

## CABINET

Date: 12 May 2020

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### **Outcomes of statutory consultation on a proposal to close West Woodburn First School**

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services: Cath McEvoy

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Wayne Daley

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

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### **Purpose of Report**

This report outlines the results of the statutory consultation process undertaken by the Council in relation to the proposed closure of West Woodburn First School with effect from 31 August 2020. This consultation has come about as the school currently has no pupils on roll and has received no applications for a place in Reception class in September 2020. In considering the outcomes of the formal consultation, Cabinet is asked to decide whether or not to approve the closure of the school.

### **Recommendations**

#### **It is recommended that Cabinet:**

- 1) **Approve** the proposal to close West Woodburn First School as set out in the Statutory Proposal with effect from 31 August 2020.
- 2) **Note** that West Woodburn First School is listed on the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order 2019 and therefore, when formulating its final decision, Cabinet must give consideration to the points set out in paragraph 16 of this report.
- 3) **Note** the impact of the proposal as set out in the Statutory Proposal attached at Appendix 1 of this report.
- 4) **Note** should the proposal be approved, there would be an additional cost of £26,600 to the Home to School Transport policy (see para. 18); this would be funded from the existing Home to School Transport budget for which there is provision.
- 5) **When making the decision in relation to West Woodburn First School, take into account** the Department for Education's (DfE) 'Guidance for decision-makers: 'Opening and closing maintained schools; Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers November 2019' linked to this report at Appendix 2 (see list of Ap, and decide how to proceed with the proposal summarised in the Key Issues and Background of this report in the light of the four options available:
  - reject the proposal;

- approve the proposal without modification;
- approve the proposal with such modifications as Cabinet think desirable after consultation with the Governing Body of The River Rede Federation ; or
- approve the proposal (with or without modification) subject to certain conditions being met.

As noted in Recommendation 2 above, Cabinet should take into account the guidance set out in 'Guidance for decision-makers: Statutory guidance for decision-makers deciding prescribed alteration and establishment and discontinuance proposals, November 2019' in relation to 'Rural Schools and the presumption against closure' on pages 17/18 of the guidance (refer to para. 16 of this report).

## Key Issues

1. At their meeting on 10 March 2020, Cabinet approved the publication of a statutory proposal to close West Woodburn First School with effect from 31 August 2020. This decision was made in the light of the five week informal consultation on proposals for the school that had taken place between 11 December 2019 and 15 January 2020, where Cabinet concluded there were no viable alternatives to closure of the school.
2. The background to the formal consultation is summarised in para. 16, with full details set out in the Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services 2 December 2019 and the Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services 10 March 2020 , available in the Background Papers to this report.

## Representations

3. There has been one (1) representation received within the statutory period of four weeks in relation to the proposed closure of West Woodburn First School. This submission is from a member of the public, who is neither a governor, parent of a child, nor a member of staff in any school in the Haydon Bridge Partnership. In considering the comments made in the representation, Cabinet should note the 'Opening and closing maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers, November 2019' with specific reference to page 6 of the guidance, which states:

*'The decision-maker should not simply take account of the number of people expressing a particular view. Instead, they should give the greatest weight to responses from those stakeholders likely to be most directly affected by a proposal – especially parents of children at the affected school(s).'*

However, as this representation has been the only one received, it is presented below in full together with officer commentary following discernible points and sections set out by the writer.

4. Representation (in bold italics) submitted by a member of the public and relevant commentary on points raised within it

***Dear Sir/Madam***

***[Point 1] 'I object to the proposal to close West Woodburn First School on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2020. The school is already shut. As it has no roll it could be declared closed (discontinued) now, or at least prior to the start of the next school term.'***

Commentary: In fact, while the writer is correct that there are no pupils currently on roll and the building is closed, the school remains effectively 'open'. A decision to close the school can only be made by the Council's Cabinet as the 'decision-maker' following the completion of the statutory process set out in this report. In certain circumstances, the decision on whether or not to close a school may fall to the Schools Adjudicator, but this is not relevant in the case of West Woodburn First School at this point.

***[Point 2] 'The comments made below relate in the main to the conduct of the LEA during the lead up and including the period that saw West Woodburn First School lose a roll and some of the consequences relating to education for pupils in the West of the county. Along the way are political and administrative agendas that have caused significant delay, significant additional costs and what may be seen to be maladministration and severe gaps in any scrutiny and accountability.'***

- ***Following the consultation exercise pursued by Northumberland County Council during toward the end of school year 2017/18 it was clearly stated and reported in the conclusions that West Woodburn First School could not be considered with the other schools that were to be redesignated as primary schools. There were three key reasons : one, the school building itself was unsuitable, in that it could not be extended or altered so as to create a third or fourth teaching area. Such areas would be needed to teach the range of pupils covered by a primary school, albeit in mixed year groups. Secondly the pupil roll and projected/anticipated future roll would not sustain a primary school and thirdly, as a school with a deficit budget ( on the then roll of around 20 ) it would not be financially viable.'***

Commentary: All consultation carried out by the Council which has included proposals for West Woodburn First School since January 2018 has been carried out in accordance with DfE guidance and school organisation legislation. The original consultation that began in the West was initiated as a result of the need to address several key issues relevant to schools in the Haydon Bridge and Hexham Partnerships; these issues are set out in the Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services Education in the West of Northumberland 19 December 2017.

Both informal and formal consultation undertaken on schools in the West and then specifically in relation to proposals for West Woodburn, and the outcomes and recommendations arising, have been scrutinised by members of the Council's Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (FACS) prior to passing to Cabinet for a decision. Decisions made by the Cabinet in relation to recommendations have been made following full consideration of the feedback from stakeholders and from FACS. Therefore, it is refuted that there has been a political agenda, maladministration or lack of scrutiny in relation to the process of consultation and decision-making in relation to any proposals put forward in relation

to West Woodburn First School.

The initial outcomes of the consultation on proposals for schools in the West, as set out in the Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services 8 May 2018, recommended that West Woodburn First School should, along with the other remaining first schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership, be included in a statutory proposal to extend its age range to become a primary school with effect from 1 September 2019. However, this recommendation was "*contingent upon it joining a federation or multi-academy trust, in order to address the predicted budget deficit and increase capacity to ensure a smooth transition to becoming a primary school*". It was also concluded that the school building would not require capital works in order to reorganise to offer the full primary curriculum to Year 6. Therefore, the school's issues with regard to staffing capacity and budgetary management were already a concern at that point and a proposed solution identified in the event it should be approved to become a primary school following the statutory consultation. In May 2018, the school had 23 pupils on roll.

During the statutory consultation that followed, (on proposals for the first schools in Haydon Bridge Partnership to become primaries and Bellingham Middle School to close), the situation in relation to staffing capacity at West Woodburn worsened. In the Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services Outcomes of Statutory Consultation, 10 July 2018, officers therefore recommended to Cabinet that West Woodburn should not be approved to become a primary school as it wasn't supported by the Governing Body, as well as the local authority at that point having concerns with the schools ability to be sustainable, and that further work should be undertaken in relation to the issues of budget and capacity at the school. At no point during the informal or formal consultation was it stated by either Council officers, staff or incumbent Governors that the West Woodburn building would not be suitable to become a primary school for Reception to Year 6 pupils and therefore it is unclear on what basis this statement has been made.

***[Point 3] 'In addition it was clearly stated that should there be a decision to close West Woodburn then the roll could be transferred to the next nearest schools: Bellingham and Otterburn schools, which were both within the permitted travel distances for pupils of first school age.'***

- ***A key feature of the published result of this consultation was the decision of the Schools Adjudicator to reject the Councils wish to close Bellingham Middle School.***
- ***In September 2018 given the low number of pupils left on roll at West Woodburn there were perceived difficulties in terms of staffing, curriculum delivery and ongoing funding.'***

Commentary: Prior to the publication of the statutory proposal to close West Woodburn First School on 12 March 2020, the possible closure of West Woodburn had only been put forward as an option during the informal consultation in early 2018 when it was proposed that should the school close and its catchment could be allocated to Otterburn Primary (as it would become); however, this was not taken forward into the statutory consultation that followed in May 2018 as noted in Point 2. The decision of the School's Adjudicator to overturn the Council's decision to close

Bellingham Middle School was made in the Autumn of 2018, after the Council's decision to retain West Woodburn as a first school, and is therefore irrelevant to this or any other decision relating to the latter. It is agreed, as previously stated, that following the statutory (formal) consultation in 2018, it was not considered that West Woodburn would be able to operate successfully as a primary school until the issues in relation to staffing and budget had been resolved.

**[Point 4] ‘The staffing was resolved by the appointment of the Head of Otterburn (now Primary) School agreeing to cover West Woodburn. Funding was secured via the County Council applying various grants to maintain small rural schools and curriculum remained an issue. When a senior officer was requested in writing to confirm that a singleton pupil in Year 1 would have full access to the relevant curriculum at West Woodburn First School they had not replied so by October half term and the pupil was removed and placed in another school.**

- **With falling numbers, the LEA came up with the idea that they could stabilise and strengthen the school, not through a merger but through guiding the West Woodburn governors to form a federation with Otterburn School.**

**The DfE talk about such actions generally being parent driven, in simple terms using the strength of the collective to enhance the schools involved.**

**So with the guidance, support and advice of the LEA West Woodburn First School was federated with Otterburn Primary School.**

**“Schools in a federation”, according to the letter sent out to parents in September last,” are linked by contractual arrangements. This means they retain their own identity-for example their own DCSF number, delegated budget, standard fund allocations, admissions arrangements and legal character.....”.**

**The letter went on to say that “the proposed federation ..... would provide long term stability and sustainability for our schools in the future.”**

**The federation caused a reaction at West Woodburn School: the pupil roll fell from around 20 to 5.**

**Parents removed their children from the school and for the most part sought placement at their next nearest school, Bellingham First School.**

**Between September and Xmas 60% of the pupil population was removed from West Woodburn. Families contacted the LEA, all were concerned by the prospect of the federation in particular the shared use of buildings and curriculum available. It was perhaps seen as a way to create a soft transition to merger or take over by Otterburn Primary. The authority officers chose not to meet with the families collectively or individually and so the roll fell.**

- **Parents and families of pupils who left West Woodburn during the course of the school year have spoken directly to the LEA and it is**

**worth noting that the families have all been declined transport to the next nearest school, Bellingham, and so undertake that themselves at considerable cost in terms of expense, emotional stress, the impact on rural family life, additional Green Mileage and time.**

Commentary: In October 2018, there were 16 pupils on roll at West Woodburn and no children had come into Reception class, in spite of there being 5 children living in catchment who could have joined the school. Applications for places in Reception are made in the November-January of the previous school year and so this demonstrates that even before the consultation on proposals for schools in the West had begun, families in West Woodburn were beginning to select other schools at which to educate their children to other than to their local village school, in spite of the fact that these children would have been unlikely to be eligible for Home to School Transport.

As noted in the commentary at Point 2, following the informal consultation in early 2018 officers had already recommended in May 2018 that West Woodburn should federate or become part of a multi-academy trust as part of a wider desire to improve the sustainability of small, rural schools in the county. Therefore, given the worsening situation at West Woodburn reported in July 2018 in relation to staffing, budget and a falling roll, it was consistent with the previous recommendation made by officers that the Governing Body at West Woodburn should look into the possibility of federating with another school to provide capacity and assistance with budget management. Furthermore, as the school was already receiving assistance from the Headteacher of Otterburn First School by Autumn 2018, it was logical that both Governing Bodies should carry out consultation on formalising the relationship through a federation.

It is true that the proposed federation was not popular with some parents, while other parents had specific concerns relating to the educational offer at West Woodburn (as had been set out in the Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, Outcomes of the Statutory Proposal on the extension of the age range of West Woodburn First School, 2 December 2019). However, given the staffing capacity and budget issues compounded by a fall in pupil numbers that had begun prior to any consultation, the only alternative to federation with Otterburn First School would have been to consult on the closure of West Woodburn. Having improved the staffing capacity budgetary issues, the two Governing Bodies were supported by the local authority in deciding to federate in order to give West Woodburn the opportunity to recover. However, it is recognised that this was not a popular decision with local parents and that a significant number acted in what they believed to be the best interests of their own children by removing them to other local schools, in particular to Bellingham First School, so that by May 2019 there were only 8 children on roll.

***[Point 5] The Council officers have been persistent in what some would suggest as their abuse of this rural community and being seen to be reticent in accepting the decision of the Schools Adjudicator.***

***The Officers have pursued consultations, federations and written reports, all at a cost of time and money when, had they chosen or responded to direct questions, they could have positively engaged with those families that***

***remained or removed their children from West Woodburn during the period September – Christmas 2018. Much could have been accomplished and most importantly the education of this group of children could have been meaningfully progressed with support from a community who saw no purpose in filing in forms or responding to formal documents when a simple and straightforward dialogue would have given rise to the idea that the LEA was working with the school community.***

***It is worth noting that whilst the LEA officers were engaged with the governors the reality of it was that parents had opted out of being governors hence representation was not realistic. Nor was there a functioning PTA.***

- ***That West Woodburn School has had no pupils on roll since January 2020 begs many questions. Not least of which may be “Where are the staff ?”***

Commentary: To carry out informal and formal consultation with parents, staff, Governors and the wider community of West Woodburn First School is not an abuse of those stakeholders, but a managed and statutorily required process to engage with them to elicit their views and develop viable proposals to support the school through what could have been a temporary change of circumstance.

However, the lack of parental representation on the Governing Body and the wholesale removal of children by parents since the inception of The River Rede Federation has clearly demonstrated that parents do not support the new federation. Only one (1) child from a possible three (3) joined Reception in West Woodburn in September 2020, and there have been no applications from a possible one (1) for the places in Reception at West Woodburn for September 2020. Furthermore, even if all possible children could have joined West Woodburn in its recent Reception classes, fewer children are being born in the catchment area, as shown para. 6.

It should also be noted that schools are not required to have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in law. Since January when the school has had no children on roll, staff employed at West Woodburn have been teaching at Otterburn Primary School working with groups of children. They have covering staff to enable them to undertake CPD, as well as undertaking CPD themselves. All staff have a full timetable working for The River Rede Federation.

***[Point 6] The LEA accepts, indeed confirm in their written report to NCC Cabinet (March 2020) confirmed that most of the children that left over the last 18 months went to Bellingham but budget and staff would seem to have gone to Otterburn.***

- ***Because aspects of this situation are complex, including matters of curriculum delivery, pupil catchment areas, school budgets, home to school transport, age phase transfer the scrutiny and accountability transgresses a number of areas.***

***During the last eighteen months The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsmen, The Ofsted-Application, Regulatory and Contract team and the***

**Schools Adjudicator have all been contacted about aspects of this situation and all have said this matter is outwith their specific remit. Each body seems to deal with only clear cases where matters are more complex they are able to say so and decline to investigate. Hence at every stage and point the LEA have been able to avoid being called to task.**

- **Using a FOI base the county council were asked about to whom ? and how to pursue these matters further ? They declined to respond saying that a public authority does not need to provide information if that information is reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means.**

**However experience would suggest for a member of the public it is not reasonably accessible- as all the Government bodies listed above have confirmed.**

Commentary: As stated in Point 2, the Council has acted at all times in accordance with DfE guidance and statutory requirements in relation to consultation and decisions made in relation to West Woodburn. The fact that no other public organisation or body that the writer has complained to has been able to find any issue with the actions of the Council should indicate that there are no grounds for investigation and that the information they have requested from the Council is publicly available .

**[Point 7]**

- **The way the LEA has responded to education in the west of the county (Haydon Bridge and its catchment area) is not anything to be proud of. A significant part of the concerns do revolve round transport. Covering a wide geographical area which is sparsely populated and where, for many families, the simple approach to school is that the pupils go where the school bus takes them, which they hope is not too far away and they receive a broad and balanced curriculum similar to all other children within the county.**

**It is worth noting the words of councillor Wayne Daley, (November 2019) cabinet member for children's services at NCC "We know transport is a concern for parents of affected Bellingham pupils and we will be working closely on a one to one basis with them to develop a robust travel plan for each and every pupil ". Words which ring hollow for the families that have sought to gain the long term well being of their children in pursuit of the fair and reasonable educational provision available throughout the county placing them in a provision that will see them through their primary ( or first school) years in a single location. Each and every one has been refused transport often further refused at appeal and despite being able to confirm that the county transport policy has been breached are still blocked by the council that said it was seeking long term solutions for children in the West.**

- **Sadly this is now being perpetuated by the current refusal of the LEA to confirm transport to Bellingham Middle School.**

**In the usual pattern of pupil age phase transfer, options are made in late October for placement to be announced in early March the following year.**



***In Northumberland only those pupils in Year4 in the catchment area of West Woodburn First school would be entitled to seek placement in their nearest Middle School for others in the area the 2019 transition to Primary education would permit those pupils to continue in their present placement.***

***The LEA, have historically done, as the DfE guidance says, allocated school place and transport provision at the same time (the following March). However this year they have chosen to discriminate against all (11) pupils whom they have allocated a place (only ) to at Bellingham Middle School.***

***At present the LEA is currently minded to try to get Bellingham Middle to close by what may be seen as unusual methods. They have declared that the school does not have a standard number on roll (see County Council Cabinet report Feb 2020 ) and they have declared that there is no catchment area after this academic year. Hence there can be no transport provision in the future.***

Commentary: As stated previously, the Council has adhered to relevant DfE guidance and school organisation legislation in order to provide relevant stakeholders with the appropriate opportunities to put forward their views on proposals for West Woodburn. The relevance and reference to transport arrangements to Bellingham Middle School made by the writer are irrelevant to the proposed closure of West Woodburn as, should the school close, it is proposed that Bellingham Primary School would be allocated the catchment area of West Woodburn up to the end of Year 6 and Haydon Bridge High School would remain the catchment area for pupils living in the current West Woodburn from Year 7 onwards. However, as there was no consultation on the closure of West Woodburn while parents were applying for places at Bellingham Middle School for September 2020 and the situation regarding the future of the former has since become uncertain, it has been agreed that pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area who have been allocated a place in Year 5 at Bellingham Middle School for September 2020 and who are eligible for transport in relation to distance, safe walking route etc would be allocated Home to School Transport for the time that they attend the middle school.

**[Point 8]**

- ***Whilst hindsight is clearly an asset even the aforementioned Cllr Daley was able to say, whilst consulting on changing West Woodburn First (with a then roll of 3 pupils )to a primary school, “Its largely about parental choice”.***

***The consultation offered three options:-status quo/convert to primary/close. The LEA chose to say that it could not stay as it was and people were clearly against the conversion however rather than go to the next logical step: to publish closure notice the LEA chose to further consult. What has this achieved ? Delay and continued frustration to the point that whilst the LEA consults and consults again the parents have chosen and the school has had no pupils since January 2020. The County Council is currently consulting on a proposal to close a no pupil roll school in a further four months. This is a waste of public money and time. The only people who are accruing any benefit are officers who are consulting and writing reports for parents, families and communities who have already concluded their consultation and removed their children from the school.***

***Yours,***

Commentary: The writer has asked what the Council's decision to carry out further informal consultation on options for West Woodburn, including closure, has achieved. The closure of any school, but in particular a rural school, has many consequences and often a notable impact on the local community. The decision to carry out informal closure on three proposals for West Woodburn offered a final opportunity for the staff, former parents of pupils, of the school and any potential future parents and the wider community to put forward their views before any final decision is made by Cabinet. This has enabled Cabinet to make an informed decision when making the serious decision to consult formally on the closure of the school.

***[Point 8] Footnote It would seem somewhat ironic that a complaint that references the time spent by Officers delaying a closure is compounded by what would seem to be an error in the notice finally sent out and cut and pasted here:***

Commentary: The writer has noted correctly that there is a typographical error in the last paragraph of the statutory proposal, where it inadvertently states that the school is to extend its age range rather than to close. However, it is clearly written at least seven times throughout the rest of the statutory proposal that it sets out a proposal to close West Woodburn First School with effect from 31 August 2020, and this is supported by the writer's own objection to the proposal as set out at Point 1. Therefore, it is unlikely that this typographical error has caused any confusion as to the purpose of the statutory proposal.

## **Final Conclusion**

West Woodburn First School has been subject to four consultations since January 2018; three have been initiated by the Council in relation to the organisation of the school and one by the Governing Bodies of West Woodburn First and Otterburn Primary Schools (then a first school) in relation to the proposal to become a hard federation. As noted in the commentary at Point 4, it is clear that local parents in West Woodburn already had doubts about the provision at the school as no children joined Reception class in September 2018, in spite of five children living in the catchment area. Furthermore, there continues to be a decline in the number of children being born in the West Woodburn catchment area (see para. 7-8) and at some point in the near future this would have caused concern about the viability of the school.

However, through the removal of all children who had attended the school over the past 12 months and in particular since the federation of West Woodburn with Otterburn Primary, it is clear that local parents do not have confidence in the educational provision at the school, whether or not that is founded on fact, and are unhappy with the federation of their community school with Otterburn. Without the support of local parents, unfortunately West Woodburn First School is unviable.

Therefore, as set out in Recommendation 1, Cabinet are asked to approve the proposal to close West Woodburn First School as set out in the Statutory Proposal with effect from 31 August 2020.

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## PROPOSED CLOSURE OF WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL

### BACKGROUND

#### Summary of rationale for Consultation

- West Woodburn First School is a very small, rural school within the Haydon Bridge Partnership. The whole history and details of the rationale for the proposed closure of West Woodburn First School referenced in this report are provided in the reports set out under Background Papers.
- The capacity of the school is 44. There has been a decline in numbers on roll at the school since September 2018 when no children entered Reception, and the decline has continued over time due to the events set out in this report. In October 2019, there were only 3 children on roll at the school, and as of January 2020 there were no children on roll, their parents having transferred them to other local schools (although one removal was in relation to a house move). While the reasons why the roll at the school has dramatically fallen over the past 18 months are set out earlier in this report, in any event the number of children being born in the West Woodburn catchment area has been declining significantly in more recent years as follows:

Expected year of entry into Reception	September 2020	September 2021	September 2022	September 2023
Number of children living in catchment	1	2	2	2

The above data indicates that, notwithstanding the recent events at the school in relation to pupil numbers, it is likely that the viability of the school would have become an issue in the fullness of time in any event.

- No children have applied for a place in Reception at West Woodburn 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.
- 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, with the first academy extending 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.

9. In order to provide a structure to restore sustainability to West Woodburn, its Governing Body and that of Otterburn Primary School agreed to federate in April 2019 following local consultation and formed The River Rede Federation. Unfortunately, the federation was not popular with many parents and additional children were removed from the school at the end of the Summer term in 2019.
10. In effect, the parents of first school age children living in the West Woodburn catchment area have spoken in the clearest way possible about their view of the school and The River Rede Foundation by enrolling them at other schools.

## **Implications of the proposed closure of West Woodburn First School**

### Standards

11. The recommendation to close 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.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. However, Cabinet should note that in 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 reports set out in the Background Papers).
15. The closest alternative school to West Woodburn First School offering primary education from Reception to Year 6 is Bellingham Primary School which is rated Good by Ofsted. Otterburn Primary School is also close to West Woodburn and is rated Good by Ofsted. Bellingham Middle School and Sports College offers primary education in Years 5 and 6 and is rated Good by Ofsted.

### Rural Primary Schools and the presumption against closure

16. West Woodburn First School is categorised as a Rural Primary School within the Department for Education's List of Designated Rural Schools 2019. In forming its final decision, Cabinet should take into account the DfE's 'Opening and Closing

Maintained Schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers November 2019' in relation to rural schools as follows:

*“There is 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 the proposal clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. Those proposing closure should provide evidence to show that they have carefully considered the following:*

- *alternatives to closure including: federation with another local school; conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust; the scope for an extended school to provide local community services and facilities e.g. child care facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access etc;*
- *transport implications i.e. the availability, and likely cost of transport to other schools and sustainability issues;*
- *the size of the school and whether it puts the children at an educational disadvantage e.g. in terms of breadth of curriculum or resources available;*
- *the overall and long term impact on the local community of the closure of the village school and of the loss of the building as a community facility; and*
- *wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils.*

The above issues in relation to the presumption against closure are addressed in the following paragraphs for Cabinet’s consideration:

#### Alternatives to closure

17. In order to improve its sustainability, the Governing Body of West Woodburn First School federated with Otterburn Primary School (then also a first school) in April 2019. While the two schools have put in place arrangements that in their view worked well, the federation was not supported by parents and this has resulted in the removal of additional children to the point where West Woodburn no longer has any children on roll. With no children on roll, and the very small number of children being born in the catchment, it is unlikely that a multi-academy trust would view the school as a viable entity. Similarly, the school currently does not provide early years education and this is available in other schools in the local area, including an on-site provision at Bellingham Primary School.

#### Transport implications

18. Should Cabinet approve the closure of West Woodburn First School and approve the allocation of its catchment area to Bellingham Primary School as recommended below, 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 £26,600 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. This will be funded from the existing Home to School Transport budget for which there is provision.
- As noted in para. 4, Point 7, it has been agreed that pupils living in the West Woodburn catchment area who have been allocated a place in Year 5 at Bellingham Middle School for September 2020 and who are eligible for transport in relation to distance, safe walking route etc would be allocated Home to School Transport for the duration of the time they attend the middle school.

19. 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.

#### Size of school and educational disadvantage

20. Refer to paras. 6 and 7.

#### Impact on the Community and Denominational Provision

21. West Woodburn First School is a community school, therefore there would be no impact on local denominational provision should it be approved for closure. As stated previously, parents have not supported West Woodburn First School in the previous 18 months and more recently many have removed their children from the school presumably in the knowledge that this would place the school in danger of closure.

#### Wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils

22. The other remaining first schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership reorganised to become primary schools in September 2019 and together with Haydon Bridge High School, the primary/secondary system of organisation prevails in the partnership. Bellingham Middle School and Sports College now stands as the only school organised within the 3-tier system and stands outside of the new educational pathway for children attending schools in the partnership.

See para. 23 re capacity of local schools.

## Catchment Area

23. As part of the informal consultation on proposals for West Woodburn that took place in December 2019-February 2020, 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. The majority of consultees who expressed a preference preferred that Bellingham Primary School should be allocated the catchment area of West Woodburn First School.

It is recommended that, should Cabinet 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 and has the capacity to accommodate children living in the West Woodburn catchment area;
- 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;
- The Otterburn Primary School catchment area is currently already one of the largest in relation to land area in the Haydon Bridge Partnership; should the West Woodburn catchment area be allocated to Otterburn Primary, children living in the south of the current West Woodburn catchment would have a significantly longer journey to school than if the catchment is allocated to Bellingham Primary .
- 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.

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 (also refer to para. 18 re transport implications).

## Implications for Staff

24. Should Cabinet approve the closure of West Woodburn First School, the staff currently employed by the school would be placed at risk of redundancy. There are 1.57 FTE teaching and teaching assistant staff and 0.41 FTE ancillary staff. 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.

The possible closure of West Woodburn First School could also have an impact on the staffing structure at Otterburn Primary School and therefore discussions will be organised by NCC officers between with Otterburn staff, union representatives and the Governing Body.

## Governance

25. Should West Woodburn First School be approved for closure its closure would automatically dissolve The River Rede Federation and the Otterburn Primary School

Governing Body would need to be reconstituted. As stated in previous consultation, the Governors of the federation have some concern around the availability of sufficient governors should the federation dissolve.

#### Special Educational Needs

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

#### Early Years Provision

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

#### Land and Buildings

28. The buildings of West Woodburn First School and playing field are in the ownership of Northumberland County Council. Should Cabinet approve the closure of the school, the land and building would be added to the Council's vacant properties list and managed by the Estates team.

#### Sport and Recreation

29. There may be implications in relation to the West Woodburn playing field in the light of the Sport England policy of opposing any loss of playing fields. No-one in the local community has to date shown an interest in taking on the lease of the playing field to date, but as there is a substantial village green in the middle of the village adjacent to the school there is perhaps no requirement by locals for additional public space.

#### Community Cohesion

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

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services Education in the West of Northumberland 19 December 2017

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services 8 May 2018

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services 2 December 2019

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services 10 March 2020



## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	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.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Should West Woodburn be approved for closure, it is estimated that it will close with a surplus of approximately £63k. Redundancy costs are estimated at £3k based on redundancy consultation beginning in July 2020, which the Council may need to incur during the period leading up to the proposed closure. The surplus at the time of closure, including redundancy costs, is estimated at £60k and would be returned to the DSG. 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 and this is estimated to be £78k. If the closure of the school is approved there will be financial implications for the Home to School Transport budget in the region of £26,600; this is based on the cost of providing an additional vehicle at £140 per day for 190 days statutory education. This will be funded from the existing Home to School Transport budget for which there is provision.
<b>Legal</b>	The informal consultation was undertaken in line with DfE Guidance.
<b>Procurement</b>	No implications
<b>Human Resources</b>	Should Cabinet approve the closure of West Woodburn First School, staff employed by the school would be at risk of redundancy (refer to para. 26). Displaced staff would need to be supported with redeployment opportunities.
<b>Property</b>	The Council owns the West Woodburn school building and playing field; should Cabinet approve the closure of the school, the land and building would be added to the Council's vacant properties list and managed by the Estates team, either for reuse by the council or potential capital receipt. The buildings at Bellingham Primary school have sufficient capacity to accommodate the slight increase in pupils, so there aren't any capital implications of this proposal.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	An EIA is attached at Appendix 3
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	A full risk assessment has been carried out
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	The proposals set out in this report are based upon a desire to act in the best educational interests of current and future children and young people living in Northumberland
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	It is not envisaged that these proposals would have a significant positive or negative impact on carbon reduction

<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	No implications
<b>Wards</b>	Bellingham

### **Report sign off**

Monitoring Officer/Legal	LH
Executive Director of Finance & Section S151 Officer	CH
Relevant Executive Director	CMcC
Chief Executive	DL
Portfolio Holder(s)	WD

Report Author: Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources  
Sue.Aviston@northumberland.gov.uk  
Tel. 01670 622281

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 Statutory Proposal, published 12 March 2020
- Appendix 2 [Opening and closing maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers November 2019](#)
- Appendix 3 Equalities Impact Assessment



# Northumberland

## County Council

### STATUTORY PROPOSAL FOR WEST WOODBURN FIRST SCHOOL

#### CLOSURE

Notice is hereby given in accordance with Section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, that it is the intention of Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF to discontinue (close) the following school;

- **West Woodburn First School**, West Woodburn, Hexham, Northumberland, NE48 2RX with effect from 31 August 2020.

West Woodburn First School is a local authority maintained community school and forms part of the Haydon Bridge Partnership of schools. The school is also federated with Otterburn First School as part of The River Rede Federation, formed in 2019.

#### Contact Details

School Organisation and Resources Team  
Northumberland County Council  
County Hall  
Morpeth  
Northumberland  
NE61 2EF

#### Copies of the full Statutory Proposal may be obtained from:

School Organisation and Resources Team  
Education and Skills  
Wellbeing and Community Health Services  
Northumberland County Council  
County Hall  
Morpeth  
Northumberland  
NE61 2EF

or from the Council's website at [www.northumberland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations)

#### Implementation

- West Woodburn First School is proposed to close with effect from 31 August 2020.

#### Objectives

The objectives of this proposal are to

- **Discontinue (close) West Woodburn First School**, West Woodburn, Hexham, Northumberland, NE48 2RX with effect from 31 August 2020.

#### Reasons for proposal:

West Woodburn First School is a small, rural community first school located in the heart of West Woodburn village on the edge of the Northumberland National Park. A formal consultation to extend the age range of West Woodburn First School to become a primary school was



undertaken in September 2019 on the basis of pupil numbers on roll at the school July 2019 and a new pupil coming on roll in Reception in September 2019. However, as a result of parental preference, 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.

Furthermore, no children have applied for a place in Reception at the school for September 2020, and feedback from local parents on the recent formal and informal consultations on proposals for the school indicates that West Woodburn is unlikely to attract further pupils for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the school is deemed to be no longer viable.

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.

#### **Effect on other schools, academies and educational institutions in the area**

There are currently no children on roll at West Woodburn, with children living within its catchment area now on roll at other local schools. The number of pupils forecast to reside in the West Woodburn catchment area in the foreseeable future would be able to be accommodated in other local schools and it is likely that these children would qualify for transport in line with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, although eligibility is assessed on an individual basis.

#### **Pupil Numbers and Admissions**

There are currently no children on roll at West Woodburn First School. The age range of West Woodburn First School is 4 years to 9 years and provides education to both boys and girls.

#### **Displaced Pupils**

In accordance with section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Northumberland County Council intends to discontinue (close) the following schools with effect from 31 August 2020. As there are no pupils on roll at the school, there are no pupils to accommodate in other local schools. However, it is proposed that the catchment area of West Woodburn First School should be allocated to Bellingham Primary School, which will from September 2020 become the catchment school for pupils aged 4-11 who live in the current West Woodburn catchment area. Bellingham Primary School is judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted.

However, the right of parents to express a preference for any school remains in place although eligibility for transport to any school would be assessed in line with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. Parents who would prefer their children to receive their education within a faith setting would be able to make a preference for their preferred faith school and where eligible, transport would be available on denominational grounds. Wark CE Primary School is the nearest faith school to West Woodburn village and is rated 'Good' by Ofsted. West Woodburn First School is currently federated with Otterburn Primary, which is rated 'Good' by Ofsted. A number of children resident in the current West Woodburn catchment are already on roll at other local schools and pupil data indicates that the above alternative schools would be able to accommodate pupils living in the current West Woodburn Catchment area in the future.

Distances from West Woodburn First School village to alternative primary schools are set out in the 'Travel' section of this proposal.



**Impact on the Community**

The closure of West Woodburn First School would remove primary education provision from age 4 to 9 years from the village. However, as stated in 'Displaced Pupils', there are several other first schools within a reasonable travelling distance of the village.

The school building and playing field is in the ownership of the Council and alternative proposals for its use would be considered should the school be approved for closure; suggestions for alternative uses would be considered as part of this formal consultation. There are currently no extended services run from West Woodburn First School.

**Balance of denominational provision**

There would be no impact on the balance of denominational provision as West Woodburn First School does not have a faith designation. There are a number of schools with a religious character within the local area.

**Rural Primary Schools**

West Woodburn First School is listed on the DfE's List of Designated Rural Primary Schools 2018. There is a presumption against the closure of rural schools in legislation, which requires that the case for closure of the school must be strong and in the best interests of educational provision in the area. In order to assist in forming a final decision on this statutory proposal, the Council would need to consider:

- Alternatives to closure. West Woodburn has already federated with Otterburn Primary School in early 2019. This resulted in a fall in attendance. Should the school be approved for closure, it may be considered for other uses by council services or the local community.
- Transport implications; it is envisaged that should West Woodburn First School close, the costs of transporting children living in the catchment to the alternative catchment school would be circa £26k per annum.
- While the small number of pupils on roll at the school was a concern with regard to possible educational disadvantage, there are now no children on roll.
- The school proposed to take over the catchment area of West Woodburn First School is Bellingham Primary School which is judged 'Good' by Ofsted. Other primary schools in the area are also judged to be good.

**Maintained nursery schools**

West Woodburn First School does not currently have nursery provision.

**Provision for 16-19 year olds**

N/A

**Special educational provision**

There are currently no pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs/Education Healthcare Plan on roll at West Woodburn School.

**Travel**

- Transport for pupils resident in Northumberland is arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy and designated catchment areas.
- Pupils aged 4 to 9 who live in the West Woodburn First School catchment who are currently on roll at other local schools may from September 2020 become eligible for transport. It is anticipated that this would add an additional £26,000 p.a. to the Council's Home to School Transport Budget.
- For information, the distances to alternative local first and primary schools from West Woodburn First School are as follows:

- Bellingham Primary School, Redesmouth Rd, Bellingham, Hexham NE48 2EL– 4.65 miles;
- Otterburn Primary School , Main Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE19 1JF – 5.7 miles
- Wark Church of England Primary School, 3 Tyne View, Wark, Hexham NE48 3L - NE48 3LP – 10.63 miles

There would be no anticipated significant increase in car use as a result of these proposals.

#### Consultation

In the interests of providing further information, all of the applicable statutory requirements to consult on this proposal as set out in Section 15(1) were complied with during the pre-publication consultation period between 12 December 2019 and 15 January 2020.

Notification of the consultation was distributed to a range of consultees in line with Department of Education guidance, including former parents and staff of West Woodburn First School, parents and staff of Otterburn Primary School and the federated Governing Body of The River Rede Federation. A consultation document was also made available on the Council's website and electronic and hard-copy versions of the consultation feedback form could be accessed. Consultees were able to respond to the consultation by either using the electronic online response form, by email or by post.

4 separate meetings for the former parents of the 3 pupils at the school and potential future parents, staff, Governing Body and wider community were held at West Woodburn First School during the consultation period on 9 January 2020. No parents or potential parents attended the parents meeting.

Details of the persons and parties consulted, notes of the consultation meetings, and views of the persons consulted are detailed in the Executive Director of Children's Services which are available on the Council's website at

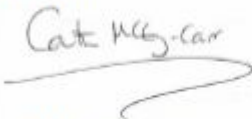
<http://committee.northumberland.gov.uk/Meeting.aspx?MeetID=9495>

#### Submission of Objections and Comments on Proposals

Within four weeks after the date of publication of the above proposals (i.e. by midnight on Thursday, 9 April 2020), any person may object to or make comments on the proposal to extend the age range of West Woodburn First School by sending their written representations to: the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF, or by email to [educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk).

Signature

Publication Date: 12 March 2020



Cath McEvoy-Carr  
Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services  
Northumberland County Council



## 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 12 March to 9 April 2020 proposal to close West Woodburn First School with effect from 1 September 2020.

2) Date of equality impact assessment: April 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?)

Since January 2018, there have been 3 periods of consultation relating to options for the future of West Woodburn First School. This latest statutory consultation was published on 12 March 2020 and proposes the closure of the school on 31 August 2020. The rationale for the approval of Cabinet to publish the closure notice was based on feedback from Governors of The River Rede Federation which incorporates West Woodburn First School and Otterburn Primary School, staff of both schools, parents of former pupils at the school

and some members of the local community. The majority of feedback from stakeholders in this consultation was in favour of the closure of the school. From January 2020, there have been no children on roll at the school and no children have applied for a place in Reception class in September 2020.

This EIA is being updated in the light of the proposal to close West Woodburn First School with effect from 1 September 2020.

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 proposed closure 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?

Statutory 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 close West Woodburn be approved.



Any member of staff at risk of redundancy would be dealt with equitably in line with County Council HR processes, including assistance to seek suitable alternative employment. No evidence has come to light during the statutory 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 a result of the closure of the school. Alternative schools are located within a reasonable distance of West Woodburn and suitable Home to School Transport would be available to eligible pupils according to need.

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 should any future pupils living in the village who attended other local schools required adjustments, these would be carried out in accordance with the relevant pupil's needs in compliance with the DDA 2005.

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 the closure of West Woodburn 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 proposal to close West Woodburn 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 should the school be approved for closure.

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, 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.)

Statutory consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the proposal to close the school 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. Should closure of the school be 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.

Statutory consultation has not shown any evidence to suggest that the proposal would create any barriers to any future pupils accessing any of the schools impacted by the proposal who have a parent who may be pregnant or who has other children under 26 weeks old. Children living in West Woodburn would attend alternative local schools and are likely to be eligible for home to school transport.

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.)

Statutory 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)

Statutory 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?

Statutory 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?

See para. 21

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)

Statutory 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 proposed closure of West Woodburn First School on groups with protected characteristics, there is no evidence to suggest that any of these groups would be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposal. 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 statutory. Should Cabinet approve the implementation of the statutory proposal to close the school, the EIA would be revisited to ensure that any changes in circumstances that may change the conclusion set out at Part 3 are identified and acted upon. Should this be the case an action plan with timescales would be 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*