

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday, 8 February 2018 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor P.A. Jackson
(Leader of the Council, in the Chair)

CABINET MEMBERS

Daley, W.
Jones, V.
Oliver, N.

Riddle, J.R.
Wearmouth, R.

OTHER MEMBERS

Dodd, R.R.
Hill, G.
Horncastle, C.W.

Renner-Thompson, G.
Roughead, G.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Aviston, S.

Elsdon, A.
Hadfield, K.

Henry, L.
Johnson, A.

Lally, D.
McEvoy, C.

Head of School Organisation and
Resources
Director of Finance
Committee Services and Scrutiny
Manager
Legal Services Manager
Project Director (Education and
Skills Service)
Chief Executive
Executive Director of Children's
Services

6 members of the press and public were present.

60. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Homer and Sanderson.

61. MINUTES

Ch.'s Initials.....

RESOLVED that the minutes of the following meetings of Cabinet as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair:-

(a) Tuesday 19 December 2017

(b) Tuesday 9 January 2018

62. REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

(1) Proposals for Education in Belford

The report set out the results of the statutory consultation process undertaken by the Council in relation to the proposal to close St Mary's Church of England Middle School with effect from 31 August 2018 and to extend the age range of Belford First School with effect from 1 September 2019. An analysis of the representations received during the statutory period was provided. The report requested Cabinet to decide whether or not to approve the proposals as consulted upon (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A).

The Chair made some opening remarks to members, setting out the procedure which would be followed, who was present and the order in which parties would speak.

Mr Johnson then outlined the main points of the report as follows:-

- The Governing Bodies of both schools had requested the County Council to consult on the proposals.
- The Council's consultation followed on from a consultation undertaken by the Governing Body of St Mary's on a stand-alone proposal to close the school on the basis that the continuing fall in pupil numbers, and consequential impact on the school's budget, would make it difficult to provide a broad and balanced curriculum.
- During the Council's informal consultation, both Governing Bodies had formally supported the proposals. Also, 52 of the 76 respondees to the informal consultation agreed with the proposal to close St Mary's CE Middle School and extend the age range of Belford First School, including the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board.
- There were currently only 39 pupils on roll at St Mary's (including only 2 pupils in Year 7 and 3 pupils in Year 8) and only 6 applications had been made for a place in Year 5 in September 2018. The school had a capacity of 120 places.
- While St Mary's was judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in November, the ability of the school to continue to provide a good standard of provision for pupils in the medium to longer term in the light of the continuing projected fall in pupil numbers remained an issue.
- Although Belford First School was judged by Ofsted to Require Improvement in March 2016, at its monitoring visit in January 2017 it was judged to be making effective progress towards becoming a good school. The site and

buildings of Belford First School had the capacity for an additional 2 year groups at Years 5 and 6 without the need for capital works.

Members commented as follows:-

- Councillor Daley remarked that this was a school led solution which carried the majority of support from respondents and the Diocese. He supported the report's recommendations.
- Councillor Oliver queried when the next monitoring visit would be at Belford FS and whether continued progress could be expected. Mr Johnson replied that this could be any time within the next year and agreed that the school were taking effective action to achieve "Good".
- Councillor Jones queried whether there had been strong support for the proposals across the Governing Bodies. Mr Johnson replied that he could not say that it was unanimous without looking at the documentation. But he was confident that, if not unanimous, there had been an overwhelming majority in support.
- Councillor Riddle asked about extra journey times. Mr Johnson advised that the two schools were within walking distance of each other so this was not an issue. Regarding the Year 7 and Year 8 year groups, both Alnwick High School and Berwick High School had confirmed that they had places available and transport arrangements would be put in place to meet individual needs.

Councillor Horncastle presented the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC (circulated at the meeting, copy attached to the signed minutes). The proposals had been supported. It was noted that the report should refer to "...extend the age range of Belford First School with effect from 1 September **2018**".

The Chair then invited Mr Henry to provide Cabinet with the necessary legal advice, which he did in detail.

It was then **RESOLVED** unanimously:-

- 1) to approve:
 - the proposal to close St Mary's Church of England Middle School as with effect from 31 August 2018;
 - the proposal to extend the age range of Belford First School from an age 2 to 9 first school to an age 2 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2018
- 2) to note the impact of the proposal set out in the Statutory Proposal attached at Appendix 1 of the report.
- 3) taking into account the Department for Education's (DfE) guidance as set out in para. 6 of the report, to approve the proposal without modification; and
- 4) to note the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC.

Cabinet then adjourned at 2.26 pm so the decision and the reasons for it, could be written up. On reconvening at 2.31 pm, the Leader read out the following statement:-

1. The Governing Bodies of St Mary's Church of England Middle School and Belford First School requested the Council to consult on proposals to close St Mary's Church of England Middle School with effect from 31 August 2018 and to extend the age range of Belford First School to become an age 2 to 11 primary school from 1 September 2018.
2. The Council's consultation followed on from a consultation undertaken by the Governing Body of St Mary's CE Middle School from 25 January to 15 March 2017 on a stand-alone proposal to close the school with effect from 31 August 2017 on the basis that the continuing fall in pupil numbers at the school, and consequential impact on the school's budget, would make it difficult to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to pupils on a par with their peers in other schools.
3. During the Council's informal consultation, both Governing Bodies wrote to the Council to formally support the proposals. Furthermore, 52 of the 76 respondents to the informal consultation agreed with the proposal to close St Mary's CE Middle School and extend the age range of Belford First School, including the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board. This was in line with the conclusions drawn at the end of the consultation carried out by the Governing Body of St Mary's in February-March 2017, which were that the community were generally in favour of Belford First School becoming a primary school.
4. There are currently only 39 pupils on roll at St Mary's (including only 2 pupils in Year 7 and 3 pupils in Year 8) and only 6 applications have been made for a place in Year 5 in September 2018. The school has a capacity of 120 places.
5. While St Mary's was judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in November, the ability of the school to continue to provide a good standard of provision for pupils in the medium to longer term in the light of the continuing projected fall in pupil numbers remains an issue. The Governing Body has not reduced staffing numbers pending the decision of the Cabinet on the proposals and 4.6 teaching staff, it is unlikely that this ratio would be able to be maintained should the budget continue to reduce as predicted.
6. Although Belford First School was judged by Ofsted to Require Improvement in March 2016, at its monitoring visit from in January 2017 it was judged to be making effective progress towards becoming a good school. The site and buildings of Belford First School have the capacity for an additional 2 year groups at Years 5 and 6 without the need for capital works.
7. Therefore, the Council believes it is in the best educational interests of the current and future pupils in St Mary's Church of England Middle School and Belford First School to close St Mary's with effect from 31 August 2018 and to extend the age range of Belford First to become an age 2 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2018.

8. The consultation on this proposal has been appropriate, reasonable and robust.

(2) Proposal for Consultation on Closure of Netherton Northside First School

The report set out a request from the Governing Body of Netherton Northside First to carry out consultation on a proposal to close the school with effect from 31 August 2018. A recommendation was set out in the report to request that Cabinet agree to permit consultation on the proposal. Members were also asked to note that Cabinet may be requested to permit the publication of Statutory Proposal in relation to this proposal at a future date following the outcomes of consultation (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the FACS OSC circulated at the meeting).

Mr Johnson highlighted the main points of the report including the extensive efforts made by the school and the Governing Body to recruit additional pupils. However, in Sept 2017, no children had joined the school in Reception. Standards at the school were good, but in the light of a reducing budget the Governing Body felt that it would be difficult to maintain a broad and balanced curriculum. As detailed in the report, he reminded members that any decision to close a rural school would need to take into account the DfE's Guidance on rural schools and the presumption against closure.

Councillor Renner Thompson reported that the Family and Children's Services OSC had noted the low number of pupils and the efforts made to attract additional pupils in the last two years, which had been unsuccessful. The recommendations had been supported.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) consultation take place as requested by the Governing Body of Netherton Northside First School on a proposal to close the school with effect from 31 August 2018.
- (b) the decision to undertake further consultation on the proposal, if necessary, be delegated to the Executive DCS in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services;
- (c) a further report following consultation be submitted to a meeting of the Cabinet, at which a decision on whether or not to issue a Statutory Proposal in relation to the proposal set out at Recommendation (a) above will be made;
- (d) it be noted that Netherton Northside First School is listed on the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order 2016 and therefore if Cabinet decided to approve the publication of a statutory proposal at a future date, when formulating any following final decision,

consideration will have to be given to the points set out in paragraph 14 of the report; and

- (e) the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....