i.e. is the school being used by the local community;*
- *educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools;*
- *the availability, and likely cost to the LA of transport to other schools;*
- *whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term);]*
- *any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the closure of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase; and*
- *any alternatives to the closure of the school.*

29. Should Cabinet approve the publication of the recommended statutory proposal, the final decision on whether or not to approve its implementation is required to be made within two months of the end of the statutory period i.e. before 9 June 2020, otherwise the proposal must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for a decision.

Outcomes of consultation on proposals for West Woodburn First School

Background

30. West Woodburn First School is a very small, rural school within the Haydon Bridge Partnership. Cabinet will be aware of the rationale and background for the informal consultation reported in this report and the previous statutory consultation on extending the age range of the school are set out in the Report of the Executive Director of Adult and Children's Services Report of 10 December 2019 and the Report of the Executive Director of Adult and Children's Service to Cabinet of 9 July 2019, available in the Background Papers to this report.
31. Based on pupil numbers on roll at West Woodburn in July 2019, it had been predicted that there would be six children on roll at the school for September 2019, including a new pupil in Reception. However, the parents of three children decided to move them to the roll of Bellingham First School for the beginning of the new school year and therefore only three children remain on roll at the school during the Autumn Term 2019. These children have now transferred to other local schools for the beginning of the Spring Term in January 2020 and there are now no children on roll at West Woodburn.
32. The number of children living in the catchment area that could join the school in Reception in future years is as follows (assuming all pupils then stay at the school):

Potential Reception 2020	Potential Reception 2021	Potential Reception 2022
2	5	4
Max total roll = 2	Max total roll = 7	Max total roll = 11

33. However, no children have applied for a place in Reception at the school for September 2020, and feedback from local parents across the two most recent consultations on proposals for the school indicates that West Woodburn is unlikely to attract further pupils for the foreseeable future.
34. In September 2019, the remaining maintained first schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership (except West Woodburn) became primary schools and in Haltwhistle the middle academy closed in August 2019 and the first academy extended its age range to become Haltwhistle Primary Academy as part of the Wise Academies Trust. West Woodburn is the only remaining first school in the Haydon Bridge Partnership, while Bellingham Middle School remains open as a result of the decision of the School's Adjudicator in Autumn 2018 to overturn the Council's decision to close the school. The primary/secondary structure is now the prevalent educational structure in the Haydon Bridge Partnership.

Implications of the recommendation to consult on closure of West Woodburn First School

Standards

35. The recommendation to propose statutory consultation on the closure of West Woodburn is based on the fact that the school currently has no children on roll and concerns with its future sustainability based on feedback from local parents. It is not based on current educational provision at the school.
36. The levels at which children in first schools are working in relation to reading, writing and maths are judged through KS1 assessments at the end of Year 2. The DfE do not publish the results of individual schools, as the main purpose of KS1 assessments is as a tool for teachers to identify children's needs before they move onto the KS2 curriculum in Year 3.
37. Furthermore, any judgement of a school's KS1 outcomes must be taken in context i.e. schools with very small cohorts are impacted more significantly either positively or negatively when individual children perform better or worse than expected in the assessments. The number of children undertaking KS1 assessments in 2019 at West Woodburn was five and therefore statistically invalid in relation to drawing assumptions from performance data.
38. However, Cabinet should note that during this and the previous consultation on extending the age range of the school, a number of parents of former pupils at West Woodburn have expressed concerns over the educational experience and the educational performance of their children at the school (refer to paras 10-12 of this report and reports set out in the Background Papers).

Catchment area

39. As part of consultation, consultees were asked if in the event of the closure of West Woodburn First School at some point, to which school or schools should its catchment area be allocated. As noted at para. 18, of the nine consultees who expressed a preference, six consultees preferred that Bellingham Primary School should be allocated the catchment area, while three consultees preferred that Otterburn Primary School should be allocated the catchment.
40. It is recommended that, should Cabinet at some point in the future approve the closure of West Woodburn First School, the school's catchment area should be allocated to Bellingham Primary School for the following reasons:
 - Bellingham Primary School is the closest school to West Woodburn village;
 - The majority of parents of children of first school age living in West Woodburn who removed their children from the school selected to send their children to Bellingham Primary School;
 - Otterburn Primary School catchment is currently already one of the largest in relation to land area in the Haydon Bridge Partnership and children living in

the south of the current West Woodburn catchment would have a significantly longer journey to Otterburn than to Bellingham.

- In any event, parents are able to express a preference for any school of their choice, although some choices would have implications for Home to School Transport arrangements (see para. 40).

41. Should Bellingham Primary be allocated the West Woodburn catchment, it would become the catchment school for children from Reception to the end of Year 6.

Transport

42. Should Cabinet approve the closure of West Woodburn First School at some point in the future and approve the allocation of its catchment area to Bellingham Primary School as recommended, the implications for Home to School Transport would be as follows:

- The catchment area of all children currently residing in the catchment area of West Woodburn First School in Reception to Year 6 would become Bellingham Primary School, and in Year 7 to Year 11 the catchment school would remain as Haydon Bridge High School.
- The Home to School Transport Policy also provides for children who are eligible to be allocated transport to the nearest school that provides education in the relevant year groups if that is parental preference. The nearest school is determined by measuring the shortest available route by road from the home address main entrance that opens onto a road or street that is maintained at public expense to the main school entrance. The measurement of the shortest available route is undertaken by the County Council's approved GIS system QGIS10.5.1.
- Children who currently attend Bellingham Primary School in Reception to Year 4 (the school currently does not have pupils in Year 5) and who live in the West Woodburn catchment would become eligible (if they meet the distance criteria) for Home to School Transport to Bellingham Primary School from September 2020 as they move into Years 1 to 5. There are currently 15 pupils within these year groups, which would equate to an additional cost of £26,600k to the Home to School Transport policy; this is based on the cost of providing an additional vehicle at £140 per day for 190 days statutory education.

43. It should be noted that all requests for Home to School Transport are considered in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

Implications for Staff

44. Should Cabinet approve the closure of West Woodburn First School at a later point, the staff currently employed by the school would be placed at risk of redundancy. Detailed discussions with the federated Governing Body and with the Trades Unions would take place should Cabinet approve the publication of the statutory proposal to close the school and measures to minimise the risk to staff would be explored, including the possibility of a form of Staffing Protocol with other local schools. The

possible closure of West Woodburn First School could also have an impact on the staffing structure at Otterburn First School and therefore should the statutory proposal to close West Woodburn be published, a meeting would be organised at Otterburn for those staff with NCC officers, union representatives and the Governing Body.

45. Should West Woodburn be approved for closure, NCC officers would work with local schools to try to secure the on-going employment of staff at West Woodburn once their current contracts of employment ended.

Governance

46. Should West Woodburn First School be approved for closure at some point in the future, its closure would automatically dissolve The River Rede Federation and the Otterburn First School Governing Body would need to be reconstituted. As stated in para. 21, Governors have some concern around the availability of sufficient governors should the federation dissolve.

Impact on the Community and Denominational Provision

47. West Woodburn First School is a community school, therefore there would be no impact on local denominational provision should it be approved for closure.

Special Educational Needs

48. There are currently no pupils on roll at West Woodburn.

Early Years Provision

49. West Woodburn does not currently have nursery provision, therefore there would be no impact on early years provision in the local area.

Land and Buildings

50. The buildings of West Woodburn First School are in the ownership of Northumberland County Council. The playing field is held on long term leasehold with a private owner. Should Cabinet approve the publication of a statutory proposal to close the school, the Council's Estates team will provide information as to whether or not a break clause is included in the lease and any related penalty clause. This information would be reported to Cabinet to inform the final decision meeting in May 2020.

Sport and Recreation

51. As stated above, the Council leases the playing field at West Woodburn on behalf of the school. There may be implications in relation to the playing fields in the light of the Sport England policy of opposing any loss of playing fields unless it meets one or more of the five exceptions within its "Policy on planning applications for development on playing fields". The local community may show interest in taking on the lease of the playing field and this would be investigated during the statutory period, should Cabinet approve the publication of the statutory proposal.

Community Cohesion

52. It is not envisaged that the proposal to close West Woodburn First School would have any impact either positively or negatively on community cohesion.

Implications

Policy	The consultation outlined in this report has been consistent with the Council's policy to review changes to schools in accordance with local wishes and needs.
Finance and value for money	Should West Woodburn be approved for closure, it may close with a surplus or a deficit depending on costs, including redundancy costs, which the Council may need to incur during the period leading up to the proposed closure. Any surplus held by the School at the time of closure would return to the Council. Any deficit would have to be met from either the DSG contingency or other Children's Services budgets. Any DSG funding scheduled to be paid to the School after the closure date would not be paid to the school, but would remain in the DSG account.
Legal	The informal consultation was undertaken in line with DfE Guidance.
Procurement	No implications
Human Resources	Should Cabinet approve the closure of West Woodburn First School at some point in the future, staff employed by the school would be at risk of redundancy (refer to para. 44-45). Displaced staff would need to be supported with redeployment opportunities.
Property	The Council owns the West Woodburn school building, while the playing fields are on a long-term lease with a private individual (see para. 50).
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	An EIA is attached at Appendix 3
Risk Assessment	A full risk assessment has been carried out on this project.
Crime & Disorder	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
Customer Consideration	The proposal set out in this report
Carbon reduction	It is not envisaged that these proposals would have a significant positive or negative impact on carbon reduction
Health and Wellbeing	No implications
Wards	Bellingham

Background papers

Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, 2 December 2019

Update of School Organisation Plan and other school organisation matters, 9 July 2019

Report sign off

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

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Monitoring Officer/Legal	Liam Henry
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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Consultation Register

Appendix 2 - Consultation

Appendix 3 - Equalities Impact Assessment



Northumberland
County Council

WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL

INFORMAL CONSULTATION

DECEMBER 2019 - JANUARY 2020



THE COUNTY COUNCIL IS CARRYING OUT CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE OF WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL. THESE PROPOSALS INCLUDE WHETHER THE SCHOOL SHOULD CLOSE.

WE NEED TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THESE PROPOSALS. WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE ANY ALTERNATIVE IDEAS ABOUT THE ISSUES FACING THE SCHOOL.

BACKGROUND

1. West Woodburn First School is a very small first school within the Haydon Bridge Partnership of schools. In 2013, some schools in the partnership reorganised from the 3-tier system to the primary/secondary system, including Haydon Bridge High School. In 2018, following extensive consultation in the west of the county, the Council approved the reorganisation of the remaining first schools in the North Tyne and Redesdale areas to the primary/secondary system, with the exception of West Woodburn. Following an appeal to the Schools Adjudicator, the Council's decision to close Bellingham Middle School in September 2019 was overturned. This meant that in September 2019, apart from Bellingham Middle and West Woodburn First Schools, the primary/secondary system is the prevalent school organisation system in the Haydon Bridge Partnership.
2. The decision not to reorganise West Woodburn First School at the same time as the other first schools became primaries in September 2019 had been made because at that time, issues with the capacity of the school's staffing body and its budget had arisen. To assist the West Woodburn Governing Body with the management of the school, the headteacher at Otterburn Primary School had been asked to work with West Woodburn to provide additional management capacity and to stabilise the school budget. This assistance had worked and therefore the Governing Bodies of West Woodburn First and Otterburn Primary Schools decided to carry out a consultation on making these arrangements permanent through the establishment of a federation. This proposal was approved by the two Governing Bodies and the River Rede Federation was established in Spring 2019.

3. Having achieved stability at the school and in order to bring it into line with the prevalent primary/secondary system in the partnership, the federated Governing Body asked the Council to consult on a proposal to extend the age range of West Woodburn First School from an age 4 to 9 first school to an age 4 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2020. Cabinet approved formal consultation to take place in Autumn 2019; at that point, there were 8 pupils on the roll at West Woodburn.
4. The formal consultation on the proposal to extend West Woodburn's age range duly took place in September 2019, at which point the school's roll had fallen to 3 pupils. Feedback on the proposal had been received mainly from parents, staff and the federated Governing Body and from the parents of former pupils at the school, as well as a small number of community members.
5. The report to Cabinet indicated that the results of the feedback from the formal consultation have been inconclusive. While the feedback from existing parents and from the staff and federated Governing Body were positive, the views of the parents of former pupils have identified issues that now cause doubt about the continuing viability of a school that does not appear to have the support of the majority of its community. The report on the outcomes of this consultation can be found at

<http://committee.northumberland.gov.uk/Meeting.aspx?MeetID=10761>

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FACING WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL?

6. As noted previously, since consultation on extending the age range of West Woodburn First School was approved, the roll at the school has fallen to only 3 pupils. There were 8 pupils on roll at the school at the May 2019 census; while 3 of these pupils were in Year 4 and would have left the school at the end of the summer term in any event to join other schools for Year 5 for September 2019, with the addition of another child joining the school in Reception at the beginning of the new Autumn Term, it was expected that there would be 6 pupils on roll at the school in September 2019. However, parents of three of the children in Year 2 removed their children from the school at the end of the summer term and placed them into Year 3 other local schools

in September. The table below shows the numbers of pupils who have been attending the school since September 2015.

West Woodburn First School	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Y0	1	0	3	4	5
Y1	0	1	7	4	5
Y2	0	7	5	3	5
Y3	2	4	3	5	5
Y4	0	4	5	4	4
TOTAL	3	16	23	20	24

7. So far, there have been no applications for a place in Reception class at West Woodburn in September 2020, although GP/birth data indicates under 5 children live in its catchment that would require a place at that time. The majority of parents with first-school age children living in the West Woodburn catchment area now send their children to other local schools. Feedback from some of these parents during the recent consultation indicated they had concerns about the ability of the school to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and the educational experience of their children at the school with such a small cohort.

8. However, the federated Governing Body and Executive Headteacher have worked hard to put in place an educational timetable that supports the offer of a broad and balanced curriculum to children on roll at West Woodburn. This includes transporting pupils from West Woodburn to Otterburn Primary School for lessons, activities and lunch for 3 days out of 5. While parents of West Woodburn have indicated they are happy with these arrangements, feedback from former parents and other interested parties indicates they do not feel this is in the best educational interests of children. This creates doubt and concern about the long-term viability of this arrangement.

9. With regard to the financial stability of West Woodburn, the school budget appears to be in a healthy position and indicates that it would remain positive over the course of the next four years as follows:

2019/20	2020/2021	2021/22	2022/23
£51,621	£44,759	£40,321	£52,554
Actual No. on roll = 3	Projected No. on roll = 5 (max)	Projected No. on roll = 10 (max)	Projected No. on roll = 14 (max)

However, these budget projections have been made on the basis of the school becoming a primary and using the assumption that the children already on roll at the school will remain there, with all forecast preschool children living in the West Woodburn catchment area (indicated by GP/birth data) joining the school in future years (latest data indicates there are under 5 children that would require a place in Reception in September 2020 and and in September 2021). Given the feedback received from the parents of former pupils at West Woodburn during the recent consultation on the proposal for the school to become a primary, there is a significant concern about the number of pupils that would actually enrol in the future (as noted in para. 7) and therefore the viability of the school.

10. The establishment of The River Rede Federation has undoubtedly created stability both educationally and financially at West Woodburn at least in the short term, and there is an acknowledgement that small, rural schools can offer a different kind of educational experience to their pupils which parents rightly value. However, there is a point at which the school becomes so small that it impacts on the quality of the educational experience of its pupils as well as its viability.

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL

11. The current possible options for the future of West Woodburn First School are:
 - **Option A - it continues as a first school i.e. the status quo**
 - **Option B - it extends its age range to become a primary school**
 - **Option C - the school closes**

However, it should be noted that both Option B and C have already been consulted on in the last 22 months and were both unpopular.

12. Under Option A, should West Woodburn remain as a first school, parents would need to apply for another school for their child for Year 5 and Year 6 as currently. As West Woodburn is in federation with Otterburn Primary School and the prevailing primary/secondary organisation of schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership, the catchment area of Otterburn Primary School would be extended to cover the current West Woodburn catchment area for Years 5 and 6. This means that pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area would be eligible for transport to Otterburn in Years 5 and 6, but they would also be eligible for transport to their nearest school, which in most cases is likely to be Bellingham Middle School. In any event, parents would be able to express a preference for any school and if a place was available, it would be allocated. However, if the school is neither the catchment nor nearest school, or if it has been selected on the basis of a preference for a faith school, it is unlikely that eligibility for home to school transport would be met.
13. Option B (become a primary school) was consulted on recently on the basis of the creation of The River Rede Federation between West Woodburn First School and Otterburn Primary School (see reasons why this has necessitated a further consultation earlier in this document).
14. In relation to Option C (closure of West Woodburn) and including Otterburn and Bellingham Primary Schools, there are 4 primary schools between 4.5 and 10 miles from West Woodburn. While West Woodburn is in a federation with Otterburn Primary School, the majority of parents of recent former pupils of the school have selected to send their children to Bellingham Primary School.

Should this option be approved, the catchment area of West Woodburn would need to be allocated to another school or schools - as part of this consultation we are seeking your views on this issue. Eligibility for Home to School Transport is assessed on an individual basis based on catchment, nearest or nearest faith school.
15. Under all options, Haydon Bridge High School would continue to be the catchment school for Year 7 onwards for pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area.

16. As part of this consultation, we will be asking for the views of all interested parties on these options, including:

- A. Parents of pupils enrolled at West Woodburn First and Otterburn Primary
- B. Parents of pre-school children living in the West Woodburn catchment
- C. Staff of West Woodburn and their representatives
- D. Pupils of West Woodburn
- E. Governors of The River Rede Federation
- F. Schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership
- G. Local Parish Councils
- H. Local early years care and education providers

17. We will also ask if anyone has any alternative options than those set out above.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY VIEWS ABOUT THIS PROPOSAL KNOWN?

18. The Council would like to receive your views on the 3 options set out in this document for West Woodburn; additionally, we would like you to share with us any alternative suggestions that could resolve the issues facing the school if you have any. There is a questionnaire attached at the end of this document which you can either complete online, send in by email or send it in hard-copy through the post as follows:

Online:

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/Consultations.aspx#schoolconsultations>

Email - educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk

Post: FAO School Organisation, Children's Services, FREEPOST MP135, County Hall, MORPETH, NE61 1BR

19. Additionally, there will be separate meetings for staff, Governors and parents of current and potential future pupils of West Woodburn held at the school during the consultation period. Those relevant parents and staff will be notified of the date of those meetings in due course. An event for members of the community and any other interested parties to drop by the school for more information will be held on:

9 January 2020 - 7.00 pm to 8.00 p.m.

20. Depending on the outcomes of this consultation and the decision of the Council's Cabinet with regard to next steps, there may be a decision to consult formally on Option B or Option C, or an alternative arising from this consultation.

The consultation is open until 15 January 2020.

CONSULTATION ON OPTIONS FOR WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL

Your name:

Are you responding mainly as a (tick one box only):

Parent/carer of child on roll at West Woodburn First School:

Parent of preschool child living in West Woodburn catchment:

Parent/carer of child on roll at Otterburn Primary School:

Member of staff in The River Rede Federation:

Governor of The River Rede Federation:

Parent/carer of child on roll at a school in the Haydon Bridge Partnership:

Member of staff in another school in the Haydon Bridge Partnership:

Resident/ Member of the local community in the North Tyne/Redesdale area:

Local Parish Councillor:

Other: If willing, please state your interest in this consultation:

Please now complete the questions overleaf:

Your views; (continue on a separate sheet where necessary)

1) **Option A** - Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn First School catchment area for the school to remain as a first school within the Haydon Bridge Partnership?

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

2) **Option B** - Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn First School catchment area for the school to become a primary school (i.e. extend its age range from 4 to 9 to 4 to 11) within the Haydon Bridge Partnership?

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

3) **Option C** - Do you believe that it would be in the best educational interests of current and future pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area for the school to close?

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

4) If a proposal to close West Woodburn was published, please state below to which school or schools you think its catchment area should be allocated?

5) Do you have an alternative option for West Woodburn First School that you believe could resolve the issues raised in this document?

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

SUBMITTING YOUR RESPONSE FORM:

There are three ways that you can submit your response form;

1) You can use the electronic form on the Council's website at

<http://northumberland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations>

2) You can return this form attached to an email

[**educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk**](mailto:educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk)

3) You can return your Response Form in hard copy to:

FAO School Organisation, Children's Services, FREEPOST MP135, County Hall, MORPETH, NE61 1BR

The consultation is open until 15 January 2020.

Thank you for responding to this consultation.

Consultation Register

- Staff of West Woodburn First School
- Staff of Otterburn First School
- Former Parents of West Woodburn First School
- Parents of Otterburn First School
- Governors of The River Rede Foundation
- All schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership
- All Union representatives who represent staff working in schools in Northumberland
- All Early Years Providers in the local area
- Parents with children in Early Years provision in the local area (via Early Years Providers)
- DfE representative
- CE Diocese
- RC Diocese
- Local Councillors for Bellingham and Humshaugh
- Parish Councils in greater Haydon Bridge catchment area
- Relevant NCC Officers
- All interested parties via publication on NCC website.

Equality Impact Assessment

To be completed for all key changes, decisions and proposals. Cite specific data and consultation evidence wherever possible. Further guidance is available at:

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=3281>

Duties which need to be considered:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

PART 1 – Overview of the change, decision or proposal

1) Title of the change, decision or proposal:

- Proposal presented under formal statutory consultation 5 September to 3 October 2019 - proposal to extend the age range of West Woodburn First School to become a primary school with effect from 1 September 2020.

2) Date of equality impact assessment: January 2020

Assessment following informal consultation process.

3) Brief description of the change, decision or proposal:

As provided in 1.

4) Name(s) and role(s) of officer(s) completing the assessment:

Lorraine Fife, School Organisation Manager

5) Overall, what are the outcomes of the change, decision or proposal expected to be? (E.g. will it reduce/terminate a low-priority service, maintain service outcomes at reduced cost, or change the balance of funding responsibility for a service which will remain the same?)

3 Options for the future of West Woodburn First School were the subject of informal consultation that began on 3 December 2019 and closed on 15 January 2020. The 3 Options were:

- School remains open as a first school (status quo)
- School extends its age range to become an age 4-11 primary school
- School closes

This consultation was approved by Cabinet on 2 December 2019 on the back of 3 previous consultations on the organisation of the school. The outcome of a consultation to extend the age range of the school in September/October was inconclusive and there were only 3 children left on the roll of the school. All 3 children transferred to other schools at the beginning of the Spring Term.

It is likely that one of the options will be taken forward to statutory consultation at which point this EIA would be updated with the impact of that option specifically.

If you judge that this proposal is not relevant to some protected characteristics, tick these below (and explain underneath how you have reached this judgement).

Disability c	Sex - X	Race X	Religion X
Sexual Orientation X			
People who have changed gender X			Women who are pregnant or have babies c
Employees who are married/in civil partnerships X			

6) The characteristics checked above are not relevant because:

In the medium to long-term, there is no reason to believe that any of the proposals would affect more positively or negatively than their peers any group of children, parents or staff defined by their gender, age, race, sexual orientation or gender-reassignment status. As there are no longer any pupils on roll in West Woodburn, the implications of the proposals would now fall upon the staff of the school and members of the local community. Existing HR policies covering organisational change would apply to staff employed at West Woodburn First School. These are designed to ensure that the equalities duties of the Council and the schools are fully met.

PART 2 – Relevance to different Protected Characteristics

Answer these questions both in relation to people who use services and employees

Disability

Note: “disabled people” includes people with physical, learning and sensory disabilities, people with a long-term illness, and people with mental health problems. You should consider potential impacts on all of these groups.

7) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by disabled people, about disabled people's experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

Informal consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that any member of the community with a disability would be disproportionately impacted positively or negatively should the proposal to extend the age range of West Woodburn be approved.

Any member of staff of the school who has a disability would not be affected by these proposals as any arrangements already in place to ameliorate such disability. No evidence has come to light during the informal consultation process of any individual who would be categorised within this protected group, but appropriate arrangements would be made where this is necessary to avoid potential adverse impacts should the need arise.

8) Could disabled people be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposed changes would affect any current arrangements for disabled people to participate in public life as adjustments as all currently arrangements at the school would remain in place

9) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of disabled people to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

The proposed changes would not affect any current arrangements for disabled people to participate in public life as adjustments as all currently arrangements at the school would remain in place.

10) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards disabled people? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is no evidence to suggest that any of the proposals would affect public attitudes towards disabled people.

11) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that disabled people will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that the proposals would increase or decrease any risk of harassment or victimisation above that which may already exist to any member of staff or member of the community with a disability.

12) If there are risks that disabled people could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

There is no evidence to suggest that there are any risks of disproportionately disadvantaging any members of staff at the school.

13) Are there opportunities to create positive impacts for disabled people linked to this change, decision or proposal?

See para. 8 above.

Age

14) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by people of different age groups, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

West Woodburn First School provides education to pupils between the ages of 4 and 9. However, all pupils have now left the school through parental preference. Staff at the school are employed equitably in accordance with the schools' and council's employment policies. Should approval for the proposal to close the school be given by Cabinet at some point in the future, staff at the school would be at risk of redundancy. The Council has appropriate employment policies and support arrangements in place to deal with possible redundancy of staff on an equitable basis, regardless of age.

15) Could people of different age groups be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

See para. 14. Above.

16) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of people of different age groups to participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

Informal consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the proposals would have any effect on the ability of different age groups to participate in public life more or less than already occurs. No evidence has arisen during consultation to suggest that anyone within this protected group would be prevented from participating in public life.

17) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people of different age groups? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

There is no evidence to suggest that this proposal would affect public attitudes towards staff in the protected groups at the school.

18) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people of different age groups will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Statutory consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that these proposals would increase or reduce the risk of harassment or victimisation of any staff.

19) If there are risks that people of different age groups could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

Refer to para. 14.

20) Are there opportunities to create positive impacts for people of different age groups linked to this change, decision or proposal?

As there are currently no pupils on roll at the school, it is unlikely that any positive benefits can be created.

Pregnancy and Maternity

Note: the law covers pregnant women or those who have given birth within the last 26 weeks, and those who are breastfeeding.

21) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal by pregnant women and those who have children under 26 weeks, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

Staff at West Woodburn First School are employed equitably in accordance with the school's and council's employment policies. Whichever proposal is eventually approved for implementation, this would be carried out in line with the council's employment policies on an equitable basis, including for those staff who may currently be pregnant or on maternity leave.

Informal consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the proposals would create any barriers to any future pupils accessing any of the school impacted by the proposal who have a parent who may be pregnant or who has other children under 26 weeks old. The proposal in relation to the extension of the age range of the school could have a positive impact for some families where a parent who may be pregnant or who has

other children under 26 weeks old may benefit from the child on roll at West Woodburn remaining at the current school site for an additional two years.

22) Could pregnant women and those with children under 26 weeks be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

See para. 23.

23) Could the change, decision or proposal affect the ability of pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks participate in public life? (e.g. by affecting their ability to go to meetings, take up public appointments etc.)

Informal consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the proposals would affect the ability of this protected group to participate in public life under the proposals.

24) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

Informal consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the proposals would have any effect on public attitudes to this protected group under the proposals.

25) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Informal consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the proposal would make it more or less likely that this protected group would be at risk of harassment or victimisation under the proposals.

26) If there are risks that pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

Informal consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the protected group would be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposals.

27) Are there opportunities to create positive impacts for pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks linked to this change, decision or proposal?

See para. 23.

Human Rights

28) Could the change, decision or proposal impact on human rights? (e.g. the right to respect for private and family life, the right to a fair hearing and the right to education)

Informal consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the proposal would impact positively or negatively on the human rights of any of the protected groups identified within this EIA.

PART 3 – Course of Action

29) Based on a consideration of all the potential impacts, tick one of the following as a summary of the outcome of this assessment:

X	The equality analysis has not identified any potential for discrimination or adverse impact and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.
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30) Explain how you have reached the judgement ticked above, and summarise any steps which will be taken to reduce negative or enhance positive impacts on equality.

From the initial analysis of the possible negative or positive impact of the proposal on groups with protected characteristics, there is no evidence to suggest that any of these groups would be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposal. However, as the proposal involves extending educational provision at West Woodburn First School for a further two years, there are some potential advantages that could be enjoyed by some protected groups as outlined. Should the proposal be approved for implementation, the EIA would be reviewed to ensure that if any evidence arises that there could be possible negative impacts, those risks would be analysed to establish whether or not there were certain risks to any or all of those groups. Steps to reduce negative impacts or enhance positive impacts would then be defined.

PART 4 - Ongoing Monitoring

31) What are your plans to monitor the actual impact of the implementation of the change, decision or proposal on equality of opportunity? (include action points and timescales)

This EIA has developed in the light of informal consultation. Should Cabinet approve that statutory consultation should be undertaken on option B or C, then the EIA would be further updated at that time. Appropriate action would be identified in the light of the consultation and where necessary, an action plan with timescales developed.

PART 5 - Authorisation

Name of Head of Service and Date Approved

Once completed, send your full EIA to: Irene.Fisher@northumberland.gov.uk. A summary will then be generated corporately and published