

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 8 May 2018 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

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

CABINET MEMBERS

Daley, W.
Homer, C.
Jones, V.

Oliver, N
Riddle, J.
Wearmouth, R.

OTHER MEMBERS

Cessford, T.
Dodd, R.R.
Flux, B.

Reid, J.
Renner Thompson, G.
Sharp, A.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Aviston, S.

Head of School Organisation and
Resources

Hadfield, K.

Committee Services and Scrutiny
Manager

Henry, L
Johnson A.

Legal Services Manager
Project Director (Education and
Skills Service)

Johnston, P.
Lally, D.
McEvoy, C.

Interim Executive Director of Place
Chief Executive
Executive Director of Children's
Services

Around 15 members of the press and public were present.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Sanderson.

Ch.'s Initials.....

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Tuesday 10 April 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Jones declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of item 5 on the agenda (Consultation exercise for proposed changes to post 16 transport policy) as she had a grandson in post 16 education who accessed school transport. She advised that she would leave the meeting for this item.

Councillor Homer declared a personal interest in item 4(1) on the agenda (Outcomes of consultation on education in the west of Northumberland) as she had three children attending Queen Elizabeth High School but she was confident she could be objective in making a decision on the issue.

Councillor Oliver declared a personal interest in the same item as he had two children attending Queen Elizabeth High School but was also confident he could be objective in making a decision. He advised that one child would be in Year 13 next year and queried whether he needed to declare the same interest as Councillor Jones. Mr Henry confirmed this would be a sensible approach.

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

(1) Outcomes of Consultation on Education in the West of Northumberland

The report explained to Cabinet the outcomes of the informal consultation about the future of education in the west of Northumberland.

The informal consultation was agreed by Cabinet as a result of a number of external factors beyond the control of Northumberland County Council (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A, along with the report of the FACS OSC).

Councillor Daley introduced the report, setting out the background to the current position. He acknowledged the work of the various groups, organisations and individuals who had worked with the Authority in the last few weeks. He was aware that this had been a difficult time and he hoped that the report showed that the Authority had been genuinely listening to communities. He also paid tribute to the significant amount of work put in by officers, including Sue Aviston and Andy Johnson.

The key messages from the report were:-

- The intention to save Haydon Bridge High School
- The rejection of a move to an 11-18 model by the Hadrian Learning Trust
- The proposal to develop an innovative resilience programme
- The creation of a multi academy trust to sustain education going forward.

Mr Johnson then highlighted a couple of minor errors in the report as follows:-

- Para 3.6 of the report on page 4 should read:- “...The Council however only has the powers to propose the closure of maintained schools and therefore **does not have** control over **Haltwhistle First and Middle Schools....**”
- Table 4 on page 70 of the report needed to include Broomhaugh School in the list of Hexham partnership schools as follows:-

Broomhaugh	No works required	Nil
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In looking at the recommendations in the report, Mr Johnson advised that recommendations a-c were decisions for Cabinet and detailed the support which was being provided. They did not involve a statutory proposal. Recommendations d-e did, but he stressed that no decision was being made today. Cabinet was being asked to permit the publishing of a statutory proposal on a number of issues including the extension of a number of age ranges and to close Bellingham Middle School. The results of the consultation would be reported back to Cabinet on 10 July 2018.

Recommendations f-g looked specifically at the Hexham Partnership where no changes to school organisation were proposed. However, he detailed the measures which were being proposed as contained in the recommendations, and highlighted the proposals for the Haydon Bridge partnership, specifically Bellingham Middle School.

Councillor Renner Thompson reported back from FACS OSC where there had been a long debate. Members had sought reassurance that this would be a long term solution and that the problems would not just return in five years, and there had been acknowledgement of the work from officers during the consultation process. Reference was made to a previous report to FACS OSC which demonstrated that this was a long standing problem. Members had been reassured that a further report would be made to them following consultation.

As a local member, Councillor Sharp, spoke in support of the proposals. He felt that it was important in small communities for parents to have a choice and so was delighted that the proposal was for Haydon Bridge High School

to stay open given the recent period of uncertainty, and its importance in employing people and maintaining the vitality of the village. Also, when first schools closed, it often took away the heart of the community so he welcomed the results of the consultation and thanked members for their support so far.

Cabinet members spoke as follows:-

- The Leader commented that this demonstrated how the Administration was not afraid to take the difficult decisions it faced if it was sure that they would take the County forward in a positive way. He also hoped that the exercise showed that the Council was a listening authority. He acknowledged that this had been a difficult process but the proposals would hopefully give the area a settled education system for the next 15-20 years. This would bring security and improved educational results.
- Councillor Homer referred to the external factors which had been around for some time, so doing nothing on this had not been an option. She thanked those individuals and organisations who had engaged with both parts of the consultation process as a lot of time had gone into preparing very detailed responses and viable alternative solutions. She supported the report's proposals, recognising the importance of providing parental choice, and that not all children were the same, and that a different offer was important without having to involve long journeys.
- Regarding the MAT and the vision on federating, it was very important that educational standards and aspirations were part of that model so that children could believe they could achieve right from the start of school and all through their school lives. A smooth transition between schools with less peaks and troughs of achievement should be built into any models.
- She was delighted with the proposed investment in schools which was much needed and indicated that she would like to be involved in any management arrangements for the delivery of the investment programme.
- Councillor Oliver also acknowledged the work which had gone into the consultation responses. People had very much engaged and it was important that people worked together to maintain the education system. The best results in the County's state schools were achieved by Queen Elizabeth High School but the facilities were embarrassing through lack of investment. He supported Councillor Homer's request to be involved in the management of the investment programme, and also wished to be part of whatever was set up. The challenges for Haydon Bridge were immense and had to be dealt with by a properly designed and sustainable solution. The challenges in the North Tyne and Redesdale area were particularly difficult because of the mixed model arrangement which was not popular. A move towards a more consistent model and the offer of a genuine choice should provide the opportunity to create two strong sustainable high schools. He asked

Councillor Daley for further detail about the published report referred to at Scrutiny.

- Councillor Daley advised that the previous Audit Committee had commissioned a report on school viability in the face of challenges facing small schools. This had been a missed opportunity because no action had been taken to progress any of the solutions. If action had been taken to deal with Bright Tribe and the other issues when it was needed, then the recent action may not have been necessary, and he felt this should all have been dealt with a long time ago. However, he informed Cabinet that he had asked Legal officers to try and recover £230,000 of funding back from Bright Tribe which was owing to the Authority.
- Councillor Oliver queried whether the £1.54m identified would be coming out of the schools budget. Mr Johnson confirmed that it wasn't and that other schools would not be disadvantaged.
- Councillor Riddle agreed that this situation should have been dealt with a long time ago. He reminded members that the recommendations were about a further consultation process and that decisions had not been taken, but as the local member for Bellingham Middle School he did not support its closure. He recognised that the Authority had to take action to address surplus places and that parents had voted with their feet in terms of Bellingham Middle School but there had been a lot of new housing development granted in Bellingham recently. Consideration had to be given to travel times, which became excessive given the routes which were used. 3 hours a day was too long in his opinion and had to be addressed. Other than these issues, he did support the recommendations which would make the Authority fit for the future and result in a better education.

In response to some of the points which had been made, Mr Johnson confirmed that a significant amount of funding was being considered and when this investment was made by the Authority in an academy as opposed to a maintained school, there would be an expectation that the Authority would have a significant input into all aspects of how the funding was spent. This would be covered in the report to Cabinet on 10 July and would also be part of ongoing work over the next two years which Cabinet members would be involved in.

He understood the points made about transport and confirmed that this would be reported back on following examination of the detail.

RESOLVED unanimously that:-

- a) Haydon Bridge High School be kept open as an 11-18 secondary school, in order to maintain secondary education in Haydon Bridge; Cabinet recommend Council to approve funding of a support plan of £1.54m to support the school for at least 3 years; it be noted that Haydon Bridge High School will come back under the control of the local authority and

will continue as a maintained school for at least three years or until the RSC can broker an appropriate sponsor;

- b) it be noted that any future review of age ranges at Haydon Bridge High School may result in a further statutory proposal;
- c) the establishment of a new Local Authority appointed Interim Executive Board (IEB) at Haydon Bridge High School be noted. This board will work with staff, parents and the community to develop a strategic plan that will enable there to be a long-term future for a school in Haydon Bridge. This will involve the development of a new curriculum offer. A plan for any capital investment or refurbishment will come back to Cabinet for approval on 10 July 2018;
- d) in the light of the feedback from consultation set out in the report and the recommendations from the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, agreement be given to the publication of statutory proposals setting out the intention of the County Council to implement the following proposals:
- Extend the age range of Bellingham First School from an age 4 to 9 First School to an age 4 to 11 Primary School with effect from 1 September 2019;
 - Extend the age range of Kielder First School from an age 4 to 9 First School to an age 4 to 11 Primary School with effect from 1 September 2019;
 - Extend the age range of Otterburn First School from an age 3 to 9 First School to an age 3 to 11 Primary School with effect from 1 September 2019;
 - Extend the age range of Greenhaugh First School from an age 4 to 9 First School to an age 4 to 11 Primary School with effect from 1 September 2019;
 - 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 2019;
 - Support the extension of the age range of Wark CE First School from an age 3 to 9 First School to an age 3 to 11 Primary School with effect from 1 September 2019;
 - Close Bellingham Middle School with effect from 31 August 2019;
 - Note that from 1 September 2020 and each September thereafter, there would be one intake of students only into Haydon Bridge High School at Year 7. The Planned Admission Number (PAN) into Year 7

from 1 September 2020 would also be reduced to 120 and the school would have a total capacity of 750;

- e) it be noted the outcomes of the formal consultation following publication of the Statutory Proposals will be brought back to Cabinet on 10 July 2018 for a final decision to be taken in relation to the proposals set out in recommendation d);
- f) it be noted that in light of the feedback from consultation set out in the report that there are no proposed changes to school organisation in relation to the Hexham Partnership;
- g) agreement be given to the establishment of a resilience programme through encouraging the establishment of a hard federation, or federations, of schools which will support small rural schools to become financially and educationally viable for the future in both Hexham and Haydon Bridge Partnerships;
- h) the Local Authority establish a Trust in partnership with other public sector organisations to enable the establishment of a multi-academy trust (MAT) across the whole County to enable small rural schools to build sufficient capacity to remain both financially and educationally viable. This application would be made as a separate process to the Secretary of State and a proposal should be ready to submit for approval by Cabinet by September 2018;
- i) Council officers advise the RSC office and Hadrian Learning Trust that as a result of this consultation, the Council cannot support the change in age range of Hadrian Learning Trust as the proposed change would necessitate the closure of Hexham Middle and have a wider adverse impact on the current system in the Hexham Partnership. The proposed change is not supported by the vast majority of schools and the local community;
- j) it be noted that the buildings of Hadrian Learning Trust require significant capital investment and will continue to educate Northumberland children and young people. Officers are therefore instructed to begin work with the Hadrian Learning Trust to establish a proposal for redevelopment of the existing schools on one of the current sites, or on a new site in Hexham, and bring a report on this proposal back to Cabinet on 10 July 2018;
- k) the indicative capital costs outlined in the report be noted and approval be given to the development of an outline business case and option appraisal report to establish deliverability and a definite budget for the proposal outlined in the report;
- l) the implications for Home to School Transport as set out in the report be noted; and

m) the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC be noted.

At this point Councillor Jones left the meeting.

(2) Outcomes of Consultation on a proposal for closure of Netherton Northside First School

The report set out the results and analysis of the informal consultation process undertaken by the Council on a proposal to close Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018. The consultation came about as a result of a request of the Governing Body of the school due to the significant drop in pupils attending the school and its impact. The report also included a request to Cabinet to permit the publication of a Statutory Proposal (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the FACS OSC).

Councillor Daley reiterated that there were only three pupils currently on roll and the proposal was school-driven.

Councillor Renner Thompson reported that there had been no objections from Scrutiny, who had noted that it was also supported by the staff.

RESOLVED unanimously that:-

- (a) the analysis of the consultation, which took place between 9 February and 30 March 2018 be noted;
- (b) in light of the report and the recommendations from the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, agreement be given to publication of a statutory proposal on 10 May 2018, setting out the intention of the County Council to implement the proposal as follows:
 - Close Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018;
- (c) it be noted that Netherton Northside First School is listed as a Rural School within the Department for Education's List of Designated Rural Schools 2016. In light of this, it is noted that when a final decision is taken by Cabinet on the proposal to close the school at the end of the statutory period, Cabinet will need to take into account the DfE's Guidance on rural schools and the presumption against closure, as set out in para.12 of the report;
- (d) the implications for Home to School Transport set out in the report be noted;
- (e) it be noted that the outcomes of the consultation following publication of the Statutory Proposal will be brought back to Cabinet on 10 July 2018 for a final decision; and

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

In accordance with Minute No.3 above, Councillor Oliver left the meeting at this point.

5. JOINT REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLACE

Consultation Exercise for Proposed Changes to Post 16 Transport Policy

The report sought approval to implement a change to the current Post 16 Transport Policy following the recent public consultation exercise. The change would result in those students that met the defined eligibility criteria qualifying for free travel (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C, along with the report of the FACS OSC).

The report was introduced by Councillor Daley who advised that this was fulfilling a manifesto commitment.

Mr Johnson drew members' attention to the post 16 transport policy which set out the eligibility criteria, the definitions etc which had all been raised at Scrutiny.

Councillor Renner Thompson confirmed that there had been a lot of discussion at Scrutiny on the eligibility criteria and the impact of it and members had been happy to see flexibility retained. The report had been supported by the Committee.

The Leader commented that this proposal would support the County's young people in their ambitions and provide equal opportunity for young people, who shouldn't be disadvantaged by not living near a local high school.

RESOLVED unanimously that:-

- (a) the introduction of free transport for Post-16 students who meet defined eligibility criteria outlined in the revised Post-16 Transport Policy be approved;
- (b) the introduction of a one-off administration fee of £50 payable at the point of application be agreed;
- (c) students from low income backgrounds be exempt from paying the administration fee provided their parents/carers are able to provide documentary evidence of low income;
- (d) students who have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHC Plan) be exempt from paying the administration fee; and

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

6. NOMINATIONS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Cabinet was asked to make its nominations to a number of outside bodies (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

RESOLVED that:-

(a) the nominations as detailed in Appendix D be approved; and

(b) Councillors Riddle and Moore be nominated at the Council's representatives on the North of Tyne Housing and Land Board.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....