



# Northumberland

## County Council

### CABINET

Date: 8 May 2018

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## Outcomes of Consultation on a proposal for closure of Netherton Northside First School

Report of Cath McEvoy, Executive Director of Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Wayne Daley, Children's Services

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

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### **Purpose of report**

This report sets 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. This consultation has come 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 includes a request to Cabinet to permit the publication of a Statutory Proposal.

### **Recommendations**

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

1. Note the analysis of the consultation, which took place between 9 February and 30 March 2018.
2. Decide in the light of this report and recommendations from the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee whether to permit the 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;
3. Note that Netherton Northside First School is listed as a Rural School within the Department for Education's List of Designated Rural Schools 2016. Therefore, should Cabinet decide to approve the publication of a statutory proposal to close the school as recommended, in making their final decision on the proposal to close the school at the end of the statutory period, Cabinet would need to take into account the DfE's Guidance on rural schools and the presumption against closure, as set out in para.12 of this report.
3. Note the implications for Home to School Transport set out in this report.

4. Note that the outcomes of the consultation following publication of the Statutory Proposal would be brought back to Cabinet in July 2018 for a final decision.

## **Key issues**

### The Consultation Process

1. Cabinet approved commencement of a six week informal consultation to gather views from staff, parents and the wider community on a proposal to close Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018. The rationale for the consultation was presented in the Report the Executive Director of Children's Services, 8 February 2018 and is summarised in the Background to this report.
2. Informal consultation began on 9 February and closed on 30 March 2018, which included six clear weeks of school term time. Notification of the informal consultation was distributed to a range of consultees as advised in guidance, in line with Department of Education (DfE) guidance, including parents, staff and Governors of the school. A Consultation Register was developed detailing all parties consulted and this is provided at Appendix 1 of this report.
3. The consultation document was made available on the Council's website and electronic and hard-copy versions of the consultation feedback form could be accessed; the consultation document is provided at Appendix 2 of this report. The Consultation Document simply asked consultees to consider the following questions and provide their responses:
  - Q1. *Do you agree with the proposal to close Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018?*
  - Q2. *Do you have an alternative proposal for tackling the issues faced by Netherton Northside First School that you would like the Council to consider or any further comments?*
  - Q3. *If Netherton Northside First School is approved for closure following statutory consultation at a later date, which schools or schools do you think would be most appropriate to be allocated part of or all of the Netherton catchment area?*
4. In addition to the distribution of the consultation document, 3 separate meetings for the parents of the 3 pupils at the school, staff and the Governing Body was held at Netherton Northside First School were held during the consultation period on 19 March. These meetings had been scheduled earlier in the consultation process, but had to be cancelled due to the inclement weather experienced in the county at the end of February. A staff representative (union) was present during the meeting held with staff.

### Consultation responses from the school's governing body;

5. The Governing Body supports the proposal to close Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018. The written response from the Governing Body of Netherton Northside First School is set out below:

*Response to Q1, “Do you agree with the proposal to close Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018?”*

Yes – the school has had a falling roll for some time.

*Response to Q2, “Do you have an alternative proposal for tackling the issues faced by Netherton Northside First School that you would like the Council to consider or any further comments?”*

Governors have exhausted all areas to increase uptake of places in the school already.

*Response to Q3, “If Netherton Northside First School is approved for closure following statutory consultation at a later date, which schools or schools do you think would be most appropriate to be allocated part of all of the Netherton catchment area?”*

The school is in extremely good condition and is wheelchair accessible. This would make a fabulous satellite SEND school or a children's residential centre in beautiful Northumberland countryside giving children from urban backgrounds a wonderful experience of their local countryside. We strongly believe the whole catchment area should be kept in the Morpeth Partnership to allow the children to continue their education via this path and the catchment should be split between the two boarder schools, Thropton 1st and Harbottle 1st. This could be achieved by parish and ease of road links however someone would need to come and drive the roads before deciding this as this is a very rural area with some roads only 1 vehicle wide and used by farm traffic.

#### Summary of other Responses to the Consultation

6. 8 responses were received in relation to consultation on the proposals, including that of the Governing Body. These included responses from staff, parents, the local community and the Governing Body of another local school.

#### **Overall responses:**

##### 6.1 Main responses to Q1 (closure of Netherton Northside First School):

###### Agree

- Falling roll numbers; children are not getting the appropriate level of social interaction which would prepare them for the future
- Falling roll numbers; budget will now be affected
- Hard to motivate such a small group of children
- School buildings are best in the area – shame it has come to this
- Should have closed years ago, with 3 other first schools in area

###### Disagree

- Netherton Northside has unique qualities of Netherton Northside First School that benefit our children and the local community.
- Disappointed in the decision of the governing body to seek closure. I
- Overall quality of the school is borne out by several Ofsted reports, staff retention and happy, confident children

- Teaching is of a very high standard
- Small class sizes mean children receive the attention they deserve
- There is full disabled access.
- School is supported by active PTA and local community
- Shame for the village to lose this unique and beloved resource for future generations.

#### 6.2 Main responses to Q2 (alternative solution)

- No obvious solution, dwindling younger population in Coquet valley
- No quick fix solution
- Use building as a resource for SEND, as it is fully accessible and a great building
- Children should attend their catchment area school or if choose to go elsewhere, should not be given free school transport

#### 6.4 Main responses to Q3 (catchment area):

- Thropton First School would seem the most appropriate school, however in terms of ethos and tradition Harbottle First would be a better fit for our families
- Children residing in the Netherton and Alnham Parishes should be included within the catchment area for Thropton Village First School, and those in the Biddlestone Parish should form part of the Harbottle First School catchment area.
- There is a natural three way division of the Netherton catchment area borne out by those families who have sought an alternative provision to Whittingham, Thropton and Harbottle schools.

### 7. **Feedback received from parents at their meeting, 19 March 2018**

The full minutes of the meeting are included in the Background Papers, and the main points and questions raised by the staff and staff representative were as follows:

- Why is there such wide parental choice in relation to schools in this area? Parents should send their children to their catchment schools.
- This school building is the best in the area. Could it be an outward bound centre for use by all children in the area, or for children with special needs? This could help with local employment.
- Could this building be an early years unit for other schools?
- Is a bus able to be provided to other schools?

### 8. **Feedback received from staff at their meeting, 19 March 2018**

The full minutes of the meeting are included in the Background Papers, and the main points and questions raised by the staff and staff representative were as follows:

- The date of the decision is very late in the summer term – staff need to make decisions;

- Could opportunities at other schools be ring-fenced?
- If I move to another school in the county, would my pension continue?
- Is there a choice between redundancy or redeployment?

## 9. **Feedback received from the Governing Body at their meeting, 19 March 2018**

- A final decision on 10 July is short notice for staff
- The budget situation for the school has only become worse recently
- Travel implications for staff looking for suitable alternative employment should be considered

## 10. **Alternative Models**

3 alternative models or variations were put forward by consultees for consideration.

### 10.1 Develop the school building as an outward bound centre for all children in Northumberland

Comment: The buildings of Netherton Northside First School are in the ownership of the Council, while the playing field is held on long term leasehold with a private owner. If Cabinet make a decision to approve the closure of the school at a later, any buildings in the ownership of the Council are at first assessed for possible use by other Council services. If it is not possible for another service to utilise the building, then alternative uses would be considered, therefore this proposal will be forwarded to the Council's Estates team for consideration.

### 10.2 Develop the school building as a SEND provision for children in the local area to reduce travel distances

Comment: As part of the separate Northumberland SEND Strategy which was approved on 10 April 2018 and as part of a separate programme, officers will be undertaking consultation across the county with a view to developing proposals for additional SEND provision in localities. Should Cabinet approve the implementation of the proposal to close Netherton Northside First School, this proposal for SEN provision will directed to relevant officers for consideration.

### 10.3 Pupils should have to attend their own catchment schools

Comment: National legislation requires that parents are able to apply for a school place at any school of their choice. However, the Council's Home to School Transport Policy in general supports children to attend their catchment, nearest or nearest denominational school, and this provides some protection to local schools. However, where there are extensive surplus places in schools, parental choice is wider which can have a significant impact on small, rural schools in particular.

## 11. **Conclusions and recommendations**

The Governing Body of Netherton Northside First School and the majority of respondees to the consultation, including parents, while expressing regret at the proposal, have all supported the proposal to close the school as being in the best educational interests of the children.

Therefore, it is concluded that Cabinet should agree that there are no viable alternatives set out at para. 10 to the proposals consulted upon and approve the recommendations, and move to the next stage in the process which is to approve the publication of a Statutory Proposal setting out a proposal to close Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018.

Event	Date	Action
Statutory Consultation period	10 May to 7 June 2018	Consult on the statutory proposal for the closure of Netherton Northside First School
Family and Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	5 July 2018	Consider the report on the outcome of the consultation and make recommendations on how to proceed.
Cabinet Committee	10 July 2018	Consider the report on the outcomes of the statutory consultation and make the final decision on whether to implement the recommendation.

12. Netherton Northside First School is listed as a Rural School within the Department for Education's List of Designated Rural Schools 2016. Therefore, should Cabinet decide to approve the publication of a statutory proposal as recommended, the final decision on the proposal to close the school would need to take into account the DfE's Guidance on rural schools and the presumption against closure, as set out below

***DfE Guidance - Rural schools and the presumption against closure***

*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 the potential for federation with another local school or conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust or umbrella trust to increase the school's viability;*
- *the transport implications;*
- *the overall and long term impact on local people and the community of closure of the village school and of the loss of the building as a community facility.'*

13. Should Cabinet approve the publication of the statutory proposal, the final decision on whether or not to approve its implementation is required to be made within 2 months of the end of the statutory period, i.e. before 7 August 2018, or must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator.

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## Outcomes of consultation on proposal to close Netherton Northside First School

### Background

14. Netherton Northside First School is a very small, rural school within the Morpeth Partnership of schools. The school has had falling pupil numbers for some time and has been surviving on the edge of viability.
15. The Governing Body approached the Council in early 2017 to discuss the possibility of closure of the school; there were 8 children on roll at the school at that time, including children in Reception. However, it was agreed not to proceed with a proposal to close the school at that point. Since that time, numbers on roll at Netherton have steadily fallen, with 5 on roll in September 2017 and no children joining the school in Reception. In January 2018, there were 3 children on roll, 1 in Year 4 and 2 in Year 3 and therefore no children in the lower end of the school; as the Year 4 child will transfer to a middle or primary school according to parental preference in September 2018, there is a possibility there may be only 2 children on roll at that time. There is one prospective child in the catchment who could join the school in Reception in the future, but that would not occur until September 2019. Table 1 below shows the pattern of attendance at the school in the last 5 academic years

*Table 1*

Netherton Northside First School	Pupils Attending Jan 2018	Pupils Attending Sep 2017	Pupils Attending Sep 2016	Pupils Attending Sep 2015	Pupils Attending Sep 2014	Pupils Attending Sep 2013
Y0	0	0	2	1	3	0
Y1	0	1	0	3	0	1
Y2	0	0	2	0	2	2
Y3	2	2	0	2	2	1
Y4	1	2	2	3	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>

16. The actions taken by the Headteacher and Governing Body to attract additional pupils to the school over the last 2 years are set out in the Report of Executive Director of Children's Services, 8 February 2018. These actions did not result in additional parents enrolling their children with the school. Furthermore, with fewer children also being born in the catchment areas of neighbouring small schools, e.g. Thropton Village First School and Harbottle CE First School, parents have a wide choice of schools from which to choose. This issue of parental choice and surplus places in schools has been raised through this consultation process and it is recognised that as a result of fluctuations in popularity, the viability of very small rural schools can quickly become an issue.
17. There are currently no issues with standards at the school. The school was judged to be good in November 2011 and this rating was maintained at an Ofsted short inspection in February 2017. However, in light of the school's reducing budget, the Governing Body now believe that with so few children on roll, and with little prospect of numbers increasing significantly in the near future, it will become increasingly difficult to sustain the broad and balanced curriculum required by the National Curriculum. Therefore, the Governing Body decided it would be in the best educational interests of the pupils to have a consultation on a proposal to close the school with effect from 31 August 2018.



### Pupil Transition and Admissions Arrangements

18. With only 3 children currently on roll at the school, one of whom is currently in Year 4 and will transfer to middle school in September, there are sufficient places in other good local first schools in the Morpeth Partnership or in other local primary schools in the Alnwick Partnership for parents to exercise their parental preference in relation to alternative schools.

### SEN Provision

19. There is no specialist SEN provision currently within Netherton Northside First School.

### Early Years Provision

20. While Netherton Northside First School is an age 3 to 9 school, there are no children on roll in the early years provision. Four other schools in the local area include early years provision from age 3, therefore it is not envisaged that the closure of the school would have an impact in this area of provision.

### Catchment Areas

21. As part of the informal consultation, consultees were asked which school or schools would be most appropriate to be allocated part of all of the Netherton Northside catchment area, should it be approved for closure at a later date. The majority of consultees who responded to this question suggested Thropton Village First School or Harbottle CE First School would be the most appropriate.

It is recommended that for the purposes of the statutory proposal that it is proposed that Thropton Village First School would incorporate the catchment area of Netherton Northside First School should it be approved for closure for the following reasons:

- Thropton Village First School is the nearest school to Netherton village and as with Netherton Northside First School, does not have a faith designation;
- Parents who would by choice prefer for their children to be educated within a faith school would be able to make a preference for Harbottle CE First School or Whittingham CE Primary School (whichever was the nearest to the place of residence), and where eligible, transport would be available on denominational grounds;
- Some children may be eligible for home to school transport where other schools are nearer to their place of residence e.g. Whittingham CE Primary School; Branton Primary School.

### Timeline for implementation

22. If the proposal to close Netherton Northside was approved at a later date, the timeline for implementation of the closure of the school would be as follows:

## Proposed timeline

### **31 August 2018**

- Netherton Northside First School would close.

### **1 September 2018**

- Pupils in Year 4 at the school would transfer into Year 5 as usual to a local middle or primary school according to parental preference.
- Pupils in Years 1 to 3 at the school in August 2018 would transfer to join the cohort of Thropton Village First School (refer to para. 21) or to another school providing education in those year groups according to parental preference.

## Implications for Staff

23. There would be implications for the staff of Netherton Northside should this proposal be approved at a future date. Detailed discussions with the Governing Body the school and with the Trades Unions would be undertaken about how any adverse implications of the proposals for staff could be minimised, including the appointment of a Contact Officer who would work with impacted staff to secure alternative suitable employment in the first instance.

## Transport

24. Transport for pupils affected by the proposals, should they be approved, would be arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. The implications of the proposed re-assignment of the Netherton Northside catchment area should it be approved for closure are set out in para. 21.

It is not envisaged that there would be any significant impact on the Council's Home to School Transport budget as a result of the proposed closure of Netherton Northside.

## Implications for school buildings

25. The buildings of Netherton Northside First School are in the ownership of the Council, while the playing field is held on long term leasehold with a private owner. Proposals for alternative use of the building are set out for consideration in para. 10.

The school building is not used by any community groups. Netherton village has a village hall where community activities are generally held.

## Sport and Recreation

26. Any potential impact on Sport and Recreation arising from the proposed closure of Netherton Northside would arise through the loss of the school playing fields. Any proposal to dispose of the school playing fields at any point in the future would be subject to the Government's 'Protection of school playing fields and public land' non-statutory guidance. Furthermore, Sport England is a statutory consultee on all planning applications for development affecting playing field

land and it is its policy to oppose any plan that would involve the loss of playing fields unless it meets with one or more of the five exceptions within its “Policy on planning applications for development on playing fields”.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Report of the Executive Director of Children’s Services, 8 February 2018

Responses received from consultees during the informal consultation period

## **IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT**

**Policy:** This consultation has been consistent with the Council’s policy to review changes to schools in accordance with local wishes and needs.

**Finance and value for money** For information purposes, the possible closure of Netherton Northside would result in a saving of £110k in a full year, based on the current formula. This saving would accrue to the Dedicated Schools Grant and be spent on the education of pupils across the whole county.

Should Netherton Northside be approved for closure, it may close with a surplus or a deficit depending upon the costs, including redundancy costs which the County Council may need to incur during the period leading up to the proposed closure. Any surplus would accrue to the DSG whilst any deficit would have to be met from either the DSG or other Children's Service's budgets.

**Human Resources:** There would be a need to support staff displaced as a result of the proposed reorganisation with redeployment opportunities.

**Property** Refer to ‘Finance and value for money’ above

**Equalities** An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out concurrently with the consultation process and is included at Appendix 3.

**Risk Assessment** A full risk assessment would be carried out on the project should statutory consultation be approved.

**Carbon Reduction** It is not envisaged that this proposal would have a significant positive or negative impact on carbon reduction.

**Crime & Disorder** This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.

**Customer Considerations:** The proposal set out in this report is based upon the request of the Governing Body of Netherton Northside First School on the basis that this proposal is in the best educational interests of the pupils

**Consultation** This report has been considered by the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and the Chief Legal Officer.

**Wards** Rothbury,

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**Report of the Executive Director of Children’s Services, 8 February 2018**  
**Responses of consultees to the consultation**  
**Minutes of the meetings with staff, parents and the Governing Body, 19 March 2018**

### **Report sign off**

Finance Officer	SD
Monitoring Officer/Legal	LH
Human Resources	n/a
Procurement	n/a
I.T.	n/a
Project Director	AJ
Portfolio Holder	WD

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### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Consultation Register  
Appendix 2 – Consultation Document  
Appendix 3 - Equalities Impact Assessment

**Consultation Register - NCC**

Parents, Staff and Governing Body of Netherton Northside First School

Headteacher and Governing Body of:

- Thropton Village First School
- Harbottle CE First School
- Rothbury First School
- Dr Thomlinson's CE Middle School
- Branton Primary School
- Whittingham Primary School
- 3 Rivers Multi-academy Trust

Newcastle Diocese Education Board

Roman Catholic Diocese, Education team

Local early years providers

Local MP, Ann-Marie Trevelyan

Local Parish Council:

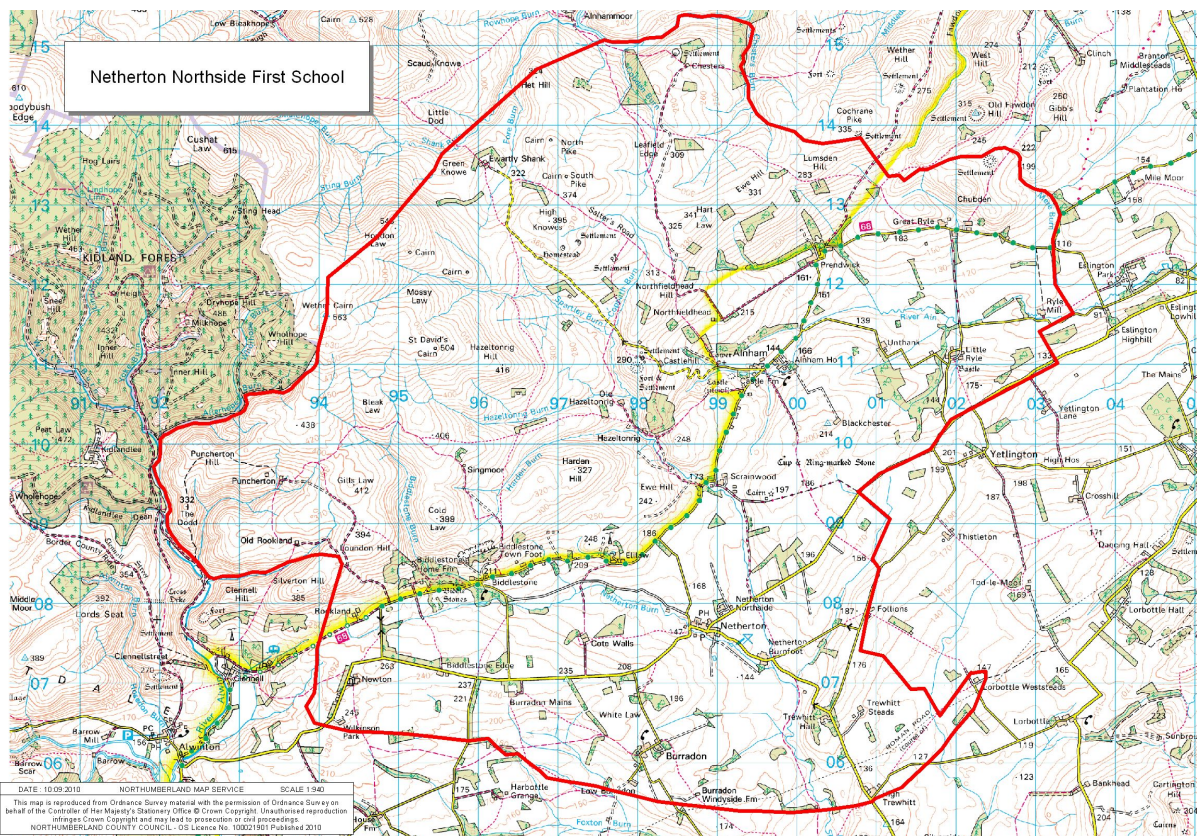
- Netherton with Biddlestone

Staff Representatives (unions)

The consultation was widely publicised on the Council's website.

# NETHERTON NORTHSIDE FIRST SCHOOL

## CONSULTATION FEBRUARY- MARCH 2018



**THE COUNTY COUNCIL IS CARRYING OUT CONSULTATION ON A PROPOSAL PUT FORWARD BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF NETHERTON NORTHSIDE FIRST SCHOOL TO CLOSE THE SCHOOL FROM 31 AUGUST 2018.**

**WE NEED TO FIND OUT WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THIS PROPOSAL AND ALSO TO FIND OUT WHETHER YOU HAVE ANY ALTERNATIVE IDEAS ABOUT THE ISSUES FACING THE SCHOOL.**

## **WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FACING NETHERTON NORTHSIDE FIRST SCHOOL?**

Netherton Northside First School is a very small first school within the Morpeth Partnership of schools. In recent years the school has suffered from falling pupil numbers and has been surviving on the edge of viability. Table 1 below shows the numbers of pupils who have been attending the school since September 2013.

*Table 1*

<b>Netherton Northside First School</b>	<b>Pupils Attending Jan 2018</b>	<b>Pupils Attending Sep 2017</b>	<b>Pupils Attending Sep 2016</b>	<b>Pupils Attending Sep 2015</b>	<b>Pupils Attending Sep 2014</b>	<b>Pupils Attending Sep 2013</b>
Y0	0	0	2	1	3	0
Y1	0	1	0	3	0	1
Y2	0	0	2	0	2	2
Y3	2	2	0	2	2	1
Y4	1	2	2	3	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>

Currently, Netherton Northside has only has 3 pupils on roll in the upper years, with no children at all in the lower end of the school. Unfortunately, there are no applications for a place in Reception class in September 2018, although from data available to the Council there are four children living in the school's catchment area in that age group. Data also shows that there are no children living in the catchment area who would be eligible to join Reception in September 2019 or September 2020. Furthermore, the majority of parents with first school age children living in the Netherton catchment area have been sending their children to other local schools.

When the current Year 4 child transfers to a middle or primary school for September 2018, there is a real possibility there may be only 2 children on roll with the school.

In order to attract additional pupils to the school, over the last 2 years the Headteacher and Governing Body have carried out the following activities to attract additional pupils:

- Placement of articles in the local Coquet valley magazine 'Over the Bridges' on several occasions;
- Adverts in the Northumberland Gazette to highlight the school's Ofsted success;
- Open morning in December 2016 – although this event was well attended, it was by people already connected with the school, with very few people attending who were not already involved with the school;
- Relaunch of toddler group 'Bumps, Babies and Beyond' at Easter 2017 – again this group was quite well attended for the first 6 months, but attendance has since fallen away.

Unfortunately, none of the above activities have resulted in additional parents enrolling their children with the school. As fewer children are also being born in the catchment areas of neighbouring small schools, such as Thropton Village First School and Harbottle CE First School, parents have a wide choice of schools from which to choose. This makes very small, rural schools vulnerable to any fluctuations in popularity which can often be overcome by larger schools if they are not sustained over a long time.

While small, rural schools can offer a different kind of educational experience to their pupils which parents rightly value, there is a point at which the school becomes so small that it exists on the edges of viability and the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum becomes increasingly difficult. All schools receive a lump sum as part of their annual funding budget, but additional funding based on the number of pupils on roll. Therefore, the fewer pupils there are, the less money the school receives. The 'fixed' costs of running a school, such as maintenance, heating, lighting and cleaning, remain the same no matter how many pupils attend and as numbers fall, schools find they spend a higher proportion of their budget on these costs compared to staffing and educational resources. Eventually, a tipping point is reached when the school is no longer able to fund the broad and balanced curriculum their pupils need and as is required by the National Curriculum.

In the light of the school's reducing budget and with little prospect of numbers increasing significantly in the near future, the Governing Body now believes that



it will become increasingly difficult to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils and therefore in the best educational interests of the pupils, requested the Council to consult on a proposal to close the school with effect from 31 August 2018.

### **MY CHILD IS ENROLLED WITH NETHERTON NORTHSIDE FIRST SCHOOL - HOW WILL HE/SHE BE AFFECTED BY THIS PROPOSAL?**

There are school places available in other schools in the locality should Netherton Northside be approved for closure at a later date and parents are able to indicate a preference for any school they wish. We are also asking whether parents and other consultees have any views on which other school the catchment area of Netherton Northside should be allocated to, as part of this consultation. Transport to other schools would be in line with the County Council's Home to School Transport policy and assessed on an individual basis, but generally, first school pupils aged up to 8 are entitled to home to school transport where they live more than 2 miles from their catchment or nearest school, or where there is no safe walking route from home to school. From the age of 8 onwards, pupils are generally eligible if they live more than 3 miles from the nearest catchment school or if there is no safe walking route.

### **HOW CAN I MAKE MY VIEWS ABOUT THIS PROPOSAL KNOWN?**

The Council would like to hear your view on this proposal, and whether you have any alternative suggestions that could resolve the issues raised. We would also like your views on alternative catchment areas as stated above for children currently residing in the Netherton Northside catchment, should the school be approved for closure at a later date. A questionnaire is attached at the end of this document for you to complete with your views, with details of how to return your response.

**The consultation is open until 30 March 2018.**

Additionally, there will be meetings held at Netherton Northside on **Tuesday, 27 February 2018**. The purpose of these meetings is for Council Officers to present the reasons for the proposal and to enable staff, parents, Governors and other interested parties the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on any issues

Please attend the meeting for the group that you most associate with.

<b>Venue</b>	<b>Meeting for:</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>
<b>Netherton Northside First School</b>	<b>Staff only</b>	<b>Tuesday , 27 February 2018</b>	<b>3.30 p.m.</b>
<b>Netherton Northside First School</b>	<b>Netherton Northside Governing Body only</b>	<b>Tuesday , 27 February 2018</b>	<b>5.00 p.m.</b>
<b>Netherton Northside First School</b>	<b>Parents and community</b>	<b>Tuesday , 27 February 2018</b>	<b>6.00 p.m.</b>

**Please now complete the response form which follows:**

**CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE  
NETHERTON NORTHSIDE FIRST SCHOOL**

**Your name:**

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

Parent/carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Governor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Netherton Staff Member	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resident/ Member of the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parish Councillor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other school staff	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1) Do you agree with the proposal to close Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018?

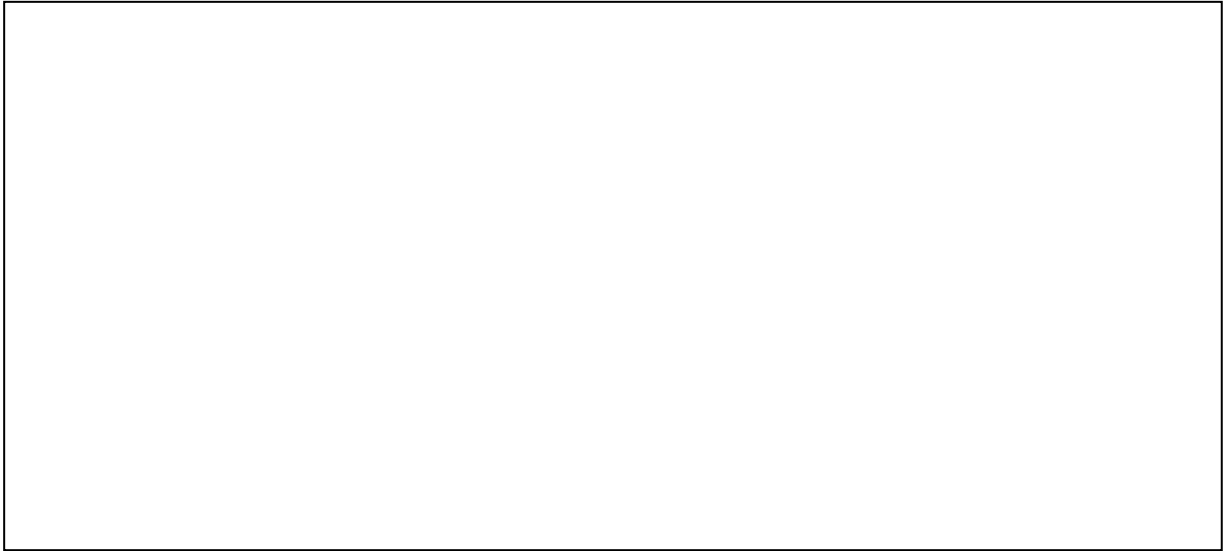
Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

2) Do you have an alternative proposal for tackling the issues faced by Netherton Northside First School that you would like the Council to consider or any further comments?

- 3) If Netherton Northside First School is approved for closure following statutory consultation at later date, which schools or schools do you think would be most appropriate to be allocated part of all of the Netherton catchment area?



**SUBMITTING YOUR RESPONSE FORM:**

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

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

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

- 2) You can return this form attached to an email**

**email [Lorraine.Fife@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Lorraine.Fife@northumberland.gov.uk)**

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

**FAO Lorraine Fife, Children's Services, FREEPOST MP135, County Hall,  
MORPETH, NE61 1BR**



# NORTHUMBERLAND

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 informal consultation 9 February – 30 March 2018, the closure of Netherton Northside First School with effect from 31 August 2018.
- This equalities impact assessment was carried out in relation to the above proposal.

2) Date of equality impact assessment:

Assessment following informal consultation process. This EIA will be refreshed and updated should Cabinet approval the publication of the statutory proposal for closure of the school on 10 July 2018.

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?)

These proposals have been brought forward by the Governing Body of Netherton Northside First School. Although the school has good standards, the roll at the school has been falling for some time and now there are only 3 pupils in the school. The Governing Body do not believe that it is in the best educational interests of the children to remain open.

It is envisaged that the implementation of the proposals would lead to improved outcomes for pupils in the Netherton area.

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  Sex - **X** Race **X** Religion **X**

Sexual Orientation **X**

People who have changed gender **X** Women who are pregnant or have babies

Employees who are married/in civil partnerships **X**

6) The characteristics checked above are not relevant because:

Should the proposal to close Netherton Northside First School be approved, the two pupils who would have remained on roll at the school on 1 September 2018 had it remained open would be affected equally by the proposal. These pupils would be offered places at other schools within the Morpeth Partnership or in accordance with parental preference .

Parents are also able to exercise their parental preference for another school subject to places being available in the selected alternative schools.

In the medium to long-term, there is no reason to believe that the proposed school closure 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. During the immediate process of transition, we would invite families to let us know if they are concerned about the impact that the change may have on the support networks for any individual children who may be at particular risk of harassment or discrimination.

Existing HR policies covering organisational change and redundancy would apply to staff employed at Netherton Northside 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**

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**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?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any member of the community with a disability would be disproportionately impacted positively or negatively should the proposal to close Netherton Northside First School be approved.

Any pupil, parent or member of staff in Netherton Northside First School who has a disability would not be affected by these proposals as any arrangements already in place to ameliorate such disability would be replicated at the alternative schools as required. No evidence has come to light during the consultation processes 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?

In the medium to long term, there is no reason to believe that the proposed school closure would affect disabled children, staff or parents more positively or negatively than their peers. In particular, the support identified through the special educational needs system would continue to be provided to all pupils who need it.

During the immediate process of transition, we would consult families about any specific potential impacts on individuals; for instance, because of loss of support networks or the need to replicate reasonable adjustments made to accommodate disabled children, and we would ensure that appropriate individual arrangements are made where this is necessary to avoid potential adverse impacts.

- 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 would be made to enable access to alternative schools, should such access not already be in place.

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

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposed closure of Netherton Northside First School 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 proposed closure of the school would increase or decrease any risk of harassment or victimisation above that which may already exist to any pupil, member of staff or member of the community with a disability.

In line with current special educational needs systems, families would be consulted about any potential issues for individual children arising from the disruption of support networks during the process of transition.

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 pupils or members of staff of Netherton Northside First School who have a disability.

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

See para. 8 above.

## **Age**

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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?

Netherton Northside First School provides education to pupils between the age of 3 and 9. Only pupils within this age ranges would be affected by the proposal.

Staff at Netherton Northside First School are employed equitably in accordance with the school's and council's employment policies. Should approval for closure of the school be given, suitable alternative employment for staff would be sought in accordance with the schools' and council's redeployment policies deal 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.)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would have any effect on the ability of different age groups to participate in public life more or less than already occurs. No evidence has arisen during consultation to would 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 pupils when they transfer to alternative schools in the local area.

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?

There is no evidence to suggest that this would increase or reduce the risk of harassment or victimisation of this group of pupils when they transfer to alternative schools. The receiving schools will have anti-bullying policies in place to ensure that any harassment or victimisation of the new pupils is dealt with effectively.

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?

It is believed that the learning experience of the pupils currently on roll at Netherton Northside First School would be enhanced from a social development perspective by transferring them to alternative schools with increased pupils numbers. The budget at Netherton Northside is now also being impacted by the falling rolls and may not be able to maintain its current teaching capacity in the near future.

### **Pregnancy and Maternity**

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

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 are employed equitably in accordance with the school's and council's employment policies. Should approval for closure of the school be given under the proposals, suitable alternative employment for staff would be sought in accordance with the schools' and council's redeployment policies on an equitable basis, including for those staff who may currently be pregnant or on maternity leave.

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would create any barriers to pupils accessing any of the schools impacted by the proposals who have a parent who may be pregnant or who has other children under 26 weeks old. No evidence has arisen during consultation that anyone within this protected group would be impacted by this proposal. However, appropriate individual arrangements to the extent possible would be made where this is necessary to avoid potential adverse impacts.

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

While other schools within the local area are within a reasonable distance of Netherton, it is likely that most children living in Netherton would be eligible for home to school transport and therefore it is not envisaged there would be no physical disadvantage or impact on pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks whose school-age child transfers to other local schools. .

No evidence has been provided that the allocation of a school place at another first within the Morpeth Partnership or other local school to a child displaced by the closure of Netherton Northside First School would cause disproportionate disadvantage to a member of this protected group. However, should evidence arise, the council would use its best endeavours to the extent possible in accordance with the Admissions Policy to seek a solution that would ameliorate such disadvantage.

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.)

There is no 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)

There is no 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?

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposal would make it more or less likely that this protected group would 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?

There is no evidence to suggest that the protected group would be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposals under the proposals.

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

See para. 22.

## **Human Rights**

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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)

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals would impact positively or negatively on the human rights of any of the protected groups identified within this EIA.

## **PART 3 – Course of Action**

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

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

From the initial analysis of the possible negative or positive impact of the proposal on groups with protected characteristics, there is no evidence to suggest that any of these groups would be disproportionately disadvantaged or advantaged 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**

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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 been updated following the informal consultation period. Should Cabinet approve the publication of the statutory proposal, the EIA would be further updated at that time. Appropriate action would be identified in the light of the consultation and where necessary, an action plan with timescales developed.

## **PART 5 - Authorisation**

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Name of Head of Service and Date Approved

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Once completed, send your full EIA to: [Irene.Fisher@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Irene.Fisher@northumberland.gov.uk). A summary will then be generated corporately and published to the Council's website.