



Northumberland County Council

Your ref:

Our ref:

Enquiries to: Karon Hadfield

Email:

Democraticservices@northumberland.gov.uk

Tel direct: 0345 600 6400

Date: 27 April 2023

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **CABINET** to be held in **COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNTY HALL** on **TUESDAY, 9 MAY 2023** at **10.00 AM**.

Yours faithfully

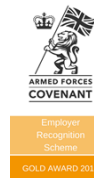
Dr Helen Paterson
Chief Executive

To Cabinet members as follows:-

G Renner-Thompson, J Riddle, G Sanderson (Chair), J Watson, R Wearmouth (Vice-Chair), C Horncastle, W Pattison and W Ploszaj



Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive
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AGENDA

PART I

It is expected that the matters included in this part of the agenda will be dealt with in public.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. MINUTES

(Pages 1
- 8)

Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 11 April 2023, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required where a matter arises at a meeting;

a. Which directly relates to Disclosable Pecuniary Interest ('DPI') as set out in Appendix B, Table 1 of the Code of Conduct, to disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote and not to remain in room. Where members have a DPI or if the matter concerns an executive function and is being considered by a Cabinet Member with a DPI they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with the matter.

b. Which directly relates to the financial interest or well being of a Other Registrable Interest as set out in Appendix B, Table 2 of the Code of Conduct to disclose the interest and only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain the room.

c. Which directly relates to their financial interest or well-being (and is not DPI) or the financial well being of a relative or close associate, to declare the interest and members may only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak. Otherwise, the member must not take part in discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room.

d. Which affects the financial well-being of the member, a relative or close associate or a body included under the Other Registrable Interests column in Table 2, to disclose the interest and apply the test set out at paragraph 9 of Appendix B before deciding whether they may remain in the meeting.

e. Where Members have or a Cabinet Member has an Other Registerable Interest or Non Registerable Interest in a matter being considered in exercise of their executive function, they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with it.

NB Any member needing clarification must contact monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk. Members are referred to the Code of Conduct which contains the matters above in full. Please refer to the guidance on disclosures at the rear of this agenda letter.

4. REPORT OF THE LEADER

(Pages 9
- 14)

Corporate Plan

This Report presents the Council's Corporate Plan for 2023-2026. The Plan builds on the progress from the previous Corporate Plan and presents a refreshed vision, and three Council priorities. This refresh takes account of the changing operating context and the recommendations of the Independent Review of Governance ('Caller Review') which reported to Full Council in June 2022. Moving forward, the three Priorities in the Plan will set the context for the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial planning process. Service planning, the performance framework, and staff appraisal process will all contribute to achieving the priorities. (Appendix A).

5. REPORT OF THE LEADER

(Pages
15 - 30)

North East Bus Service Improvement Plan

To outline the implications of the Bus Service Improvement Plan for Northumberland bus services and infrastructure (Appendix B).

The report of the Communities and Place OSC is enclosed with the report.

6. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

(Pages
31 - 100)

Financial Performance 2022-23 – Position at the end of February 2023 (Provisional Outturn 2022-23)

The purpose of the report is to ensure that the Cabinet is informed of the provisional outturn position for the Council against the Budget for 2022-23. Due to the timing of the statutory accounts deadline the forecast provisional outturn is based on the position at the end of February (Appendix C).

7. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

(Pages
101 -
114)

Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

The report summarises proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group (CSG) via email on 6 April 2023 (Appendix D).

8. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES (Pages 115 - 270)

Outcomes of the Consultation on Proposals for the Berwick Partnership

This report presents the outcomes and analysis of feedback received from stakeholders arising from Phase 2 pre-statutory consultation with stakeholders in the Berwick Partnership area approved by Cabinet on 22 October 2022. The Phase 2 consultation set out possible models of school organisation within both the current 3-tier system and within a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system. Consultation was also undertaken with stakeholders on proposals for increased specialist provision within the Berwick Partnership area and feedback and analysis arising from this aspect of the consultation is also set out in the report. Feedback received during consultation has been used to assist with the determination of the final conclusions and recommendations. Cabinet is now asked to approve the recommendation to publish statutory proposals for the implementation of a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure in the Berwick Partnership, which includes the proposed closure of some schools (Appendix E).

9. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES (Pages 271 - 306)

Public Report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

A Public Interest Report has been issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to a complaint raised by a Northumberland County Council resident in relation to the Post 16 Transport Policy.

In accordance with Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974, "The report shall be laid before the authority concerned and it shall be the duty of that authority to consider the report and, within the period of three months beginning with the date on which they received the report, or such longer period as the Local Commissioner may agree in writing, to notify the Local Commissioner of the action which the authority have taken or propose to take." Cabinet are asked to consider recommendations made to rectify council policy relating to the Post-16 Transport Policy and address any subsequent injustice to service users.

In an email dated 14/03/23, the LGSCO confirmed "we are satisfied the Council has completed the remedy action, but we cannot confirm compliance until the Council has formally considered the report." (Appendix F).

10. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS (Pages 307 - 338)

Energising Blyth Programme: Culture Hub and Market Place Outline Business Case

This report seeks the approval of the Outline Business Case (OBC) and project budget for the Culture Hub and Market Place project. This flagship project will initiate the regeneration of Blyth town centre (Appendix G).

11. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTHY LIVES (Pages 339 - 364)
The Future of the Berwick Museum and Art Collections

The purpose of the report is to agree the future housing of the Berwick Museum and Art collections in the custodianship of the Council and currently managed by Museums Northumberland within the context of the opportunities and challenges presented by The Living Barracks Initiative (Appendix H).

12. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT WELLBEING (Pages 365 - 376)
The Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund 2023/24

The report makes proposals for the allocation in 2023/24 of a Government grant for adult social care. Urgent approval of a broad approach to the use of this grant is required to comply with a grant condition requiring submission of proposals by 24 May (Appendix I)

13. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair, should, by reason of special circumstances, be considered as a matter of urgency.

IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST AT THIS MEETING, PLEASE:

- Declare it and give details of its nature before the matter is discussed or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.
- Complete this sheet and pass it to the Democratic Services Officer.

Name:		Date of meeting:	
Meeting:			
Item to which your interest relates:			
Nature of Interest i.e. either disclosable pecuniary interest (as defined by Table 1 of Appendix B to the Code of Conduct, Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest (as defined by Appendix B to Code of Conduct) (please give details):			
Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?		Yes - <input type="checkbox"/>	No - <input type="checkbox"/>

Registering Interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office you must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests)**.

"Disclosable Pecuniary Interest" means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

"Partner" means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest.

Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

5. Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in **Table 2**), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in **Table 1**) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.
8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –
- your own financial interest or well-being;
 - a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate; or
 - a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests as set out in **Table 2** you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied
9. Where a matter (referred to in paragraph 8 above) **affects** the financial interest or well- being:
- to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
 - a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise, you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Where you have an Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in the [Relevant Authorities \(Disclosable Pecuniary Interests\) Regulations 2012](#).

Subject	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. [Any unpaid directorship.]
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council — (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land and Property	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. ‘Land’ excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.
Licenses	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to the councillor’s knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body

	<p>where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to the councillor’s knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or ii. if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.
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* ‘director’ includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

* ‘securities’ means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

Table 2: Other Registrable Interests

You have a personal interest in any business of your authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- a) any body of which you are in general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority
- b) any body
 - i. exercising functions of a public nature
 - ii. any body directed to charitable purposes or
 - iii. one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)

Agenda Item 2

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the Cabinet held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 11 April 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor G. Sanderson
(Leader of the Council, in the Chair)

CABINET MEMBERS

Horncastle, C.	Riddle, J.
Pattison, W.	Watson, J.
Ploszaj, W.	Wearmouth, R.
Renner Thompson, G	

OTHER MEMBERS

Ferguson, D.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Stewart, G.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Binjal, S (Remote)	Monitoring Officer
Bradley, N.	Executive Director for Adults, Aging & Wellbeing
Hadfield, K.	Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Hunter, P.	Interim Senior Service Director
Lawler, J.	Public Health Consultant
Murfin, R. (Remote)	Interim Executive Director of Planning & Local Services
	Regeneration, Commercial & Economy
Paterson, Dr H.	Chief Executive
Roll, J.	Head of Democratic Services
Rose, J.	Interim Executive Director of Regeneration
Soderquest, P.	Service Director - Housing and Public Protection
Willis, J. (Remote)	Executive Director for Resources & Transformation (S151)

119. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 March 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

120. DISCLOSURES OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Wearmouth disclosed an interest in item 8 on the agenda (Flood and Coastal Erosion Additional Schemes), as his property was affected. He advised that he would leave the chamber whilst this matter was discussed.

121. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

Social Housing Regulation Bill

The report provided members with information relating to the Social Housing Regulation Bill, which was intended to reform the regulation of social housing. The report provided an update on the development of the Social Housing White Paper and the progress through parliament of the Social Housing Regulation Bill (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A).

The report was presented by Councillor Horncastle. He advised that the Authority had been asked by the Regulator to participate in a pilot scheme from September.

The Leader welcomed the idea of a peer review and Councillor Horncastle reported that this would be discussed with officers and a report brought back.

Councillor Riddle asked if every property would receive an energy efficiency audit. Members were advised that at the time of a new tenancy, a full energy audit was carried out for the EPC, but officers were also actively looking at how they could improve energy performance within the Council's stock and had secured grant to do that from Government.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the content of the report and future requirements and expected outcomes of the legislation when enacted; and
- (b) Cabinet agree to:

- Undertake within service a peer review exercise with an appropriate local authority or registered social housing provider.
- Receive future updates on the implementation of the Social Housing Regulation Bill and implications for Northumberland County Council.
- Receive future updates on any identified service improvements arising from in-service improvement plans, including planning and preparing for inspection, with the support of the Executive Director for Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing.
- Receive details of the named senior officer roles within the council that will be responsible for, lead and ensure compliance with health and safety and consumer standards.

122. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

Introducing services charges into the Council's Sheltered Accommodation Schemes

The report requested permission to introduce service and heating charges to all Council tenants across seven Sheltered Housing Schemes in line with those currently being charged at Arnison Close in Allendale (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B).

The report was presented by Councillor Horncastle. The report's proposals would protect the Council's HRA and would bring the Council in line with other local authorities.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) service and heating charges be introduced across those sheltered housing schemes for the reasons as set out within the report, where they are not currently applied, to ensure that all those tenants living in sheltered accommodation are paying the required charges for the services they receive, and
- (b) implementation of the newly introduced charges be rolled out on a phased basis for existing tenants and at full cost for new tenants, as set out in paragraph 12 (headed Implementation) of the report.

123. REPORT OF THE LEADER

Governance of Council Companies

The report proposed the adoption of strengthened Governance arrangements in relation to the Council's companies and the relationship between the Council and those companies. These proposals built on the principles and expectations in relation to the governance of the Council's interests in companies approved by Cabinet on 13 December 2022. The proposals also addressed recommendations of the Caller Independent Governance Review to provide the foundation for decision making and the development of a comprehensive company governance framework for companies wholly or partly owned by Northumberland County Council (NCC) and alternative delivery vehicles (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The report was presented by the Leader, which was the final report of three on this subject matter. He detailed the key points.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve the establishment of a Cabinet Shareholder Committee, the terms of reference of which were set out at Appendix A, as the Governance arrangements, being part of the development of a comprehensive governance framework, for companies that are wholly or partly owned by the Council.

124. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS

Energising Blyth: Energy Central Campus Phase 1: Learning Hub: Full Business Case

In accordance with the Energising Blyth Programme - Local Assurance Framework, the report sought the approval of the Town Deal Full Business Case (FBC) for the Energy Central Campus (ECC) Phase 1 - Learning Hub which received approval at OBC stage from Levelling Up, Housing and Community (DLUHC) and Northumberland County Council (NCC) Cabinet. The FBC had been internally reviewed with a recommendation to award a Grant Funding Agreement and proceed to project delivery and entering into the works contract. Since Cabinet approved the OBC, final project costs had increased as the works procurement process and tender price had concluded and contract terms agreed. A proposed Delivery Model was also detailed which addressed financial management, asset ownership and procurement complexities manifested by multi-organisation interest and contribution to the Energy Central Learning Hub (ECLH) (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

The report was presented by Councillor Ploszaj and he detailed the key points.

Councillor Renner Thompson supported this key project for Northumberland Skills, which was part of the wider education and industrial strategy to produce good schools and good educational attainment levels. He felt it was an exemplar project.

Councillor Ploszaj reminded members that the welding and fabrication facility right next door would be opening very soon.

Councillor Wearmouth agreed this was a very good project and would provide a pathway to all of the jobs which had been created in the Blyth Estuary for local people. The cost benefit ratio which had been identified in the report was a phenomenal achievement and the wage uplift benefits were significant.

Councillor Watson asked about the area of land for additional car parking for the site and whether this was to be a not for profit or commercial sale. Members were advised that this was not for profit arrangement as it was not currently development land.

The Leader welcomed this fantastic project and he paid tribute to all businesses who had got involved and recognised the need to upskill residents.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet approve the Full Business Case (FBC) for the Energy Central Campus Phase 1 - Learning Hub to enable a Town Deal and Northumberland County Council (as Accountable Body) Grant Funding Agreement to be entered into between the Accountable Body and Energy Central Campus Ltd;
- (b) Cabinet approve a total budget for inclusion in the Capital Programme of £13.580m Capital and £0.200m Revenue, including £4.480m from

the Energising Blyth Project Delivery Support Budget which is included in the Mid -Term Financial Plan;

- (c) authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to enter into the main construction contract relating to the project, subject to the appropriate procurement processes being followed; and
- (d) Cabinet approve the proposed Delivery Model including the following key elements:
 - (i) Northumberland County Council to be responsible for delivering the capital build of the Energy Central Learning Hub (ECLH), on behalf of the Energy Central Campus Ltd.
 - (ii) NCC to act as guarantor to the Grant Funding Agreement for Energy Central Campus Ltd to satisfy the Due Diligence requirements of the Agreement.
 - (iii) approve Northumberland County Council entering into a 'Shareholder Agreement' with the Port of Blyth and Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult (OREC) (co-founders of ECC Ltd) in order to protect the financial interests of all partners and funders given ECC Ltd landownership and in the event that ECC Ltd fails.

125. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES

Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

The report summarised proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group (CSG) via email on 3 March 2023 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

Councillor Wearmouth left the Chamber at this point.

125.1 Flood and Coastal Erosion Additional Schemes

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve a request to update the budget allocations within the Council's 2023-24 MTFP for several existing schemes as summarised in the Table at paragraph 5.10 in the report, to reflect the Environment Agency's refreshed programme and to add the new Blenkinsopp Flood Alleviation Scheme to the Council's 2023-24 MTFP. It was noted that all schemes will commence in Summer 2023 and will be fully funded by the Environment Agency except for the Hepscott Scheme, which requests a £50,000 contribution from NCC already identified in the 2022-23 Budget which will be slipped into the 2023-24 MTFP.

Councillor Wearmouth returned to the Chamber.

125.2 Riding for the Disabled Adaptations at Kirkley Hall

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve a request to allocate an additional £50,000 from the 2023-24 MTFP Capital Contract Price Inflation Budget to meet inflationary pressures for the Kirkley Hall Adaptation works originally approved by Cabinet in March 2022.

125.3 Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit Relocation

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve a request to spend £188,312 Basic Need (BN) allocation funding on refurbishment works required to the former Atkinson House SEN school buildings that will enable growth in the capacity of the Northumberland Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) to be funded from the Basic Need Grant included in the 2023-24 MTFP.

125.4 Additional Budget 2023 Highways Maintenance and Pothole Repair Funding

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve the addition of £3.872 million Central Government Funding for highways maintenance and pothole repairs to the 2023-24 capital programme and the delegation of the detailed programme of works and any subsequent in-year amendments to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Services.

125.5 Blyth Relief Road

RESOLVED that Cabinet approve a request to allocate an additional £431,214 from the 2023-24 MTFP Capital Contract Price Inflation Budget to meet inflationary pressures for the Blyth Relief Road Project; and

Cabinet authorise an amendment to the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to reflect a revised contribution from the Department for Transport's National Roads Fund of £39,783,267 to the Blyth Relief Road project.

125.6 Contracts in excess of delegated limits

RESOLVED that Cabinet authorise the award of a 1-year contract to replace windows and doors to council-owned dwellings in line with the agreed capital investment programme funded through the HRA. The estimated contract value of £1,384,792 includes the tender submission of £1,258,902 plus a contingency of 10% to allow for an early variation to include a backlog of replacement doors from the repairs and maintenance team. It is anticipated that the contract will commence in April 2023 and run until the end of March 2024 during which time around 450 homes will benefit from having timber windows and/or doors replaced with uPVC.

126. DELEGATED DECISIONS

RESOLVED that the following delegated decisions be noted (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix F):-

126.1 Decision Taken by the Interim Executive Director of Planning and Local Services: Local Transport Plan Programme 2023-24

126.2 Decision Taken by the S151 Officer and Executive Director of Transformation and Resources: Energy Central Learning Hub (ECLH) - Pre- Full Business Case (FBC) /Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) Project Expenditure

127. URGENT BUSINESS

The Leader had agreed to take one item of urgent business, which had been circulated to members (copy attached to the signed minutes). As required, agreement had also been given by the Scrutiny Chair and the Business Chair. The matter was urgent to ensure that the Northumberland Line was reopened to passenger services by summer 2024, as prescribed by the Rail Minister in confirming the Government's contribution from the Restoring Your Rail Fund to the scheme.

Report of the Cabinet Member for Business

Northumberland Line Update

The purpose of the report was to agree the funding package and revised financial profiles for the Council's contribution to the reopening of the Northumberland Line to passenger services and the construction of the bridge over the Line at Newsham Road on the A1061.

The Leader paid tribute to the work of the local MP Ian Levey, Government Ministers, North of Tyne and the Government for their support in getting this project to fruition.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet note the increased costs principally associated with the construction of the new stations along the Northumberland Line and the bridge over the line at Newsham Road on the A1061;
- (b) Cabinet add a contribution of £5.00m from North of Tyne Combined Authority, subject to their Investment Panel process in May, to the Council's capital programme in 2023/24;
- (c) Cabinet add a contribution of £7.50m from the Department for Transport to the capital programme in 2023/24 that the Council will subsequently reimburse in 2027/28 from land value capture income generated within three years of the Line reopening to passenger services;
- (d) Cabinet approve an allocation of £2.08m in 2023/24 from the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget held within the Capital Programme as a contribution to the delivery of the two schemes;
- (e) Cabinet approve an allocation up to a maximum of £2m in 2024/25 from the Capital Contract Price Inflation budget held within the Capital Programme to address the maximum funding gap associated with these two schemes;

- (f) Cabinet approve the revised financial profile for both expenditure and income to the Council's contribution to the Northumberland Line and Newsham Road Bridge as set out at Appendix 2; and
- (g) approval be delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to execute all contracts relating to the Northumberland Line project, through to entry into service, including the construction of Newsham Road bridge, subject to confirmation of associated funding being in place and the appropriate procurement processes being followed.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....



Northumberland County Council

COMMITTEE: Cabinet

DATE: 9th May 2023

Corporate Plan 2023-2026

Report of Councillor Glen Sanderson, Leader of Council

Executive Director: Chief Executive

1. Purpose of report

1.1 This Report presents the Council's Corporate Plan for 2023-2026. The Plan builds on the progress from the previous Corporate Plan and presents a refreshed vision, and three Council priorities. This refresh takes account of the changing operating context and the recommendations of the Independent Review of Governance ('Caller Review') which reported to Full Council in June 2022. Moving forward, the three Priorities in the Plan will set the context for the Council's Budget and Medium-Term Financial planning process. Service planning, the performance framework, and staff appraisal process will all contribute to achieving the priorities.

Appendix 1 document is to follow as a supplementary report to this agenda item and this will be published on 4th May.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) Recommend to Full Council the new Corporate Plan 2023-26 for adoption at its meeting of 17th May.
- (ii) Note the proposal to Full Council to receive and consider an annual Corporate Plan Achievements Report at Full Council in March each year.
- (iii) Note the proposal to Full Council to receive and consider an annual Corporate Plan Performance Report at Full Council at the conclusion of Quarter four of the performance cycle.

Link to Corporate Plan

- **Achieving Value for Money** - the Corporate Plan embeds this priority in the Council's budgeting, service planning, performance framework and individual appraisal. The Plan aims to ensure we are delivering Best Value through efficient, effective and accessible services that respond to and meet the needs and expectations of our residents.
- **Tackling Inequalities** – the Corporate Plan embeds this priority in the Council's budgeting, service planning, performance framework and individual appraisal. The Plan aims to ensure people have fair access to the building blocks of a good life.

- **Driving Economic Growth** - the Corporate Plan embeds this priority in the Council's budgeting, service planning, performance framework and individual appraisal. The Plan aims to ensure everyone can benefit a strong and sustainable economy.

3. Key issues

3.1 The redrafted Corporate Plan is an opportunity for the Council to agree a Plan which builds on previous progress, presenting a refreshed vision, and the three Council priorities. This refresh is also an opportunity to take account of the changing operating context and the recommendations of the Independent Review of Governance ('Caller Review') which reported to Full Council in June 2022.

4. Background

4.1 In its final report to Full Council in June 2022, the Independent Governance Review ('Caller Review') recommended the Council "redraft its Corporate Plan in terms of the Administration's Goals and Objectives, moderated by the capacity of the organisation and the legislative framework".

4.2 Responding to the Caller Review, the Council's Action Plan aimed to:

- To reframe and redraft the Corporate Plan setting out a more granular articulation of milestones and outcomes to achieve the Council's priorities and demonstrating more clearly the role of service performance on delivering the Council's vision.
- As part of the annual budget setting cycle, ensure a clear 'golden thread' between the Corporate Plan, spending plans (Budget), service planning and personal appraisal.
- Develop tools where Members can see how resources are translated into actions, products and outcomes.
- Engage widely with Members, partners and residents on the Corporate Plan.
- Ensure the Corporate Plan is embedded in the organisation and with Members, through communication, engagement and training.

4.3 The Corporate Plan is attached as Appendix 1 (Note: Appendix 1 document is to follow – this will be published on 4th May). The Plan outlines how, moving forward, the three key Priorities will set the context for the Council's Budget process, service planning, performance framework, and staff appraisal processes.

4.4 The Corporate Plan establishes three key Priorities for the Council:

- **Achieving Value for Money** - The Plan aims to ensure we are delivering Best Value through efficient, effective and accessible services that respond to and meet the needs and expectations of our residents.
- **Tackling Inequalities** – The Plan aims to ensure people have fair access to the building blocks of a good life.
- **Driving Economic Growth** - The Plan aims to ensure everyone can benefit from a strong and sustainable economy.

4.5 In achieving the three Priorities, we must also ensure we pass a healthy, clean and sustainable environment to future generations. Each of our three Priorities has a part to play in responding to the Climate Change Emergency. Climate Change threatens to disproportionately affect our poorest areas, and climate policies which are too

burdensome for the poorest in society could have an unwelcome effect on inequality. Net Zero is the growth opportunity of the 21st Century. Northumberland can get a huge boost from the low carbon economy, and we are already creating the foundations as we work to become carbon neutral.

4.6 As part of the Corporate Plan refresh and to ensure broader engagement and embedding, we have:

- Held two all-Member Policy Conferences held (January 11th and April 3rd), providing wider and deeper Member engagement in in the Corporate Planning process.
- Facilitated three Town and Parish Council meetings held to engage local members and listen to their local priorities.
- Undertaken numerous ‘Staff Corporate Plan Task & Finish Group’ sessions. This has ensured closer, cross-directorate involvement in Corporate Planning. This has also involved discussions on how the Corporate Plan will be translated, through detailed service plans, into the more granular articulation of milestones and outcomes as recommended by the ‘Caller Review’.
- Presented our Priorities and outcomes to the Council’s Health and Wellbeing Board and started conversations on how, as partners, we can share our respective corporate plans.
- Consulted residents and stakeholders on their priorities as part of the Council’s Budget and Corporate Planning online consultation undertaken over six weeks, December 2022-January 2023

4.7 In addition, Officers have updated the Council’s Challenge Board on the Corporate Planning process and listened to the feedback and suggestions from Board Members. As a result, we extended the planned timetable from March to May 2023 to enable more engagement. During Summer 2023, we propose further staff, partner and Member engagement. The aim of this is twofold: firstly, to ensure the Plan is embedded with Members and that they are able to hold the organisation to account for delivery and performance; and, secondly to work with staff, partners and Members to evolve our Corporate Plan into a County Plan.

Implications

Policy	The Corporate Plan sets strategic policy direction across the Council’s Services and functions and establishes the policy context for the Council’s Budget planning, service planning and appraisal process.
Finance and value for money	Whilst the Corporate Plan and this Report contain no direct financial implications, the delivery of the individual priorities will have financial implications. Any financial implications will be subject of separate reports in relation to specific priorities at the appropriate time.
Legal	The Corporate Plan forms part of the Council’s Policy Framework. Whilst the Corporate Plan and this Report contain

	<p>no immediate legal implications, the delivery of the individual priorities may have legal implications. Any legal implications arising from the delivery of priorities will be brought forward in future reports.</p> <p>The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the adoption of the Corporate Plan is a function reserved to Full Council.</p>
Procurement	NCC Procurement policy and guidance will be applied appropriately in the delivery of the Corporate Plan Priorities.
Human Resources	Officers and Members have developed a set of shared values that will underpin everything we do. It will guide the decisions we make, the way we work with each other and the difference we make in our communities. These values are the standards by which we will hold ourselves and each other to account. They are our promise to our residents.
Property	Within the 'Achieving Value for Money' priority, the Corporate Plan commits to making best use of our land and buildings by maximising their impact and running them efficiently to deliver our operational objectives.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The Corporate Plan is focused on tackling health inequalities across the County. It contains numerous commitments which will have a potentially positive impact on equalities.</p>
Risk Assessment	None at this stage.
Crime Disorder &	<p>The plan commits to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refreshing our Physical Activity Plan so that we create places that are safer for children to play and travel; • Keeping our children safe through early support, assessment and delivering our statutory functions; • Support community cohesion where our communities feel safe and have a sense of belonging; <p>Ensuring residents enjoy where they live, with clean, well maintained and safe neighbourhoods.</p>
Customer Consideration	The plan commits to make Council services more available, accessible, and easy to use by our customers. This will be

	supported by a single customer case management system that brings together in one place our customers journeys and data.
Carbon reduction	Each of our three Priorities has a part to play in responding to the Climate Change Emergency. This is set out in more detail in the Corporate Plan document which aligns with the Council's Climate Change Action Plan.
Health and Wellbeing	The Plan establishes Tackling Inequalities as one of the three key Council Priorities. The Council is committed to harnessing all its services and functions and working with partners and communities to address the factors which have the greatest influence on health and wellbeing.
Wards	All

Enclosure

Appendix 1: This is to follow and will be published on 4th May.

Background papers:

N/a

Linked documents

- Corporate Plan 2021-24
- Independent Review of Governance Final Report

Report sign off.

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

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Chief Executive
Chief Executive	Dr Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	Leader of Council

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Northumberland County Council

CABINET

TUESDAY, 9 MAY 2023

NORTH EAST BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Report of: Glen Sanderson, Leader of the Council

Lead Officer: Janice Rose, Interim Director of Regeneration

Purpose of report

To outline the implications of the Bus Service Improvement Plan for Northumberland bus services and infrastructure.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) Note the decision of the North East Combined Authority and the North of Tyne Combined Authority, acting together through the North East Joint Transport Committee to make an Enhanced Bus Partnership for the region;**
- 2) Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Regeneration, in consultation with the Executive Director of Finance (Section 151 officer), to accept the funding for bus service improvements, once confirmed, from Transport North East; and**
- 3) Authorise the creation of a Northumberland Local Bus Board as set out in Appendix 2.**

Key issues

The North East Joint Transport Committee on Tuesday 21st March 2023 agreed to formally make an Enhanced Bus Partnership. This is a key step in unlocking Bus Service Improvement Plan funding of £163.5million for the region. This funding is for financial years 2023/24 to 2024/25 with £73.5m for capital investment and £90.0m for revenue investment.

Revenue funding will be used, in part, to implement a range of new ticketing products, which will enable cheaper, simpler, multi modal and multi-operator fares, with the aim of attracting more passengers to the network. Proposed fare products specific to Northumberland residents include:

Product	Price
Under 22 singles	£1
Under 22 regionwide day ticket (multi modal)	£3
Northumberland adult day ticket (multi-operator)	£5

Further revenue funding will be used to procure new services and improved services, delivering new routes to connect communities, and improving frequencies and operating hours for existing services. Funding for service improvements in Northumberland (subject to confirmation) is expected to total £7.8m.

Overview of the Enhanced Partnership and associated Bus Service Improvement Plan funded initiatives will be facilitated by the creation of a regional Bus Board together with a requirement to establish a Local Bus Board at a Northumberland level. The Local Bus Board would not be a decision-making body but would seek to improve working arrangements for the discussion of bus service reliability, service improvements, highways infrastructure measures, fares initiatives and information to the public.

BACKGROUND

1. The National Bus Strategy was published by the Department for Transport (DfT) on 15 March 2021 and set out central government's vision and the opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered.
2. The North East Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) bid responded to the National Bus Strategy and was published in October 2021. The BSIP committed the region to the establishment of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) plan and scheme. An EP is a statutory partnership between Local Transport Authorities (LTA's) and their local bus operators and sets out how they will work together to deliver BSIP outcomes, An EP consists of two parts:
 - An EP plan – a high-level vision and objectives for bus services in the local area and closely follows or replicates relevant sections of the BSIP, setting out a clear vision of the improvements to bus services that the EP is aiming to deliver; and
 - One or more EP schemes – an accompanying document which sets out the requirements that need to be met by local services that stop in the EP area and precise detail of how the BSIP vision and objectives will be achieved, including any commitments made by the local authority or standards to be met by bus operators.
3. Making an EP is an essential step in unlocking the regions BSIP funding, failing to do so would limit the region's ability to fund and deliver improvements to bus services needed in the region. This investment is hugely important to the region and a failure to deliver an EP, and therefore BSIP, will be a missed opportunity in terms of the economic, health, social and environmental benefits they will bring.
4. An EP plan and an EP scheme have been developed by Transport North East (TNE) in partnership with LTA's and bus operators and the content of these documents have been agreed with the DfT. The partnership involves continuous engagement with all parties working together to deliver the ambitions set out in the BSIP and EP Plan, and the EP Scheme sets out obligations on local authorities and local bus operators. To that end, a North East Regional Bus Partnership Board (Partnership Board) has been established to oversee the North East EP. This Partnership Board includes representation from Northumberland County Council (NCC) Stuart McNaughton, Acting Head of Economy and Regeneration.
5. On 2 March 2023 the Leader of the Council took the delegated decision as agreed by Cabinet on 10 May 2022 and authorised Northumberland County

Councils participation in the making of an Enhanced Bus Partnership Plan and Scheme.

6. Following approval by the North East Joint Transport Committee (JTC) on Tuesday 21 March 2023 it was agreed to make the EP. This is a key step in unlocking confirmed regional BSIP funding of £163.5million. This funding is for financial years 2023/24 to 2024/25 with £73.5m for capital investment and £90.0m for revenue investment. Once funding is received, we will begin to deliver schemes which work towards the BSIP Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to improve bus patronage, modal share, performance, and customer satisfaction. The package of regional and local schemes include:

- New ticketing products, set out in the table, which will enable cheaper, simpler, multi modal and multi-operator fares, with the aim of attracting more passengers to the network;

Product	Price	Proposed Implementation
Under 22 singles	£1	May 2023
Under 22 regionwide day ticket (multi modal)	£3	May 2023
Northumberland day ticket (multi-operator)	£5	July 2023
County Durham day ticket (multi-operator)	£4	July 2023
Tyne & Wear day ticket (multi-modal)	£6	July 2023
Two-Zone day ticket (multi-modal)	£6.50	July 2023
Regionwide day ticket (multi-modal)	£6.80	July 2023

- New services and improved services, delivering new routes to connect communities and improving frequencies and operating hours for existing services. A key requirement of the funding identified sustainability as a key factor when planning interventions. To that end officers have worked extensively with operators to identify a package of interventions that have the highest likelihood of being commercially viable after the funding has ended. These interventions will form the initial phase of work. Notwithstanding these interventions, additional funding will be available to implement a package of bus service enhancements identified locally following engagement with Elected Members and Town and parish Councils. Funding for service improvements in Northumberland subject to confirmation is expected to total £7.8m to be spent between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2025. Details of the current bus network is set out in Appendix 1;

- Improved reliability and speed of buses through Bus Priority Infrastructure and Intelligent Transport Systems Investments, allowing users to rely on buses and attracting more people to use their local services. Many of these schemes are targeted in Tyne & Wear, but Northumberland bus users will benefit because of improved journey times to Newcastle and further afield;

Northumberland Highway Schemes	Description
Blyth A189 Southbound to A193 Eastbound bus lane.	Widen carriageway to provide additional bus lane to facilitate bus movement through A189 roundabout.
Cramlington Low Main Place to B1326 right turn bus lane.	Widen Road and signalise junction to facilitate right turn bus movement and provide new left turn entrance to supermarket car park in advance of junction to ease volume of traffic moving through junction.
Cramlington Dudley lane southbound bus lane at A1171 roundabout.	Widen Southbound carriageway to provide addition bus lane to facilitate bus movement through A1171 roundabout.

- Investment focused on connectivity in rural areas such as ‘on demand’ ‘demand responsive transport’ and small ‘pocket park and ride’ sites;
 - Funding to update outdated bus stops in the county to correct safety or accessibility issues that may be barriers to travel; and
 - Ensuring services run as a cohesive network, including branding and enhanced passenger information. This will be in the form of a new website and app as well as additional staffing and online information. A Code of Conduct and Bus Passenger Charter have also been agreed, ensuring that bus users and bus operators work together ahead of network changes and passengers can come to expect consistent standards throughout the network.
7. The making of the EP Plan and EP Scheme, set out an intention to formalise a governance structure to oversee the operation of the EP. A Partnership Board has been established and has been meeting in shadow form. LTAs are being asked to establish Local Bus Boards. Cabinet is requested to give approval for the creation of a member led Local Bus Board for Northumberland as set out in Appendix 2.
8. The aim of the Local Bus Board is to allow representatives from across Northumberland to meet with bus operators to increase understanding between the parties involves, specifically but not limited to, reporting and

discussion of forthcoming bus service changes in Northumberland. The Local Bus Board would seek to improve working arrangements for the discussion of bus service reliability, service improvements, highways infrastructure measures, fares initiatives and information to the public.

9. All relevant actions within the EP Scheme and EP Plan will be funded through the BSIP award, or are costs already met by Northumberland County Council. It should be noted that the EP Scheme contains a measure requiring Northumberland County Council to maintain their supported services and concessionary travel budget at the actual spend of financial year 2022/23 for the duration of the EP.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy	This approach will provide ongoing support to transport providers and support the economic recovery of the region, as well as supporting the Council's strategic objective of connecting people by provided access to education, employment, and social activities.
Finance and value for money	The North East's BSIP set out an ambitious request for Government funding for the delivery of measures relevant to bus services. Entering an EP is a requirement to receive ongoing Government funding for bus services. Future reports will be brought to Cabinet for decision making if the EP requires any financial support from the Council for specific schemes.
Legal	The overarching principle of the EP is that there are no decision-making powers aligned to the any of bodies which will make up the governance structure of the EP; and that these bodies should be focused on building consensus as to the best way to proceed on issues. Once consensus is reached on a matter, if a decision is required by, for an example, a Local Authority, the matter must be passed forward to that the Local Authority for a decision to be reached through that Local Authority's established governance. The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council.
Procurement	New/enhanced services will be contracted in accordance with existing procurement arrangements
Human Resources	None

Property	None
Equalities	(Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Implementation of the EP will assist in reducing social exclusion by improving access for the young, elderly, unemployed/low waged and people with disabilities.
Risk Assessment	The main risk associated with the programme is that any significant underspend or failure to deliver schemes that have external funding linked to them may lead to a loss of that funding and jeopardise the potential to secure additional funding in future years.
Crime & Disorder	Proposals within the BSIP, to be developed through the EP, will assist in improving safety and security for the travelling public
Customer Consideration	None
Carbon reduction	The EP will be a crucial element in providing a sustainable transport system capable of supporting Northumberland's environmental, social, and economic objectives. It seeks to reduce car dependence and increase sustainable travel, thereby contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions.
Health and Wellbeing	Improving opportunities for sustainable travel through improved bus services will encourage more activity and benefit health by improving air quality.
Wards	All wards

Background papers:

- [National Bus Strategy](#)
- [National bus strategy: bus service improvement plans – guidance to local authorities and bus operators](#)
- [Bus Partnership & Scheme – Report to Cabinet – May22](#)

Report sign off

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

	Full Name of Officer
Interim Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Resources and Transformation (S151 Officer)	Jan Willis
Interim Executive Director for Regeneration	Janice Rose
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson
Council Leader	Glen Sanderson

Report Author

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Appendix 1: Current Bus Network Update

Current commercial network

The table below shows the approximate number of boardings in Northumberland on the public bus network during the 2019/20 financial year, as illustrated there has been over 8.54m bus journeys, with English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) usage accounting for just over 40% of all journeys and fare paying passengers accounting for 60% of all journeys. During 2022/23 there has been approximately 7.26m a reduction of 1.28m journeys (15% fewer journeys) when compared to pre pandemic levels.

	Fare paying Journeys	ENCTS Journeys	Total Boardings in N/Land
2019/2020	5,100,163	3,438,968	8,539,131
2022/2023	4,643,171	2,613,616	7,256,787

In terms of service delivery Arriva North East is by far the largest public transport provider operating in Northumberland and are responsible for about 74% of all journeys undertaken on the public bus network. Go North East are the second biggest provider and account for about 12% of all journeys, the rest of the network is primarily delivered by small to medium sized operators mostly based in the North and West of the County.

The table below shows indicative revenue for operators now compared with the equivalent period during 2019/20. The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent change in travel habits, has resulted in the bus industry requiring significant local authority and government support, because farebox revenue that allows commercial bus services to make a return on costs has been significantly reduced.

Funding Stream	2019/20 Revenue	2022/23 Revenue
From Fares	61%	42%
Concessionary Travel (Local Authority)	23%	25%
Secured Services (Local Authority)	10%	12%
Bus Services Operator Grant (DfT)	6%	7%
Bus Service Support/ Recovery Grant (DfT)	0%	14%

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the bus industry has been reliant on government funding to maintain core networks, funding streams have gone through several iterations with the latest being Bus Recovery Grant this Department for Transport (DfT) funding allows bus operators to claim the difference between pre-Covid revenue and current revenue, this funding was recently extended until 30th June 2023 with funding currently planning to cease after this date. This funding has allowed operators to maintain services that would have otherwise been cancelled had the funding not been in place.

The potential loss of this funding coupled with significant operating cost increases as a result of inflation, presents risks to the commercial network, which will lead to the loss of some services and frequency reductions in other routes. The supported services funding that Northumberland County Council has secured as part of the regional Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) settlement will in the first instance be used to offset these losses.

Current supported bus network

Historically most bus routes operated in Northumberland have operated commercially without any input, subsidy, or support from Northumberland County Council. This commercial network covered approximately 70% of all registered services, providing services along those routes that were considered profitable. The remaining 30% of services are either fully or partially subsidised by Northumberland County Council and their partners, these services would not operate without the ongoing support of the council.

The supported services network currently comprise 47 routes, or parts of routes, that cover mainly rural areas of Northumberland. These supported services include instances of services running commercially at popular/peak times, but where support is given to maintain journeys at other times (early morning and late evening for example). They also include support the County Council gives to key tourist services that help boost the local economy and safeguard the environment by ensuring that people can visit notable locations without needing a car.

During 2022/23 Northumberland County Council is forecast to have a gross spend of £2.4m on the supported bus network, this expenditure will be offset by income from funding partners such as the NHS (National Health Service) and town/parish councils with net expenditure of £1.9m. This spend represents an increase on previous years due to inflationary cost pressures as part of the re-tendering of services and contraction of the commercial network leading to additional demands on the budget.

The table below lists those services that are currently supported:

Service No	Operator	Contract Description	Operation Days
773	Durham County Council	X Border contribution - Townfield - Consett	Annual Charge
815	Bellingham & Humshaugh Taxis	West and East Woodburn, Otterburn, Byrness and Rochester into Bellingham	Fri
691	N.E.E.D	Upper Coquetdale & Morpeth	Mon
680	Go North East	Hexham to Bellingham	Mon - Sat
808	Phoenix Coaches	Otterburn - Newcastle	Mon - Sat
131	Peter Hogg	Jedburgh - Newcastle via Otterburn	Mon - Sat
689	Go North East	Hexham - Slaley - Whittonstall - Ebchester - Shotley Bridge - Consett	Mon - Sat
688	Go North East	Hexham - Allenheads via Allendale	Mon - Sat
418	Travelsure	Alnwick & Belford via Coast	Mon - Sun
15	Phoenix Coaches	Thropton and Alnwick	Mon - Sat
267	Border Buses	Wooler and Berwick via Milfield	Mon - Sat
464	Border Buses	Wooler and Berwick via Lowick	Mon - Sat
Hoppa	Woods of Berwick Ltd	Berwick Town service	Mon - Sat
19	Nexus	Ashington and North Shields	Mon - Sat
AD122	Go North East	Hexham to Haltwhistle	Mon-Sun
67, 67PT	Scottish Borders Council	Berwick to Galashiels	Monthly charge
710	Glen Valley Tours	Kelso - Newcastle via Coldstream, Wooler	Sat
460	N.E.E.D	Eglingham - Alnwick	Thur
694	A.D.A.P.T	Redesmouth to Hexham	Tue + Fri
692	WAT BUS	Newbiggin Nipper	Tue + Fri
16	U.C.C.T	Rothbury and Coquetdale Circular	Tue + Thur
889	Wrights Bros	Carrshield - Hexham Tuesdays	Tues
695	A.D.A.P.T	Blanchland to Hexham	Tues
696	A.D.A.P.T	Carrshield to Hexham	Wed
266	Glen Valley Tours	Wooler & Kirknewton	Wed

406	N.E.E.D	DAR Longframlington and Alnwick	Wed
477	Border Buses	Berwick - Holy Island	Wed Sch & Mon - Sat (Non-Sch)
74	Go North East	Hexham - Newcastle Via Stamfordham, Ponteland	Mon - Fri
PC0010	N.E.E.D	DAR 1 Wooler, Whittingham and Lesbury pilot Alnwick DAR's	Tue, Thur, Fri
58 (Minimum Cost)	Phoenix Coaches	Cramlington Retail Park, East Hartford, Hartley Square, Northumbria Hospital	Mon - Sat
684	Go North East	Hexham via Wylam to Newcastle	Mon-Sat
686/X85	Go North East	Hexham to Newcastle via Corbridge, Ovingham, Prudhoe	Mon-Sat
416/417/436 (Minimum Cost)	Green Mountain Travel	Morpeth Town Service	Mon-Sat
472/473	Glen Valley Tours	Alnwick - Shilbottle - Amble Alnwick – Wooler	Mon-Sat
434 (Minimum Cost)	Phoenix Coaches	Linton - Bedlington Station (Bedlington Station - Guide Post)	Mon - Sat
X14	Arriva NE	Thropton and Morpeth	Mon - Sat
687	Go North East	Hexham to Newbrough	Mon-Sun
57A	Arriva NE	Holywell to Cramlington	Mon - Fri
681	Go North East	Alston - Haltwhistle	Mon - Sat
57A	Arriva NE	Holywell to Cramlington	Sat, Sun, and P/Hol
X15 (North)	Arriva NE	Alnwick and Berwick via Warenford	Mon - Sat
X18 (North)	Arriva NE	Alnwick and Berwick via coast	Mon - Sun
682	Go North East	Hexham - West Woodburn	Sat

The map below illustrates both the commercial and supported bus network in Northumberland:

Northumberland Public Bus Service Route Lines



Appendix 2: Northumberland Local Bus Board – Draft Terms of Reference (to be agreed at first meeting of the Bus Board)

1. Aims and Objectives

The aim of the Northumberland Local Bus Board is to allow representatives from across the county to meet with officers and bus operators (where necessary) to discuss and understand forthcoming alterations to the bus network and consider any planning work that is being carried out at both local and regional levels. Discussions may include changes to routes and timetables, punctuality, reliability, highway infrastructure, fares initiatives and public information.

2. Frequency and Conduct of Meetings

The Northumberland Local Bus Board will not be a public meeting. Attendance at Board meetings will be by invitation only and is expected to include:

- the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services
- a representative from each of the four Local Area Committees
- the Head of Economy and Regeneration
- an officer from the Local Services Transport team responsible for contract management and compliance
- a representative from the Northumberland Disability Partnership
- a representative from the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC)
- a representative from Transport Focus/Confederation of Passenger Transport
- representatives of one or more local bus operators where this is deemed necessary to address specific discussion points

The Board is not a decision-making body.

Meetings will be chaired by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services unless otherwise directed by the Cabinet Member.

The agenda for each meeting will be prepared by an officer from the Strategic Transport team in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services. A meeting note will be prepared and circulated to all attendees.

The ordinary frequency of meetings will be four times per year. It is recognised, however, that it may be necessary to arrange meetings at short notice (for example, to respond to Government announcements and associated funding opportunities). Any requests for additional meetings should be approved by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services.

Task and finish groups may be set up. These will act within the remit specified by the Board and a written report of their activity will be provided to the next meeting of the Board.

3. Procedure for reporting Bus Service Changes

The standard procedure for reporting forthcoming commercial bus service changes will be:

- An officer from the Strategic Transport team will provide a written report to the Board containing, as a minimum, commentary of any proposed changes including revisions to routes, frequencies, hours of operation and the types of vehicles used as well as their date of introduction (in accordance with the required registration process).
- These changes will be circulated to board members by e-mail and if they wish to comment they should do so by reply within seven days. The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services will arrange for a written response to be sent to bus operators' representatives (where necessary), setting out the Board's comments and requesting a response within seven days.
- Bus operators' representatives will then provide a written response to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services, which will be circulated by e-mail to the Board for further discussion.

4. Procedure for reporting matters by the Cabinet Member and attendees

The procedure for the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services to raise other matters will be:

- The Authority will provide a written report to bus operators' representatives on the matter unless the urgency of it means it must be raised verbally at the meeting.
- The bus operators' representatives will provide a written or verbal response as appropriate to be discussed by the Board. The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services will then agree a written response to be sent to the bus operators' representatives setting out the Board's comments and requesting a response to be provided by the next meeting of the Board.
- The bus operators' representatives will then provide a written response to the Board to be discussed at the next available Board meeting.

Should other Board attendees wish to raise a specific matter for discussion, they should make a request to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services, asking the Cabinet Member to consider raising the matter via the procedure above.

5. Review of Terms of Reference and Membership

The Terms of Reference and membership of the Board will be reviewed on an annual basis and approved by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Local Services.

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OSC

REPORT TO CABINET

9 MAY 2023

North East Bus Service Improvement Plan

John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Local Services presented the report to the Committee on 26 April 2023. Neil Easton, Public Transport Manager, Janice Rose, Interim Director of Regeneration and Simon Neilson, Executive Director of Place and Regeneration were also in attendance to assist with any queries from members.

Although the Committee welcomed the proposals contained in the report, members made the following comments for consideration by the Cabinet:

- support the Council's efforts in lobbying the Government to extend the funding period beyond 2024/25;
- encourage service providers to create addition space on vehicles to carry bicycles;
- with regard to recommendation 2 in the report, members agreed that the delegation should include the relevant portfolio holder, and
- with regard to recommendation 3 in the report, members agreed that the elected member representation should reflect the political balance of the Council.

The Committee further agreed to receive further reports on the implementation of the Plan as appropriate.

The Committee therefore **RESOLVED** to advise the Cabinet that it supported the recommendations subject to the above comments.

COUNCILLOR NICK OLIVER

CHAIRMAN

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Northumberland County Council

CABINET

9 May 2023

Financial Performance 2022-23 – Position at the end of February 2023 (Provisional Outturn 2022-23)

Report of Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

Executive Director: Jan Willis, Executive Director of Resources & Transformation

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to ensure that the Cabinet is informed of the provisional outturn position for the Council against the Budget for 2022-23. Due to the timing of the statutory accounts deadline the forecast provisional outturn is based on the position at the end of February.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are requested to approve:

- the new grants and amendments to existing grants at Appendix A and the required changes to the budgets.
- the following which are assumed in the forecast position:
 - Create a reserve to carry forward unspent 2022-23 Homes for Ukraine funding as per the conditions. The unspent grant is estimated at £5.026 million. It is proposed that the transfer of the final value and utilisation of this reserve is delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Section 151 Officer.
 - Create a reserve of £2.930 million for the replacement of defective street lanterns. It is proposed that the utilisation of this reserve is delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Section 151 Officer.
 - Create a reserve of £0.250 million for Parks and Green Spaces to supplement the Parks Enhancement Capital Programme. Growth was approved by the Council in the 2022-23 budget but was not utilised and schemes are now to be delivered in 2023-24. It is proposed that the utilisation of this reserve is delegated to the

Executive Director for Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Section 151 Officer.

- Create a reserve for £1.127 million for Highways Commuted Maintenance Funds received from developers for future use on the maintenance of the highway following adoption by the Council. It is proposed that the utilisation of this reserve is delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Section 151 Officer.
- the transfer of the balance of funds from the Economy and Regeneration Investment Reserve to the Regeneration Additional Capacity Reserve to be used to offset the fluctuations in external income received by the service over the medium term to provide a degree of stability for the core capacity of the service. It is proposed that the utilisation of this reserve is delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Section 151 Officer.
- the following use of the underspend:
 - Add £1.000 to the Regeneration Development Reserve to enable the continued support of the key economic work of the Council and appropriate external partners, to maximise the benefits of current and future investment opportunities.
 - Add £0.100 million to the Regeneration Additional Capacity Reserve to offset the fluctuations of external funding income over the medium term, thereby providing a degree of stability for the core capacity of the Service.
 - Add £1.017 million to the Exceptional Inflation Reserve to offset potential inflationary pressures in 2023-24.
- that any balance remaining upon finalisation of the Statement of Accounts is to be transferred to the Council's General Fund (GF).

2.2 Members are requested to note:

- the estimated net re-profiling to the Capital Programme of £14.284 million from 2022-23 to 2023-24 to reflect estimated expenditure levels in the current financial year.
- the services projected overspend of £3.091 million and the assumptions outlined in this report.
- the net forecast underspend of £2.117 million following the utilisation of the Exceptional Inflation Reserve.
- the forecast net nil impact on the General Fund following the proposed use of the underspend.
- that this forecast provisional outturn is based on the figures as at the end of February and is subject to change.

- the delivery of the approved savings at Appendix B.
- the use of the contingency shown at Appendix Q.
- the use of reserves shown at Appendix R.
- the virements requested by services shown at Appendix S.

3. Link to Corporate Plan

- 3.1 The Council's budget is aligned to the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan 2021-24 "A Council that Works for Everyone". The budget includes significant investment in each of the priorities and the overarching themes of "supporting economic recovery and growth" and "tackling inequalities".
- 3.2 Thriving: significant investment to promote economic growth in the county, including supporting local businesses in post Covid-19 recovery, capital investment to reopen the Northumberland Line and the Borderlands programme of investment in rural growth and regeneration.
- 3.3 Living, Learning: the largest proportion of the revenue budget is dedicated to this priority which includes caring for residents, supporting the most vulnerable in society, encouraging active citizens and ensuring the best education standards for children and young people.
- 3.4 Enjoying, Connecting: substantial investment is committed to protect and enhance the environment, while prioritising climate change and delivering high quality services in all communities. This includes improving parks and open spaces and keeping the county's streets and roads clean, tidy and safe.
- 3.5 How: the Council is committed to listen to and communicate with residents, businesses and partners and ensure value for money in its services. Decisions regarding the budget were taken following engagement with residents, partners and Local Area Councils, to ensure delivery on the services, facilities and improvements they value most.

4. Key issues

4.1 Overall Position

4.1.1 The report provides information and analysis on the Council's financial performance and use of resources in 2022-23. The Council set its budget for 2022-23 on 23 February 2022 and this report focuses on the financial performance to the end of February 2023 and the projected provisional outturn position at that point in time.

4.2 Inflationary Pressures

4.2.1 During the preparation of the 2022-23 budget and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) a significant sum of money was earmarked to deal with "routine inflation" and what the Council referred to as "hyper-inflation". It was anticipated that the hyper-inflation would continue for two years and money has been set aside in reserves to fund these additional costs.

4.2.3 All of the inflationary costs have now been included in the forecast position for services. Taking account of the exceptional inflation reserve the forecast position for the Council for the current year is as follows:

	£m
Forecast overspend as per services	3.091
Use of Exceptional Inflation Reserve	(5.208)
Net forecast underspend	(2.117)
Proposed use of underspend:	
Add £1.000 to the Regeneration Development Reserve to enable the continued support of the key economic work of the Council and appropriate external partners, to maximise the benefits of current and future investment opportunities	1.000
Add £0.100 million to the Regeneration Additional Capacity Reserve to offset the fluctuations of external funding income over the medium term, thereby providing a degree of stability for the core capacity of the Service	0.100
Add £1.017 million to the Exceptional Inflation Reserve to offset potential inflationary pressures in 2023-24	1.017
Net forecast impact on General Fund	0.000

4.2.4 The position at the end of June, after exceptional inflationary pressures, was a gross forecast overspend of £17.135 million and a net forecast overspend, after utilisation of the exceptional inflation reserve, of £11.927 million. In light of this forecast, the Council took urgent action in order to contain the overspend and implemented the measures outlined below:

- The normal budget approval process was suspended and all expenditure over £0.010 million was authorised by Executive Directors.
- The Council invited applications from staff for voluntary redundancy.

- There was a freeze on in-year contingency requests and the balance on the contingency was utilised to offset the inflationary increases and potential overspend.
- A Vacancy Review Panel was established where all requests to recruit to posts were considered.
- The Executive Team considered increasing fees and charges in year, however, no in year increases were deemed necessary.
- The Executive Team instructed all managers to be proactive and ensure “good housekeeping”; e.g. ensure that all of their suppliers were on the supplier incentive scheme, review contracts and request better value from their suppliers.
- The Capital Programme was reviewed, particularly in relation to contract price inflation. Following this, the cost of capital and debt charges (borrowing) were examined to establish the potential for an in-year revenue budget underspend.

The key movements from the June forecast position previously reported to Cabinet are shown in the table below:

June forecast position (after inflationary pressures and use of exceptional inflation reserve)	11.927
Treasury management forecast position following review of the Capital Programme	(1.809)
Change in net cost of pay award (largely due to DSG funding of school support staff)	(3.068)
Waste PFI underspend due to lower waste volumes and higher commodity prices from the sale of recyclable materials	(2.050)
Other changes, including the effect of deferring employment to vacant posts where possible	(0.679)
September forecast position (after inflationary pressures and use of exceptional inflation reserve)	4.321
Reduction in energy forecast	(0.519)
Reduction in pay award forecast	(0.754)
Utilisation of Family Hubs grant funding	(0.359)
Reduction in forecast support for Active Northumberland	(0.278)
Reduced forecast cost of Adult In-house services	(0.673)
Other changes	(0.204)
December forecast position (after inflationary pressures and use of exceptional inflation reserve)	1.534
Reduction in forecast support for Active Northumberland	(0.574)
General contingency underspend	(3.225)
Business rates underspend (net of reserve transfers)	(0.831)
Increase in Adult Social Care doubtful debt provision	1.514
Other changes	(0.535)
Provisional outturn position (after inflationary pressures and use of exceptional inflation reserve)	(2.117)
4.3 To date the Council has assisted residents with the cost-of-living crisis as follows:	
a. The Council at its meeting on 23 February 2022 agreed to:	
• match the Discretionary Housing Payment allocation of £0.385 million provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.	
• an additional one-off in-year credit equivalent to the weekly rent amount for residents occupying HRA residences.	

- b. Council tax energy rebates totalling £19.025 million (£150 each) were paid to 126,836 households. All eligible households were paid by 30 November 2022 either directly into their bank account, by redeeming a Post Office Voucher, or, as a last resort, by a credit to their council tax account.

In addition, the Council implemented its own Energy Rebate Discretionary scheme utilising specific funding provided by the Government to provide support to other energy bill payers not eligible under the terms of the core energy rebate scheme, and, to provide carefully targeted “top-up” payments to the most vulnerable households.

The Council’s Discretionary scheme provided support for the following cohort of households:

- Households in Council Tax Bands A to D and in receipt of Council Tax Support received a £20 top up payment. This was in addition to the £150 Council Tax rebate announced by the Government, giving them a total of £170.
- Households in Council Tax Bands E to H in receipt of Council Tax Support received a £170 payment. This was to match the total payment received by Council Tax Support claimants in Bands A to D (above).
- Households that are liable for council tax as a main residence and are not connected to the national domestic electricity grid; or, receive a supply from the national domestic electricity grid (as confirmed with the energy distribution network, including Northern Powergrid and Scottish Power), received a £400 payment.
- Households that were in receipt of a Class U council tax exemption (on the grounds of severe mental impairment) also received a payment of £150.

The Council’s Discretionary Scheme also included provision to pay occupants of registered Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) properties in Northumberland a payment of £150 but received no applications for this payment despite publicity and direct contact with landlords.

In total, 25,482 households received a payment from the Discretionary scheme with 22,684 receiving the payment into their bank account and 2,798, as a last resort, by way of a credit to their council tax account.

- c. At its meeting on 23 February 2022 Council agreed to update the Council Tax Discount policy for 2022-23 to include a hardship award of up to £200 for working age council tax support claimants. To date 19,435 awards totalling £2.416 million have been made.
- d. On 30 September 2021 the Government announced that a new Household Support Fund grant (HSF) would be made available to councils. The new grant covered the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022. The Council’s allocation was £2.480 million; £0.097 million (4% of grant allocation) covered

the cost of scheme administration, and the total amount provided directly to vulnerable households was £2.383 million (96% of grant allocation) including:

- £1.711 million was allocated to households with a child (approximately 72%)
- £0.672 million was allocated to households without children (approximately 28%)
- The average payment equated to £49.96
- The average payment to a household with a child was £46.00 - households will have received multiple payments through non-term time support
- The average payment to other households (without a child) was £63.99
- Food payments totalled £1.341 million and equated to approximately 56% of the spend
- Fuel payments totalled £0.882 million and equated to approximately 37% of the spend
- 93% of the grant has been spent on food, fuel and water, with 7% spread linked to wider essentials

On 31 March 2022 the Government announced that pensioners and families were set to benefit from the £500.000 million extension to the Household Support Fund. This grant covered the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. The Council's funding allocation was £2.480 million.

- Expenditure for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 was £2.480 million, (£2.460 million to vulnerable households and £0.020 million for administration), 35,986 awards, allocated as follows:
 - By area
 - Households with children - £1.159 million (47% of expenditure to vulnerable adults); 19,558 awards,
 - Households with pensioners - £1.146 million (47% of expenditure to vulnerable adults); 13,447 awards, and
 - Household other - £0.155 million (6% of expenditure to vulnerable adults); 2,981 awards.
 - By category
 - Food payments totalled £1.320 million; 19,524 awards,
 - Fuel, energy, water and related payments totalled £1.112 million; 15,950 awards, and
 - Other wider essential payments totalled £0.028 million; 512 awards.

On 26 May 2022, the Chancellor announced, as part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. The fund was

made available to Northumberland County Council to support those most in need. The Council's funding allocation for the period was £2.480 million.

There have been a number of changes to the guidance compared with previous schemes of the Household Support Fund. The first, is that there will be no ringfence of any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people. Also amongst the changes is a requirement for all authorities to operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis i.e residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. This has been made available through various routes including universal email access.

There is also an expectation that particular consideration is given to those groups who may not have benefitted from any of the recent cost of living support.

Summary of performance for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2022:

- £1.101 million expenditure between 1 October 2022 and 31 December 2022,
- £1.868 million committed between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023,
- £0.612 million remains uncommitted between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023.

Breakdown of performance by Household Composition for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2022

- Household Children (0-19yrs) = £0.913 million expenditure / 18,328 awards,
- Household Disability = £0.122 million expenditure / 2,444 awards,
- Household Pensioners = £0.024 million expenditure / 285 awards,
- Household Other = £0.042 million expenditure / 642 awards.

Breakdown of performance by Category of Support for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2022:

- Fuel/Energy = £0.388 million expenditure / 7360 awards,
- Food = £0.694 million expenditure / 149 awards,
- Essentials linked to Fuel/Food = £0.010 million expenditure / 285 awards,
- Other = £0.009 million expenditure / 178 awards.

Performance for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 will be calculated after the financial year end.

On 17 November 2022 in the Autumn Statement the Chancellor announced, as part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, that the Household

Support Fund would be extended from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 with a further £842.000 million of funding. Northumberland County Council will receive indicative funding totalling £4.961 million to cover the period.

The objective of the fund continues to be to provide crisis support to vulnerable households most in need of support, and to help with significantly rising living costs.

Northumberland County Council will provide the Department for Work and Pensions with a summary of how the authority plans to spend the funding during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 through an initial management information return outlining proposed grant spend and the volume of awards by 17 May 2023.

5. Projected Revenue Outturn 2022-23

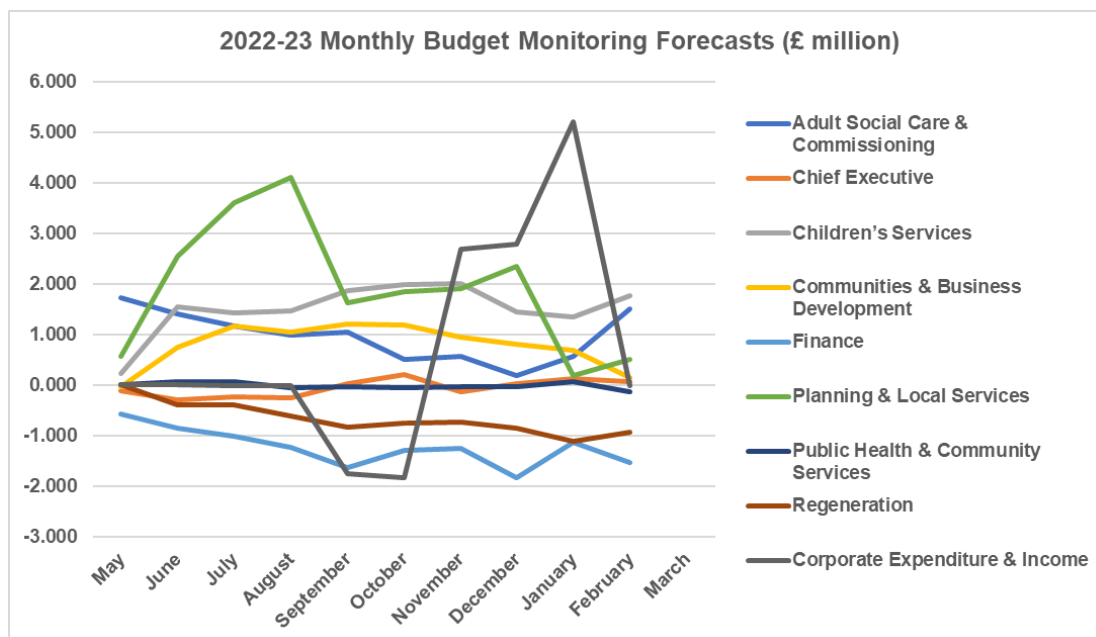
- 5.1 The Council's projected revenue outturn position, within each service area is shown in summary at Section 6 of the report (figures in brackets denote an underspend); and in detail within Appendices C - O of the report.
- 5.2 The Council's overall annual revenue expenditure is managed across a number of areas:
 - a. The General Fund with a net budget of £382.624 million, providing revenue funding for the majority of the Council's services.
 - b. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) of £150.250 million in 2022-23, which is ring-fenced for schools funding, overseen by the Schools' Forum, and managed within the Children's Services Directorate.
 - c. Public Health, a ring-fenced grant of £17.366 million in 2022-23, must be spent to support the delivery of the Public Health Outcomes Framework and is managed within Public Health and Community Services.
 - d. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) with anticipated gross expenditure budget of £38.914 million in 2022-23, is ring-fenced, and reported separately from the General Fund, and is managed within the Regeneration, Commercial and Economy Directorate.

6. General Fund

6.1 The following table provides a summary of how each Directorate is performing against the General Fund revenue budget for the 2022-23 financial year.

Service	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
	£m	£m	£m
Adult Social Care & Commissioning	113.598	115.111	1.513
Chief Executive	29.929	30.003	0.074
Children's Services	69.471	71.246	1.775
Communities & Business Development	15.829	15.971	0.142
Finance	28.016	26.485	(1.531)
Planning & Local Services	81.394	81.899	0.505
Public Health & Community Services	4.788	4.662	(0.126)
Regeneration	5.127	4.201	(0.926)
Total Services	348.152	349.578	1.426
Corporate Expenditure and Income	34.472	34.468	(0.004)
Total Net Expenditure	382.624	384.046	1.422
Budget funded by:			
Council Tax	(219.677)	(219.677)	0.000
Retained Business Rates	(74.254)	(78.590)	(4.336)
Revenue Support Grant	(10.837)	(10.837)	0.000
Other Corporate Grants	(38.450)	(38.450)	0.000
Earmarked Reserves	(14.365)	(8.360)	6.005
General Reserve	(25.041)	(25.041)	0.000
Total Funding of Services	(382.624)	(380.955)	1.669
Net Total	0.000	3.091	3.091

6.2 The following graph provides a trend analysis of the forecast outturn, by directorate over the year to date:



6.3 The Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) was made available to councils during the Covid-19 pandemic to support activities to mitigate and manage local outbreaks of Covid-19. The Department of Health and Social Care confirmed that the Council's unspent funding of £2.130 million could be carried forward to financial year 2022-23 to support the local response to living with Covid-19. The funding has been committed to activities in the following services:

Service	Funding
	£m
Adult Social Care & Commissioning	0.390
Chief Executive	0.057
Children's Services	0.742
Communities & Business Development	0.610
Planning & Local Services	0.165
Public Health & Community Services	0.166
Total COMF Allocated	2.130

The Department of Health and Social Care has confirmed that unspent funds from COMF can be carried forward to financial year 2023-24. It is anticipated that the Council will carry forward funds of £0.103 million, which is committed to continuing activities to protect vulnerable residents, harnessing capacity within local sectors, and community-based support for those disproportionately impacted.

7. Other General Fund Items

- 7.1 Appendix A is a schedule of all new grants and amendments to existing grants (capital and revenue) which the Council has been awarded during January to February 2023 and expected to be awarded during March 2023.
- 7.2 The Council at its meeting in February 2022 agreed to implement a range of savings and efficiencies totalling £9.704 million in 2022-23. A recent review of the delivery of those savings has been conducted and the results are illustrated at Appendix B.
- 7.3 Appendix Q is a schedule of all items which have been released from contingency during January to February and those expected to be released in March 2023.
- 7.4 Appendix R is a schedule of the movement in the Council's Reserves.
- 7.5 Appendix S is a schedule of virements during January to March 2023.

8. Ring-fenced Accounts - Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG)

2022-23 Budget	Gross Expenditure	Gross Income	Net Revenue Budget	Net Outturn	Variance
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Dedicated Schools' Grant	151.313	(151.313)	0.000	(1.281)	(1.281)

8.1 The DSG budget includes a revised grant allocation of £150.250 in 2022-23, plus the use of £1.063 million carried forward from 2021-22. The overall DSG surplus from 2021-22 was £4.032 million, however only £1.063 million has been confirmed for use in 2022-23. The remaining balance on the reserve has been authorised by Schools' Forum to be set aside for pressures arising in 2023-24. The DSG is forecast to underspend by £1.281 million and the details explaining the factors leading to this variance are contained within Appendix G.

9. Ring-fenced Accounts - Public Health Grant

2022-23 Budget	Gross Expenditure	Gross Income	Net Revenue Budget	Net Outturn	Variance
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Public Health Grant	17.366	(17.366)	0.000	0.000	0.000

9.1 Further details on the Public Health budget are contained within Appendix L.

10. Ring-fenced Accounts - Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

2022-23 Budget	Gross Expenditure	Gross Income	Net Revenue Budget	Net Outturn	Variance
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Housing Revenue Account	38.914	(38.928)	(0.014)	0.782	0.796

10.1 The HRA is forecast to overspend by £0.796 million and the details explaining the factors leading to this variance are contained within Appendix M.

11. CAPITAL PROGRAMME

- 11.1 The Capital Programme for 2022-23 totalling £307.356 million was agreed by full Council on 23 February 2022.
- 11.2 The Capital Programme has changed during the year as the phasing of schemes was reviewed at the end of the previous financial year with £52.001 million re-profiled from 2021-22 to 2022-23 and a mid-year review resulting in a net in-year reprofiling of £185.951 million from 2022-23 to 2023-24. In addition, further approvals totalling £15.434 million have been agreed by Cabinet for additional schemes.

11.3 The following table sets out the provisional outturn position:

Directorate	Original Budget	Approved Adjustment	Revised Budget	Expenditure to date	Forecast Expenditure	Net Variance	Over / (Under) spend	Reprofiling
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Adult Social Care & Commissioning	8.191	(4.083)	4.108	1.674	2.041	(2.067)	(1.814)	(0.253)
Chief Executive	1.999	(0.462)	1.537	0.889	1.534	(0.003)	(0.003)	-
Children's Services	24.540	(3.490)	21.050	11.868	16.003	(5.047)	(0.676)	(4.371)
Communities & Business Development	15.579	(2.870)	12.709	9.628	12.210	(0.499)	0.101	(0.600)
Finance	35.453	(16.629)	18.824	8.513	17.831	(0.993)	(0.086)	(0.907)
Planning & Local Services	47.955	1.145	49.100	38.983	48.028	(1.072)	(0.035)	(1.037)
Public Health & Community Services	28.441	(15.223)	13.218	9.071	10.010	(3.208)	(1.151)	(2.057)
Regeneration	145.198	(76.904)	68.294	39.647	54.571	(13.723)	(8.664)	(5.059)
Total Programme	307.356	(118.516)	188.840	120.273	162.228	(26.612)	(12.328)	(14.284)
Financed by:								
Capital Receipts	4.716	-	4.716					
External Grants	150.488	(57.512)	92.976					
GF Borrowing	126.982	(44.933)	82.049					
GF Revenue Contributions (RCCO)	3.437	(1.764)	1.673					
HRA Contributions (MRR & RCCO)	21.733	(14.307)	7.426					
Total Financing	307.356	(118.516)	188.840					

11.4 Year-to-date capital expenditure is £120.273 million with forecast expenditure of £162.228 million. The major areas of forecast capital investment during the year are as follows:

- i. £74.135 million invested in transport schemes including infrastructure, traffic management, integrated transport schemes and the reintroduction of the Northumberland Line.

- ii. £16.003 million invested in school buildings, including the relocation of Atkinson House.
 - iii. £4.081 million invested in fleet replacement.
 - iv. £13.277 million invested in leisure facilities including the construction of new leisure centres in Berwick and Morpeth.
 - v. £9.826 million invested in the Council's housing stock.
- 11.5 There is a net forecast underspend of £26.612 million across the 2022-23 Capital Programme comprising of £14.284 million net reprofiling from 2022-23 to 2023-24 and £12.328 million underspend. A summary of the significant variances can be found at Appendix P with an explanation of those greater than £0.250 million.
- 11.6 It is recommended that Cabinet notes estimated net reprofiling of £14.284 million from 2022-23 to 2023-24.

12. Capital Receipts

12.1 The level of Capital Receipts available to support the 2022-23 Capital Programme was estimated to be £4.716 million (£1.870 million General Fund and £2.846 million HRA). General Fund capital receipts completed in the year-to-date amount to £2.480 million and no further completions are expected in the year. The overachievement will be utilised to support the Capital Programme in 2022-23. The following table demonstrates the current position regarding asset disposals:

General Fund Asset Disposals	Actual £m
Completed and available for use in year	2.480
On the market	1.058
Terms Agreed	1.991
Contracts exchanged	0.744

12.2 The closing balance on the Capital Receipts Reserve at 31 March 2022 was £4.951 million (£4.768 million HRA). This is available to support the Capital Programme in 2022-23.

13. TREASURY MANAGEMENT

13.1 The Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2022-23 was agreed by full Council on 23 February 2022.

13.2 The following table summarises the Council's borrowing activity for the period January to February 2023:

	Previous Quarter	Movement- Feb 23	Current
Outstanding principal - at quarter end (£m)	740.401	(0.018)	740.383
Weighted average interest rate - year to date (%)	3.002	0.136	3.138
Quarter end external borrowing as % of Operational Boundary (Borrowing)	70.919	(0.002)	70.917

13.3 Whilst the Council has an overall cap on borrowing through an Authorised Limit, the Operational Boundary is where the Council would expect its borrowing to be. At the end of February 2023, the Council's external borrowing represented 70.92% of its Operational Boundary, which was approved as part of the Treasury Management Strategy for 2022-23. The Operational Boundary is only a guide and may be breached or undershot without significant concern, with borrowing driven by economic and market considerations as well as interest rates.

13.4 The following table provides an analysis by type of the borrowing activity for the period January to February 2023:

Lender Category	Repayment Type	Opening Balance	Repaid – Jan - Feb 2023	New Borrowing Jan - Feb 2023	Closing Balance
		£m	£m	£m	£m
PWLB	EIP	3.502	-	-	3.502
PWLB	Annuity	0.558	(0.018)	-	0.540
Salix	EIP	0.037	-	-	0.037
PWLB	Maturity	445.704	-	-	445.704
Other Local Authorities	Maturity	45.000	(35.000)	35.000	45.000
Other/Market	Maturity	245.600	-	-	245.600
Total		740.401	(35.018)	35.000	740.383

13.5 The following table summarises the Council's investment activity for the period January to February 2023:

	Previous Quarter	Movement - Jan – Feb 2023	Current
Outstanding principal - at month end (£m)	134.500	1.500	136.000
Weighted average interest rate - year to date (%)	3.285	0.556	3.841

13.6 The following table provides an analysis by type of the investment activity for the period January to February 2023:

Category	Opening Balance	Repaid – Jan – Feb 2023	New Investment Jan – Feb 2023	Closing Balance
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Term Deposit Banks	20.000	(20.000)	-	-
Term Deposit Building Societies	15.000	(15.000)	-	-
Term Deposit Other Local Authorities	24.500	(24.500)	10.000	10.000
Money Market Funds	60.000	(92.900)	143.900	111.000
Debt Management Office (DMO)	5.000	-	-	5.000
Notice Accounts	10.000	-	-	10.000
Total	134.500	(152.400)	153.900	136.000

13.7 New investments during the period 1 January to 28 February 2023 consisted of a £10.000 million fixed term deposit, over one and a half months, with a local authority at 3.65%.

There was a net investment of Money Market Funds of £51.000 million. The movement in the Money Market Funds represents daily deposits and withdrawals to manage cashflow.

14. Transformation Fund Reserve

14.1 The Council at its budget meeting on 23 February 2022 agreed to invest £3.000 million per annum for three years in a strategic change programme, now known as BEST programme of work.

14.2 To date a number of commitments have already been made against that fund as follows:

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Council Investment	3.000	3.000	3.000	-	9.000
Commitments to 28 February 2023	1.106	1.629	1.981	1.117	5.833
Balance Available	1.894	1.371	1.019	(1.117)	3.167

14.3 A number of projects have already been approved by the Transformation Board, including for example, Fix My Street, Living Leader and the Labman management system. In addition to this, it will be necessary to recruit to a number of fixed term roles in order that the project can progress, and the service improvements can be delivered quickly. The roles will be required for a maximum of three years and approval has been given for the estimated cost of £2.567 million.

14.4 It will also be necessary to involve a number of staff across the Council in the BEST programme of work. However, their roles within the workstreams will require a full-time commitment so it is recommended that the Transformation Fund is also used to fund the temporary backfill for those staff involved in the work. Approval has been given for the estimated cost of this, which is £0.661 million over the next three years.

14.4 It is likely that the profiling of the commitments will extend into 2025-26. Members will receive a quarterly update on the Transformation Fund balance, actual expenditure and commitments as part of the Financial Performance report.

Implications

Policy	The report provides information and analysis on the Council's financial performance against budget as set in the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022-26 which fully supports the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan 2021-24 - A Council that Works for Everyone.
Finance and value for money	The report is of a financial nature and the detail is contained within the body of the report.
Legal	There are no immediate legal implications arising from the recommendations within this report.
Procurement	There are no specific procurement implications within this report.
Human Resources	There are no specific human resources implications within this report.
Property	There are no specific property implications within this report.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached)	There are no specific equalities implications within this report.
Risk Assessment	The risks associated with the budget were considered in February 2022 and were considered to be acceptable.
Crime & Disorder	There are no specific crime and disorder implications within this report.
Customer Consideration	There are no specific customer consideration implications within this report.
Carbon reduction	There are no specific carbon reduction implications within this report.
Health & Wellbeing	The Council's budget is founded on the principle of promoting inclusivity.
Wards	All wards.

Background papers

Cabinet 8 February 2022 and Council 23 February 2022: Budget 2022-23 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022-26

Report sign off

	Name
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Section S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Jan Willis
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Richard Wearmouth

Author and Contact Details

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Directorate:	Adult Social Care & Commissioning
Grant Awarding Body:	Department of Health and Social Care
Name of Grant:	Grant to Streamline Local Authority Adult Social Care Assessments
Purpose:	This is a non-ringfenced grant contribution paid to local authorities towards implementing innovative projects developed in response to planned reforms. There are no conditions on the grant.
Value:	£148,791
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Non-Recurrent
Profiling:	March 2023

Directorate:	Children's Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Department for Education
Name of Grant:	Dedicated Schools Grant
Purpose:	The grant is paid in support of the local authority's school budget. The reduction in grant represents the Early Years Block final allocation which is based upon the January 2023 census.
Value:	£224,840
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Non-Recurrent
Profiling:	March 2023

Directorate:	Children's Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Department for Education
Name of Grant:	Early Years Experts and Mentor programme
Purpose:	Early Years support delivered by mentors to early years practitioners, leaders and the wider setting.
Value:	£12,000
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Non-Recurrent
Profiling:	March 2023

Directorate:	Children's Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Department for Education
Name of Grant:	Early Years Professional Development programme phase 3
Purpose:	Funding to ensure sufficiency and capacity to deliver continuous professional development across the Early years workforce as part of the early years education recovery plan
Value:	£23,200
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Recurrent until 2024-25, future allocations not confirmed
Profiling:	March 2023

Directorate:	Children's Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Ministry of Justice
Name of Grant:	Turnaround programme
Purpose:	Support to build the resilience of vulnerable families and to drive system change to ensure local services can identify families in need.
Value:	£62,837 2022-23 £165,405 2023-24 £165,314 2024-25
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Recurrent 2022-2025
Profiling:	December 2023 and twice yearly for future years

Directorate:	Public Health and Community Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government
Name of Grant:	Shaping Places for Healthier Lives
Purpose:	To fund projects that aim to make changes to local systems that will encourage better physical and mental health, and that will be sustained beyond the lifetime of the grant programme.
Value:	£100,020
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Non-recurrent
Profiling:	January 2023

Directorate:	Public Health and Community Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Newcastle City Council acting as Lead Authority for the One Public Estate North East Partnership
Name of Grant:	Resource Capacity Funding
Purpose:	To fund feasibility studies for two HRA sites at Foggins Yard, Rothbury and Lyndon Walk, Blyth and funding for a strategic business case for the HRA site at Lanercost Park, Cramlington.
Value:	£24,140
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Non-Recurrent
Profiling:	March 2023

Directorate:	Public Health and Community Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Northumbria Police & Crime Commissioner
Name of Grant:	Seasonal Violence Funding
Purpose:	Violence Reduction funding to contribute to Preventing Crime” and “Improving Lives
Value:	£20,000
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Non-Recurrent
Profiling:	April 2022 – March 2023

Directorate:	Public Health and Community Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Northumbria Police & Crime Commissioner
Name of Grant:	Supporting victims of ASB across the region
Purpose:	To support victims of ASB across Northumberland
Value:	£5,000
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Non-Recurrent
Profiling:	December 2022 – March 2023

Directorate:	Public Health and Community Services
Grant Awarding Body:	Public Health England
Name of Grant:	Drug & Alcohol Universal Grant
Purpose:	To support improvements in interventions to reduce drug related offending and deaths
Value:	£478,710
Recurrent/Non-recurrent:	Non-recurrent
Profiling:	January 2023

Performance against the 2022-23 savings targets is shown in the table below. The savings have been RAG rated based on the ability to meet the savings target within the year.

Directorate	Red	Amber	Green	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Adult Social Care & Commissioning	2.570	0.000	0.691	3.261
Chief Executive	0.000	0.000	0.183	0.183
Children's Services	0.503	0.000	0.979	1.482
Communities & Business Development	0.115	0.000	0.196	0.311
Finance	0.020	0.000	1.122	1.142
Planning & Local Services	0.285	0.000	2.032	2.317
Public Health & Community Services	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.004
Regeneration	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.004
Corporate	0.494	0.000	0.506	1.000
Total	3.987	0.000	5.717	9.704

Key

Red – saving not expected to be delivered in year

Amber – saving at risk of non-delivery in year

Green – saving delivered or expected to be delivered in year

Adult Social Care & Commissioning

The shortfall in savings relates to the proposed review of individual care packages. The Risk and Independence (R & I) Team, who are responsible for delivering the bulk of this saving, has been utilised to cover critical staffing shortages in care teams to deliver statutory assessments and services. The shortfall will be partially offset by underspends across other areas of Adult Services in particular within employee costs as a result of the high level of vacant posts.

Children's Services

The bulk of the shortfall in savings relates to a proposal to reduce the level of out of county placements by £0.245 million as up to six new beds in NCC residential homes were due for completion by the end of 2022-23. There was a delay in the development of the homes which means they will not be ready until 2023-24. Revenue funding for the staffing and running costs of the new beds of £0.222 million was built into the residential homes budget and will not be required during 2022-23 so will largely offset this saving.

There is a £0.350 million saving proposal in relation to additional income at Kylee House that is not expected to be delivered as originally intended within the year. The saving was based upon a significant increase to the bed price to bring it in line with other providers. The service has identified issues around retaining and recruiting staff which is impacting on their ability to open all the beds in the unit following reduced occupancy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Alternative savings are being sought recurrently and the level of shortfall is currently £0.258 million. This is offset in year by additional income from other local authorities.

Communities & Business Development

£0.045 million unachieved saving is based on Placecube creating a 10% channel shift including successful project team implementation and changing customer habits. Placecube will be implemented by April 2023 so any impact will not be realised until the next financial year when the system is embedded, and customer channel shift is evidenced.

£0.070 million unachieved saving is due to the delivery of the new vehicles for the Library Service being delayed.

Finance

£0.020 million Oracle database licence reduction saving will not be achieved in 2022-23 but will now be achieved in 2023-24.

Planning & Local Services

£0.110 million under achievement of Planning Performance Agreements. This service was introduced in 2021-22 and is very much in its infancy. Uptake of the scheme has been slower than anticipated during this market penetration phase.

£0.175 million under recovery of Pre-Application Fees. The appetite for this service has been diminishing so the service is in the process of being refreshed and relaunched. The timescale means this savings target will not be achieved in this financial year.

Corporate

It is currently forecast that £0.494 million of the £1.000 million target saving attributable to the review of the executive and senior management structure will not be achieved in 2022-23. However, the review of tiers 3 and 4 management level will identify additional savings to contribute to the shortfall. Further recurrent savings of £0.253 million have been identified from April 2023 which will contribute to this savings target, leaving £0.241 million to be identified. Progress updates will be provided within future reports.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Adult Social Care & Commissioning

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Commissioned Services	71.263	79.359	84.199	4.840
In-house Services	9.905	11.073	9.475	(1.598)
Care Management	14.304	16.496	15.275	(1.221)
Support & Other Services	7.138	6.670	6.162	(0.508)
Total Adult Social Care & Commissioning	102.610	113.598	115.111	1.513

NOTES - Predicted Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast position for Adult Social Care and Commissioning are outlined below:

- a. Commissioned Services is forecast to overspend by £4.840 million. This is predominantly due to the high level of savings target allocated to this area. Due to ongoing recruitment difficulties, the Risk and Independence (R & I) Team who are responsible for delivering the bulk of this saving are currently being utilised to cover critical staffing shortages in care teams to deliver statutory assessments and services. Some of the team moved back into their R & I roles in January with a view to gradually bringing the team back to full strength by the end of the financial year.

A review of historic adult social care debt has resulted in an increase in the doubtful debt provision of £1.514 million which is included in the forecast position.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) created a £500.000 million Adult Social Care Discharge Fund to be distributed to Local Authorities and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) in 2022-23 to prioritise approaches which free up hospital beds. The Council was allocated £1.268 million and the pooled amount from the ICB is £1.332 million. Adult Social Care will be spending on behalf of the Council and the ICB and any additional costs will be met from the fund with any projected underspend to be repaid to DHSC. It is expected that the full allocation will be utilised.

- b. In-House Services is forecast to underspend by £1.598 million. This is due to the following:
- i. Staffing-related budgets are forecast to underspend by £0.877 million. The impact of the national workforce shortage, in particular within the health and social care sector, has resulted in an increased level of vacancies across Adult Social Care;
 - ii. To ensure continuity of care within Commissioned Services, the Short Term Support Service (STSS) is providing care and support to clients where external providers do not

- have the resources to meet the level of care required. This level of service will be met from income to the STSS from the Commissioned Care budget; which in turn is included in the pressure in Commissioned Care. It is anticipated the additional income will be £0.515 million more than budget;
- iii. It is anticipated that the delay in the redesign of the telecare service will result in £0.406 million of the 2021-22 approved saving not being achieved again this financial year;
 - iv. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) made funding available to providers of Adult Social Care in 2021-22 to help with the costs of infection control and workforce retention within care settings during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council prioritised the funding in the first instance to external providers to reclaim the additional costs incurred. The level of external claims was lower than the DHSC funding and £0.245 million has now been redistributed to the Council In-House services to partly offset the cost of Covid-19 within their services; and,
 - v. There are a number of minor variations across a variety of non-staffing and income related budgets which result in a forecast underspend of £0.367 million.
- c. Care Management is forecast to underspend by £1.221 million. This is due to the following:
- i. Staffing-related budgets are forecast to underspend by £0.905 million because of vacant posts; and,
 - ii. There are a number of minor variations across a variety of non-staffing and income related budgets which result in a forecast underspend of £0.316 million.
- d. Support & Other Services is forecast to underspend by £0.508 million. This is due to the following:
- i. Staffing-related budgets are forecast to underspend by £0.237 million because of vacant posts.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Chief Executive

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Chief Executive	0.460	0.476	0.565	0.088
Fire & Rescue	14.840	17.002	17.786	0.784
Human Resources	3.520	4.750	4.207	(0.543)
Legal	3.236	2.778	2.736	(0.042)
Transformation	0.387	0.122	0.221	0.099
Policy	0.448	0.507	0.498	(0.009)
Democratic Services	2.919	2.741	2.593	(0.148)
Elections	0.889	0.546	0.510	(0.036)
Public Relations	0.855	1.007	0.887	(0.120)
Total Chief Executive	27.554	29.929	30.003	0.074

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast position for Chief Executive are outlined below:

- a. Within the Chief Executive area, expenditure of £0.259 million has been incurred in relation to the previous Chief Executive's exit package which was agreed by full Council on 27 July 2022. £0.040 million of this is being funded from the service's revenue budget, with the remaining £0.219 million funded by the Restructuring Reserve. The Council has received a refund of employers' pension contributions of £0.035 million, which has been transferred to the Restructuring Reserve.
- b. Within the Chief Executive area, expenditure of £0.218 million has been incurred in relation to the Director of Transformation voluntary redundancy payments which was agreed by full Council on 21 September 2022. £0.049 million of this is being funded from the service's revenue budget, with the remaining £0.169 million funded by the Restructuring Reserve.
- c. Within Human Resources, Learning & Organisational Development and Corporate Union there is a forecast underspend of £0.407 million as a result of vacant posts;
- d. Fire and Rescue is forecast to overspend by £0.527 million due to:
 - ii. A forecast overspend against overtime of £0.292 million which is as a result of a significant increase in operational incidents over spring/summer 2022 compounded by staffing shortages caused by sickness (both long and short term), a shortage of skills (including

Drivers and Incident Commanders) and to accommodate staff attendance at risk critical training course;

- iii. Data Lines and Communications are forecast to overspend by £0.242 million due to contractual increases; and,
- iv. Part year vacant posts and training income amounting to a £0.224 million underspend within the Community Safety Department.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Children's Services: Children's Social Care

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Adolescent Services	2.900	3.490	2.331	(1.159)
Family Placement	12.531	12.477	13.304	0.827
Purchase Budgets	8.331	8.341	10.079	1.738
Early Intervention and Prevention	4.981	6.123	5.500	(0.623)
Local Children's Safeguarding Board	0.025	0.099	(0.001)	(0.100)
Looked after Children	2.763	2.184	1.659	(0.525)
Social Work Teams	19.233	11.500	11.383	(0.117)
District Admin Offices	0.826	0.560	0.421	(0.139)
Family and Disability Services	2.638	3.115	3.321	0.206
Safeguarding Standards	1.098	1.094	0.968	(0.126)
Other Children's Services	1.828	1.739	1.674	(0.065)
Total Children's Social Care	57.154	50.722	50.639	(0.083)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast position for Children's Social Care are outlined below:

- a. The Adolescent Services budgets are forecast to underspend by £1.159 million.
 - i. The supported accommodation budget is forecast to underspend by £0.258 million due to a reduction in demand;
 - ii. There is an underspend on staffing of £0.513 million across the service due to difficulty in recruiting to cover vacancies across the team; and,
 - iii. There is an overachievement of income of £0.484 million in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- b. The Family Placement budget is forecast to overspend by £0.827 million, this is due to the following:
 - i. There is an expected overspend of £0.588 million on foster care allowances (both in-house and independent agencies) adoption allowances and special guardianship allowances; and,
 - ii. There is also an overspend of £0.164 million on other placement costs which is used to meet ad-hoc costs associated with looked after children.
 - iii. There is a forecast overspend of £0.071 million for an additional contribution required by the Regional Adoption Agency to meet the in-year deficit. This is apportioned across all the regional

authorities involved.

- c. The Early Intervention and Prevention budget is forecast to underspend by £0.623 million, this is due to the following:
 - i. There is an overall underspend of £0.574 million on staffing and £0.47 million across non-staffing across all services. Whilst there have been several vacancies contributing to this position, costs of £0.329 million have been attributed to the Family Hub grant for those staff and resources involved with the delivery of the new service model; and,
- d. The Purchase budget is forecast to overspend by £1.738 million, this is due to the following:
 - i. There is an expected overspend of £0.139 million on professional services associated with on-going court proceedings;
 - ii. There is a £1.059 million overspend on external residential care placements. The forecast includes contract inflation and a slight increase in numbers which have gone from 45 at the beginning of the year to 50 at present. There have been several short-term placements since the beginning of the year. In addition, a saving of £0.245 million was proposed for 2022-23 which will not be achieved. This was linked to the opening of new beds within residential Children's homes. However, delays to the capital programme will result in a delay in opening the new home until at least June 2023; and,
 - iii. There have been two young people in secure placements at Kylloe House Secure unit for much of the year at an additional cost of £0.555 million.
- e. There is an underspend of £0.525 million within Looked after Children, this is due to the following:
 - i. Growth was built into the budget of £0.222 million for the running costs of the new residential beds. Due to the delays in the capital programme the beds will not be available until 2023-24 and therefore the budget will not be required this year; and,
 - ii. Kylloe House secure unit is expected to underspend by £0.288 million. A saving of £0.350 million was proposed, but only £0.092 million will be achieved and alternative savings are being investigated for 2023-24. This is offset by an overachievement of income from other local authorities of £0.669 million following an increase in the daily bed price which will contribute towards an overspend on utilities of £0.146 million.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of several minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Children's Services: Education & Skills

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Director of Education & Skills	1.010	0.276	0.211	(0.065)
Curriculum & Learning	0.253	0.095	0.105	0.010
Alternative Education (Virtual Headteacher)	0.413	0.479	0.469	(0.010)
Special Educational Needs & Disability	7.172	7.829	9.834	2.005
School Organisation	39.928	10.070	9.922	(0.148)
School Improvement	0.001	0.000	0.066	0.066
Total Education & Skills	48.777	18.749	20.607	1.858

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast position for Education and Skills are outlined below:

- a. The Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) budget is forecast to overspend by £2.005 million due to:
 - i. SEND Home to School Transport has an overspend of £2.237 million for the 407 routes currently transporting 1,033 pupils and 550 escorts. Severe budgetary pressures emerged earlier in the financial year as a result of fuel price increases and driver availability, which led to a need to re-tender resulting in increased costs or additional monthly payments to assist operators. Further pressures have also arisen due to growth in the number of routes and the relocation of the Emily Wilding Davison Special School.
 - ii. There are staffing and travel underspends of £0.216 million across council funded SEND services due to several vacant posts.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Children's Services: Dedicated Schools' Grant

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Central Schools Block	2.833	2.477	2.190	(0.287)
Early Years Block	17.118	18.407	17.946	(0.461)
High Needs Block	37.252	44.316	44.300	(0.016)
Schools Block	86.493	86.113	85.596	(0.517)
Total Dedicated Schools' Grant	143.696	151.313	150.032	(1.281)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

- a. In 2022-23 the Council expects to receive Dedicated Schools' Grant totalling £151.313 million, which is ring-fenced and will be passported through to fund schools; with an element retained centrally by the Council to provide a range of support to schools. Schools that have transferred to academy status receive their funding directly from the Department for Education – this amounts to a further £124.792 million for 2022-23.
- b. The 2022-23 budget includes £1.063 million of the overall grant surplus from the previous year of £4.032 million.
- c. The Central Schools Block is expected to underspend by £0.287 million, this is due to the following:
 - i. There is an underspend of £0.244 million on the revenue contribution to capital budget. This is a historic commitment where the funding is decreasing by 25% year on year. At the end of 2021-22 contributions to a historical project at Hexham Priory special school ceased, when the funding reduces by a further 25% in 2023-24 the budget will come back into line.
- d. The Early Years Block is expecting to underspend by £0.461 million, this is due to the following:
 - i. Following receipt of the census data for January 2023 a forecast position has been included for the various early years funded streams (2/3/4-year-old provision, Disabled Access Funding and Early Years Pupil Premium). An overall underspend of £0.429 million is expected, however this includes £0.378 million which was transferred in from the EY block reserve as a contingency and has not been required in year. Much of the underspend relates to DAF or 3 and 4-year-old funding provision.
 - ii.
- e. During 2021-22 all school phases increased their reserves due to their partial closure for some pupils and the additional grant funding they have been able to access as a result of Covid-19. This excludes Trust Schools as their school balances are held separately from the main school reserve. Following indicative budget updates, the estimated position for 2022-23 shows that

schools are expecting a significant reduction in their balances of £2.949 million overall:

	Closing School Reserve	Closing School Reserve	Estimated School Reserve
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
	£m	£m	£m
Primary/First	3.641	4.092	2.715
Middle	0.862	1.023	0.624
Secondary/High	(0.383)	0.623	0.360
Special/PRU	1.330	2.439	1.529
Overall	5.450	8.177	5.228

The impact of pay awards and inflation on energy and resources has had a detrimental impact on school balances and, whilst additional funding has been announced for 2023-24, schools are expected to meet these pressures from their reserves for 2022-23. Overall, there are currently 18 schools predicting a deficit position compared to 12 schools earlier in the year. We are working closely with these schools to ensure they are working towards a sustainable budget recovery plan.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Communities & Business Development

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Customer Services	1.647	2.227	2.006	(0.221)
Registrars & Coroners	1.450	1.439	1.712	0.273
Tourism, Culture, Leisure & Heritage	12.258	8.695	8.763	0.068
Improvement & Innovation	1.391	2.149	2.215	0.066
Northumberland Communities Together	0.000	0.520	0.520	0.000
Information Governance	0.064	0.302	0.283	(0.019)
County Hall Restaurant	0.310	0.031	0.067	0.036
Complaints	0.064	0.466	0.405	(0.061)
Total Communities & Business Development	17.184	15.829	15.971	0.142

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reason for the forecast position for Communities & Business Development is outlined below:

- a. Customer Services is forecast to underspend by £0.221 million mainly due to a £0.262 million underspend on staffing vacancies within the Contact Centre and Service Centres.
- b. Registrars & Coroners is forecast to overspend by £0.273 million due to:
 - i. A £0.446 million overspend within Coroners in relation to post mortems, body storage and medical fees; and,
 - ii. A £0.331 million underspend within Registrars due to an over recovery of income from weddings.
- c. The Tourism, Culture, Leisure & Heritage Service is forecast to overspend by £0.068 million due to:
 - i. It is forecast that Active Northumberland will require financial support of £1.277 million by year end. Currently, support of £1.051 million has been committed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and in recognition of significant inflationary pressures. This contribution has been set aside within a reserve and will be drawn down at year end to partially offset the overall forecast pressure. The remaining £0.226 million shortfall is a budgetary pressure.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Finance

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Revenues & Benefits	2.428	1.544	1.088	(0.456)
Information Services	10.132	10.997	11.175	0.178
Internal Audit	0.594	0.892	0.811	(0.081)
Corporate Finance	29.787	6.284	5.853	(0.431)
Strategic Property	5.666	7.465	7.473	0.008
Procurement	0.358	0.834	0.085	(0.749)
Total Finance	48.965	28.016	26.485	(1.531)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast position for Finance are outlined below:

- a. The Revenues and Benefits Service is forecast to underspend by £0.057 million due to:
 - i. A net underspend on staffing amounting to £0.210 million due to a number of vacant posts throughout the service offset by costs relating to temporary staffing cover;
 - ii. Additional new burdens grant income of £0.682 million, mainly for the Energy Rebate Grant of £0.382 million, Business Rates Reliefs of £0.104 million and the Discretionary Housing Admin Grant of £0.093 million; and,
 - iii. A net overspend on Cost of Benefits in relation to Rent Allowance and Rent Rebate payments and claimed subsidy of £0.210 million. This forecast is due to the payments made in relation to the increased application of Supported Exempt Accommodation schemes which attract a reduced amount of subsidy.
 - iv. An underachievement of £0.193 million on recovered council tax legal costs due to the support provided by the Hardship Fund scheme which has reduced the liability of working age council tax support claimants which in turn has reduced the number of liability orders that have needed to be obtained.

- b. Information Services is forecast to underspend by £0.178 million due to:
- i. An underspend of £0.452 million due to a number of vacancies within the service which are being addressed by a recently approved staffing changes proposal. The recruitment process is now underway to appoint suitable officers to the available posts in the coming months; and,
 - ii. A £0.473 reduction in the level of income expected to be received via recharges and from external bodies following a full review.

Within the Print Unit it is proposed to create a permanent Print Assistant (Band 4) post which will be fully funded from additional recurrent income generated by the Print Unit.

- c. Corporate Finance is forecast to underspend by £0.431 million due to a net underspend of £0.318 million due to vacant posts, some of which have been filled in year.
- d. Procurement is forecast to underspend by £0.749 million due to an overachievement of procurement rebate income of £0.435 million and staffing vacancies of £0.166 million.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Planning and Local Services

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Local Services Management	27.696	24.635	24.481	(0.154)
Neighbourhood Services	10.655	12.439	13.322	0.883
Waste PFI Contract	10.146	19.734	17.784	(1.950)
Technical Services	28.435	22.903	23.914	1.011
Total Local Services	76.932	79.711	79.501	(0.210)
Planning	7.373	1.362	2.151	0.789
Corporate Health & Safety	0.275	0.321	0.247	(0.074)
Total Planning & Local Services	84.580	81.394	81.899	0.505

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reason for the forecast position for the Planning and Local Services Directorate is outlined below:

- a. Neighbourhood Services is forecast to overspend by £0.883 million.
 - i. Due to increased fuel prices, it is anticipated that vehicle fuel will be overspent by £0.276 million across all service areas;
 - ii. There is a forecast overspend of £0.461 million relation to staffing costs due to vacancies being filled by increased overtime and agency costs and waste catch up collections for the extra bank holiday. However, some of the additional costs can be attributed to increased waste collections and are offset by additional income;
 - iii. There is a forecast overachievement of income of £0.728 million. This includes overachievements in Commercial Waste of £0.610 million, garden waste of £0.073 million, NHS waste collection of £0.101 million, £0.079 million grounds maintenance and rental income across the County and bulky waste of £0.036 million. This is offset by an underachievement of fleet income of £0.102 million, market income of £0.055 million and burial income of £0.032 million;
 - iv. There is a forecast overspend of £0.323 million in relation to gas and electric which has previously been forecast centrally; and,
 - v. There are a number of other overspends including £0.281 million for vehicle/plant hire, vehicle repairs, equipment and hired services, £0.138 million due to inflationary pressures impacting on the unit costs for purchase of replacement bins and £0.170 million additional

training costs.

- b. The Waste PFI Contract is forecast to underspend by £1.950 million. This is due to lower than expected waste volumes being generated by households and forecast continuation of this trend for the remainder of the year, as well as higher commodity prices from the sale of recyclable materials which it is anticipated will deliver an in-year surplus on the recycling services adjustment.
- c. Technical Services is forecast to overspend by £1.101 million mainly due to:
 - i. Home to School Transport is forecast to overspend by £2.240 million. Significant issues have emerged around the provision of Home to School Transport as a result of fuel price increases and driver availability, with some operators being unable to fulfil contracts and the need to re-tender resulting in increased costs. Since the introduction of an inflationary uplift payment no contracts have been returned to the Council. This also includes a pressure of £0.118 million which arose from the finalisation of the routes for the current academic year and a review of the contracts in the south east of the County which has been finalised resulting in a cost increase of £0.130 million;
 - ii. Streetlighting is forecast to overspend by £0.585 million due to increases in electricity expenditure due to a 53% increase on prior year costs based on the figures provided by North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO) and the energy providers. If the Streetlighting replacement and modernisation programme had not been undertaken then the increased estimated energy consumption would have resulted in an additional £4.000 million overspend;
 - iii. Highway maintenance is forecast to overspend by £1.086 million due mainly to rising material costs, non-recoverable out of hours expenditure and increased traffic management costs;
 - iv. Network Management is forecast to underspend by £0.864 million due to an overachievement of parking charges of £0.225 million, penalty charge notices of £0.228 million, rents and leases from traders of £0.072 increased road closure fees of £0.113 million, permit fee income of £0.063 million, fixed penalty notices of £0.054 million and sample inspection fees of £0.107 million; and,
 - v. The Todstead stabilisation scheme is now due to commence April/May 2023. There was a budget for £2.500 million for a contribution to be made from revenue in 2022-23 to part finance the scheme but this will now be required in 2023-24. The underspend shown here is offset by an under-recovery in the Finance budget so has no effect on the Council's net position.
- d. Planning is forecast to overspend by £0.789 million mainly due to:
 - i. £0.800 million underachievement of planning fee income. The income budget was increased by £0.400 million as part of the 2021-22 budget setting process in anticipation of an increase to the national planning fee structure. The Planning Bill proposing the change, having been put on hold, is now subsequently progressing but it is not anticipated that this saving will be achieved in the current financial year. There has also been slippage in the submission of a large scale project which was anticipated to bring a £0.244 million fee, this is now not expected to be submitted until Autumn 2023;
 - ii. £0.175 million under recovery of Pre-Application Fees. The appetite for this service has been diminishing so the service is in the process of being refreshed and relaunched. The

timescale means this will be unlikely to achieve the savings target built into the 2022-23 budget;

- iii. £0.200 million under achievement of Planning Performance Agreements. This service was introduced in 2021-22 and is very much in its infancy. Uptake of the scheme has been slower than anticipated during this market penetration phase; and,
- iv. £0.391 million underspend on staffing due to vacancies currently within the Service and a reduction in the use of agency staff.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Public Health & Community Services

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Housing General Fund	1.062	1.171	1.199	0.028
Public Protection	2.676	3.550	3.396	(0.154)
Public Health	0.024	0.067	0.067	0.000
Total Public Health & Community Services	3.762	4.788	4.662	(0.126)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

There are no significant variances to date.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Public Health & Community Services - Public Health

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Staffing and Support Costs	0.591	1.716	1.575	(0.141)
Stop Smoking Initiatives	0.442	0.335	0.240	(0.095)
Drug & Alcohol Services	3.822	4.465	4.451	(0.014)
Sexual Health Services	2.215	2.143	2.191	0.048
0-19 Public Health Services	6.309	6.906	7.094	0.188
Integrated Wellbeing Service	1.219	1.331	1.116	(0.215)
Other Health Initiatives	2.059	2.490	2.649	0.159
Total Public Health & Community Services	16.657	19.386	19.316	(0.070)

NOTES

- a. The Council's Public Health service will receive grant funding of £17.366 million in 2022-23. This funding is ring-fenced for the provision of services to improve the health of the local population and reduce health inequalities.
- b. The terms of the main grant allow unspent allocations to be carried over into the next financial year. Public Health carried forward a reserve of £5.150 million to financial year 2022-23.
- c. The Council received an allocation of £0.171 million from the Public Health England Weight Management Services Grant in 2021-22 which was ringfenced to support the commissioning of adult behavioural weight management services. Unspent funding of £0.069 million was carried forward to financial year 2022-23.
- d. Additional one-off funding of £0.350 million was secured from Public Health England to support drug treatment crime and harm reduction activity in 2021-22. Unspent funding of £0.197 million was carried forward to financial year 2022-23 to continue the activity. An additional tranche of £0.479 million has been received in financial year 2022-23 to continue the support in this area.
- e. Funding of £0.120 million was awarded from the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government in 2021-22 to support the Heart of Blyth project with is part of the Shaping Places for Healthier Lives programme. The majority of the activity will take place this financial year and £0.108 million was carried forward to 2022-23. Additional funding of £0.100 million has been received in financial year 2022-23.
- f. Funding of £1.000 million has been received from Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group to

support joint investment in population health management interventions.

- g. The Council is contributing funding of £0.067 million to support the provision of Public Health services in financial year 2022-23.
- h. Underspends within the Integrated Wellbeing Service and demand led services will be used in year to fund initiatives to tackle health inequalities which were approved at Cabinet 13 September 2022.
- i. It is anticipated that £0.070 million will be carried forward to the reserve balance at the end of 2022-23.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Public Health & Community Services - Housing Revenue Account

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Housing Management	6.093	6.674	6.361	(0.313)
Housing Special	0.796	0.732	0.830	0.098
Repairs and Maintenance	8.241	8.572	9.354	0.782
Housing Capital Works	0.546	0.499	0.588	0.089
Other HRA Services	13.263	13.748	13.924	0.176
HRA Income	(29.923)	(30.239)	(30.275)	(0.036)
Total HRA Expenditure & Income	(0.984)	(0.014)	0.782	0.796

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast variance for the Housing Revenue Account are as follows:

- a. Housing Management is forecast to be underspent by £0.313 million due to part year vacancies and the creation of additional posts to strengthen the Estates Management Function.
- b. Repairs and Maintenance is forecast to be overspent by £0.782 million. £1.099 million relates to additional repairs and disrepairs which have involved the use of contractors and are partly due to Storm Arwen. Council Tax on void properties is forecast to overspend by £0.083 million. Transport Related Charges are forecast to overspend by £0.066 mainly due to increased fleet charge following a replacement vehicle programme. Salaries and agency staff costs are forecast to underspend by £0.390 million and insurance receipts received on fire damaged properties £0.059 million.
- c. Other HRA Services is forecast to underspend by £0.176 million. The main reasons for this are:
 - i. Depreciation charges have increased by £0.460 million following an upward revaluation of Council dwellings by the Council's external valuers;
 - ii. Interest payable on HRA borrowing has increased by £0.693 million. This is due to the Internal borrowing rates payable to the general fund, which are based on the 30-year PWLB rates and are forecast to increase from 2.1% to 4.22% following a rise in the Bank of England interest rates; and,
 - iii. Interest received on balances has increased by £0.964 million. This is due to an increase in the 3-year SONIA rate which is forecast to average at 2.29% for the current year. The budget was set at an interest rate of 0.02% following the plunge in rates in 2020-21.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Regeneration

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Economy & Regeneration	2.641	2.944	2.312	(0.632)
Executive Director of Regeneration, Commercial & Economy	0.074	0.203	0.020	(0.183)
Culture	0.000	1.418	1.390	(0.028)
Climate Change	0.099	0.562	0.479	(0.083)
Total Regeneration	2.814	5.127	4.201	(0.926)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reason for the forecast position for the Regeneration Service is outlined below:

- a. Economy and Regeneration is forecast to underspend by £0.232 million due to vacant posts within the service and the inability to recruit into posts either through a lack of applicants or having to readvertise resulting in posts being vacant for longer than anticipated.
- b. Concessionary Travel is forecast to underspend by £0.400 million. Following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions the Department for Transport has allowed local authorities to negotiate with the local travel providers regarding the reimbursement rates payable in respect of concessionary travel. The Council has been able to negotiate two fixed price deals with the two major operators for the period April 2022 to March 2023 rather than based on a reimbursement rate per journey. This has provided budget certainty for all parties as passenger numbers are yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Forecast Revenue Outturn - Detailed budget summary by Service

Service: Corporate Expenditure and Income

Summary by Service	2021-22 Outturn	Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance
Service	£m	£m	£m	£m
Corporate Items	45.504	20.299	22.100	1.801
Treasury Management	(25.168)	(23.174)	(25.023)	(1.849)
Capital Financing	87.896	37.347	37.391	0.044
Corporate Funding	(410.624)	(382.624)	(380.955)	1.669
Total Other Corporate Expenditure & Income	(302.392)	(348.152)	(346.487)	1.665

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reason for the forecast position for the Corporate Expenditure and Income is outlined below:

- a. Corporate Items is forecast to overspend by £1.801 million due to:
 - i. A forecast overspend of £4.841 million against the pay award contingency budget due to the pay award that was processed in November; along with a forecast underspend of £3.225 million against the general contingency budget to give a net overspend of £1.616 million
 - ii. A forecast overachievement of income of £0.261 million due to the balance on the NHS Partnership Agreement reserve being transferred back into revenue as it is no longer required; and,
 - iii. A forecast overspend of £0.494 million relating to unallocated savings that will not be achieved in 2022-23. However, £0.253 million of these savings will be achieved in 2023-24.
- b. Treasury Management is forecast to underspend by £1.849 million due to:
 - i. The Council's budgeted investment return for 2022-23 was £0.734 million. Due to the significant increase in interest rates in recent months, and the higher than anticipated level of balances available for investment, returns have already exceeded the budget. Based on existing investments, returns already total £1.635 million, and will likely be in excess of £2.000 million by the year end, leading to an over-achievement of income of around £1.300 million; and,
 - ii. Total external borrowing has decreased by £11.027 million, from £756.930 million at the start of the year to £745.903 million at 31 December 2022. This is due to maturing existing loans. However, taking into account future maturities and the anticipated further borrowing requirement of around £50.000 million, overall borrowing is projected to total around £775.378 million by 31 March 2023. Although savings resulting from the reduced levels of borrowing will be partly offset by the higher than expected interest rates payable on those new loans taken out within the year, it is expected to generate an overall underspend of around £0.543 million

compared to the original interest payable budget for 2022-23 of £23.527 million.

- c. Corporate Funding is forecast to overspend by £1.669 million due to:
 - i. Business Rates underspend of £4.336 million due to:
 - i. Additional Section 31 grants of £3.252 million (including £2.609 million in relation to the Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) which will be transferred to the Collection Fund Smoothing Reserve to offset the projected deficit to be distributed in relation to this scheme in 2023-24;
 - ii. Additional renewable energy income of £0.506 million, and;
 - iii. £0.578 million in relation to Northumberland's share of the national levy account surplus announced as part of the local government finance settlement.
 - ii. Earmarked Reserves overspend of £6.005 million due to:
 - i. £2.609 million transfer to the Collection Fund Smoothing Reserve in relation to CARF to offset the deficit which is to be distributed in 2023-24;
 - ii. £2.500 million due to a contribution from reserves allocated to combat the effects of Severe Weather now not being drawn down from reserves until 2023-24 when work will commence. There is a corresponding reduction in expenditure with Local Services; and,
 - iii. The budgeted transfers from the Collection Fund Smoothing Reserve of £0.342 million for Business Rates and £0.554 million for Council Tax in relation to the three-year spread of the 2020-21 deficits were not required due to the surplus from renewable energy and the levy account distribution.

Note - The difference between the figures shown in the table and the explanations above consist of a number of minor variations within each area.

Key Capital Movements by Service

Service: Adult Social Care and Commissioning – Forecast variance (£2.067) million

Summary by Project	Under/ Overspend	Reprofiling
	£m	£m
Adult Social Care Capital Fund	-	(0.100)
Disabled Facilities Grant	-	(0.072)
Person Centred Care Information System (SWIFT)	-	(0.050)
Supported Housing	(1.814)	-
Sea Lodge Wet Room	-	(0.031)
Total	(1.814)	(0.253)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast variance for Adult Social Care and Commissioning Services are outlined below:

- a. Supported Housing – The budget is no longer required as it is the intention is to use the Adult Social Care capital external funding to support the market.

Service: Chief Executive – Forecast variance (£0.003) million

Summary by Project	Under/ Overspend	Reprofiling
	£m	£m
General	(0.003)	-
Total	(0.003)	-

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

There are no significant variances to date.

Service: Children's Services – Forecast variance (£5.047) million		
Summary by Project	Under/ Overspend	Reprofiling
	£m	£m
Basic Needs Programme	-	(0.066)
Bedlington Whitley Memorial & West End First School	(0.025)	-
Children's Homes Provision	-	(0.467)
Collingwood Children's Centre	0.001	-
Darras Hall Primary New Build	(0.011)	-
Devolved Formula Capital	0.602	-
Gilbert Ward Academy – Contribution	-	(1.058)
Hexham New Build Schools (Hexham QE Site)	(1.010)	-
Kyloe House	-	(0.597)
Morpeth First School - Contribution	-	(0.057)
New Hartley Classroom - Contribution	-	(0.023)
Ponteland Secondary School & Leisure Centre	0.016	-
Port of Blyth – Welding & Fabrication Centre	(0.115)	(0.739)
RDA Relocation	-	(0.151)
Schools Building Programme (SCIP)	-	(1.038)
SCIP - Mobile Classroom Replacement Programme	-	(0.175)
Whittingham Primary School	(0.140)	-
Wise Academy – Haltwhistle Schools	0.006	-
Total	(0.676)	(4.371)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reason for the forecast variance for Children's Services are outlined below:

- a. Children's Homes Provision - £0.600 million was earmarked for the purchase of a second home in Ashington, which has now been identified and an offer accepted, but this will not complete until 2023-24.
- b. Devolved Formula Capital - Total Devolved Formula Capital allocated to projects by Schools for 2022-23 is £1.061 million, it is estimated that 90% of these projects will be complete by 31st March 2023. The overspend will be met by grant not drawn down into the capital programme.

- c. Gilbert Ward Academy (Contribution) - Department for Education have delayed the building of the Gilbert Ward Academy from September 2023 to January 2024, therefore the contribution being made to the scheme will be required in 2023-24.
- d. Kyoie House – Due to delays with Legal sign off it is now expected that the High Dependency Unit, Alder Yard Screens, Entrance Gates and Willow Yard will complete in 2023-24.
- e. Port of Blyth Welding and Fabrication Centre – The project has been delayed due to tender and material lead time. The contract value of the tender returned was lower than initial estimates. It is now estimated the project will complete in May 2023, as such the Capital Programme for 2023-24 will need to include the reprofiling set out above.
- f. Hexham New Build Schools (Hexham QE Site) – There is an underspend against the original profile due to delays in the programme. The final account is currently under negotiation and the final outcome is expected by the end of the year. It is expected that this will be under the original budget.
- g. Schools Building Programme (SCIP) - Large scale schemes that were due for completion in March 2023 have encountered delays due to lack of materials and availability of subcontractors. This significant change has resulted in SCIP being underspent in-year and requires funding to be reprofiled into 2023-24 to allow the schemes to be completed.

Service: Communities and Business Development – forecast variance (£0.499) million		
Summary by Project	Under/ Overspend	Reprofiling
Project	£m	£m
Berwick Leisure Centre	-	(0.600)
Newbiggin Sports Centre	0.101	-
Total	0.101	(0.600)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reason for the forecast variance for Communities and Business Development are outlined below:

- a. Berwick Leisure Centre – Following the administration of the main contractor (Tolent) there will be a delay in the completion of the outstanding works (car park, play park and landscaping) whilst a new contractor was found. A new contractor has been appointed to undertake the outstanding work and will commence on site on 27 March.

Service: Finance – forecast variance (£0.993) million		
Summary by Project	Under/ Overspend	Reprofiling

Project	£m	£m
Hardware Infrastructure		(0.020)
Server Infrastructure		(0.020)
Library Kiosks		(0.052)
CISCO Infrastructure		(0.553)
County Hall IT Infrastructure	0.004	
Cloud Migration		(0.152)
Office 365 Implementation	0.011	
IT Backup and Recovery		(0.100)
Alnwick Lindisfarne Site	0.181	-
Leisure Buildings – Essential Remedials	(0.101)	-
Property Stewardship Fund	(0.181)	(0.010)
Total	(0.086)	(0.907)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reason for the forecast variance for Finance is outlined below:

- a. CISCO Infrastructure – Due to delays in service delivery this scheme has been delayed and will run into 2023-24.

Service: Planning and Local Services – forecast variance (£1.072) million		
Summary by Project	Under/ Overspend	Reprofiling
Project	£m	£m
Car Park Programme~	0.015	-
Blyth Cycleway Improvement Scheme*	0.180	-
Briar Dene Surface Water Scheme	(0.093)	-
Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) – Alnwick	(0.427)	-
FCERM – Beadnell	-	(0.040)
FCERM – Berwick	(0.239)	-
FCERM – Fenwick’s Close	(0.127)	-
FCERM – Hepscott	-	(0.030)
FCERM – Ovingham	-	0.043
FCERM – Stannington	(0.040)	-
Highways Maintenance in U and C Roads and Footpaths	-	(0.268)
Local Transport Plan*	(1.496)	-
Lynemouth Bay Landfill Encapsulation	-	0.030
Members Local Improvement Schemes	(0.052)	(0.226)
Morpeth Northern Bypass	0.268	-
New DfT Challenge Fund Support Bid*	0.527	-
Next Generation Flood Resilience	-	(0.226)
Salt Barns	-	(0.090)
Seahouses Main Pier Refurbishment	0.022	-
Streetlighting Modernisation and Replacement Programme	0.038	-
Union Chain Bridge*	1.418	-
Country Parks Improvement Programme	(0.006)	-
England Coastal Path (Bamburgh to Scottish Borders)	-	(0.054)
Fleet Replacement Programme	-	0.286
Food Waste Collection and Recycling Pilot	(0.023)	-

Hirst Area Containerisation of Waste	-	(0.200)
Parks Enhancement Programme	-	(0.262)
Total	(0.035)	(1.037)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast variance for Planning and Local Services are outlined below:

- a. FCERM – Alnwick – Due to a significant funding gap in the scheme this has been deferred within the Environment Agency’s programme of works.
- b. Highways Maintenance in U and C Roads and Footpaths – The programme of works has progressed well during the financial year although a small number of schemes will be delivered in April/May.
- c. Local Transport Plan – The pressures on Union Chain Bridge and Challenge Fund Support will be accommodated from the additional funding (LTP) released from Todstead so that existing allocated LTP schemes are not affected. Schemes continue to progress on site, but it is envisaged that some schemes will commence in 2023-24 or will span the two financial years depending on commencement dates.
- d. Morpeth Northern Bypass – due to the settlement of the land acquisition claim from Persimmons (£0.175 million) and for the return of the final licenced area (£0.093 million) to the landowner. The Persimmon’s element will be covered from a transfer from the legal challenges reserve and the additional licenced area payment is to be funded from the LTP.
- e. New DfT Challenge Fund Support Bid – Steel Structures – costs have increased due to inflationary cost increases and unexpected bridge defects identified during the completion of the works.
- f. Union Chain Bridge - Further works on the scheme have identified additional work due to the age and condition of the structure. The works to reconstruct the bridge have also been more complex and time consuming than was originally envisaged, significantly prolonging the construction period. The forecast cost to complete the scheme shows a £1.418 million overspend. Whilst both the Council and Scottish Borders Council are liable for a 50/50 share of any overspend, discussions are being held with the Heritage Lottery Fund around any additional grant funding that may be available to try to reduce the additional funds required from the two Council’s.
- g. Fleet Replacement Programme – Reprofiting had previously been identified from 2022-23 to 2023-24 due to the long lead in times and the supply of vehicles still being challenging due to component and logistical issues. However, it is now anticipated that two refuse collection vehicles will be delivered in March rather than 2023-24 as previously notified.
- h. Parks Enhancement Programme – The scheme at Isabella in Blyth has commenced but schemes at Ridley Park and Prudhoe Eastwood are expected to be delivered in 2023-24.

~Construction of the new car parks at Morpeth Goosehill, Hexham Alemouth Road (Bunker site), Berwick Quayside and Amble Turner Street East has now been successfully completed. Costs of these schemes have however risen significantly compared to original estimates - Morpeth Goosehill (£0.740 million), Amble Turner Street (£0.400 million), Berwick Quayside (£0.205 million), Hexham Alemouth Road (£0.067 million). Cost increases are due to a combination of unexpected ground

conditions, delays due to encountering uncharted utilities and drainage, necessary minor design changes, national increases in construction inflation affecting material and subcontractor costs, the local government pay award and supply chain delays for some materials and equipment as part of overall national construction supply chain issues. These overspends are being funded through the Car Parks General allocation within the MTFP. Although specific allocations remain for former Alnwick Duchess site car park and Corbridge, consideration is currently being given to how to fund other remaining proposed car parks projects at Boulmer, Newbiggin and Berwick Castlegate.

*The underspend shown on Local Transport Plan will be used to fund the additional costs on New DfT Challenge Fund Support Bid and Union Chain Bridge. This is being covered from the additional funding released from Todstead so that existing allocated LTP schemes are not affected.

Service: Public Health and Community Services – forecast variance (£3.208) million		
Summary by Project	Under/ Overspend	Reprofiling
Project	£m	£m
Major Repairs Reserve	-	(0.253)
Affordable Homes	-	(0.478)
Felton (HUSK)	-	(0.163)
Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund	-	(1.163)
Green Homes – Social Housing	(1.151)	-
Total	(1.151)	(2.057)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast variance for Public Health and Community Services are outlined below:

- a. Major Repairs Reserve – Delivery of the programme has been delayed due to longer preparation time being required and access to materials as a result of Covid-19.
- b. Affordable Homes – Some of the new build programme will now be delivered in 2023-24.
- c. Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – delivery of the programme has been delayed following revisions to the scope of energy efficiency measures to be delivered within the project.
- d. Green Homes – Social Housing - This scheme is not proceeding following the suspension in working with an external partner.

Service: Regeneration – forecast variance (£13.723) million		
Summary by Project	Under/ Overspend	Reprofiling
	£m	£m
Ashington High Street Improvement Programme	-	(0.055)
Bedlington Town Centre Redevelopment Phase 1 and 2	-	(0.600)
Borderlands – Carlisle Station	-	(2.018)
Borderlands – Carlisle University	-	(0.029)
Energising Blyth Programme	-	(1.175)
Great Northumberland Forest	-	(0.200)
Port of Berwick Grant	-	(0.050)
Strategic Regeneration Projects – Ad Gefrin	-	(0.090)
Ashington Northeast Quarter Redevelopment Phase 1	0.236	-
Loan to NELEP – Fairmoor	(2.000)	-
Loan to NELEP – Ramparts Business Park, Berwick	(0.800)	-
County Hall Solar Car Port	-	1.264
Green Homes – Private Sector Housing (LAD1)	(0.282)	-
Green Homes – Sustainable Warmth Grant (LAD2)	(2.114)	-
Ground Source Heat Pumps/Solar PV	(0.121)	-
Sustainable Warmth Competition – Home Upgrade Grant Phase 1 (HUG 1)	(3.506)	-
Sustainable Warmth Grant (LAD 3)	-	(2.106)
Waste Transfer Sites – Energy Projects	(0.077)	-
Total	(8.664)	(5.059)

NOTES - Year End Variances of £0.250 million or more

The main reasons for the forecast variance for Regeneration are outlined below:

- a. Bedlington Town Centre Redevelopment Phase 1 and 2 due to the contractor (Tolent) going into administration with a new contractor currently being sought to complete the development.

- b. Borderlands – Carlisle Station due to the project being delayed by the recent Local Government Reorganisation in Cumbria.
- c. Energising Blyth Programme – The majority of the reprofiling relates to the Future High Street Fund due to delays in receiving confirmation of the funding and longer design and operator procurement processes to ensure scheme viability. The majority of the reprofiling will occur in 2023-24 with the Council expenditure forecast to take place in later years due to the constraints of when the grant must be incurred by.
- d. Loan to NELEP – Fairmoor - The requirement is currently part of a wider review. If the scheme is to proceed, then it is expected it would be funded from the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget. The requirements will be confirmed as part of the wider MTFP review.
- e. Loan to NELEP – Ramparts Business Park - The requirement is currently part of a wider review. If the scheme is to proceed, then it is expected they would be funded from the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget. The requirements will be confirmed as part of the wider MTFP review.
- f. County Hall Solar Car Port - Budget was previously reprofiled in September 2022 to 2023-24. Since this forecast position, the contractor took earlier delivery of the battery which was agreed could be installed on site early to assist with their cashflow and avoid significant double handling craneage costs. It was also agreed for drainage attenuation works to proceed in advance of the main contract works to assist with meeting the target completion date of 30 June 2023.
- g. Green Homes – Private Sector Housing (LAD1) - This project is complete and has been audited. An overpayment of grant has already been returned to BEIS to the value of £1.059 million.
- h. Green Homes – Sustainable Warmth Grant (LAD2) - This project is currently being audited with a significant underspend anticipated due to issues with Procurement delays meaning the project could not be delivered within the timescales specified by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.
- i. Green Homes – Sustainable Warmth Grant (LAD3) – An application has been submitted to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) requesting an extension to the scheme in 2023-24.
- j. Sustainable Warmth Competition – Home Upgrade Grant Phase 1 (HUG1) - The grant is to be repaid to the BEIS as the scheme was superceded by HUG2 with the Council awarded up to £12.400 million for this element.

Items approved from the Council's Contingency

The following items have been approved from the Council's contingency during January to February 2023.

Non-Recurrent Funding	2022-23	2023-24
	£	£
Alendi Consulting Ltd – strategic performance support	12,170	-
Bruton Knowes – building measured surveys	135,000	-
Wide Area Network (WAN) consultancy costs	126,000	-
Total amount drawn from Contingency non-recurrently	273,170	-

In addition, the following items are earmarked from the Council's contingency before the end of March 2023 and will be actioned once the full year's expenditure has been incurred.

Recurrent Funding Earmarked	2022-23	2023-24
	£	£
Release of Firefighters' pay award	405,340	405,340
Total amount earmarked from Contingency recurrently	405,340	405,340

Non-Recurrent Funding Earmarked	2022-23	2023-24
	£	£
Band 11 WorkSmart and Community Hub support post	64,030	-
Leisure contract – specialist legal and procurement advice	60,000	-
Consultancy fees – Interim Monitoring Officer & Director of Corporate Governance	321,120	-
Vehicle livery – return of contingency funding due to works being delayed	-99,190	-
Temporary acting up arrangements within Place & Regeneration	12,710	-
Interim Executive arrangements to continue for a further 6 months	146,590	-
Total amount earmarked from Contingency non-recurrently	505,260	-

Movement in the Council's Reserves

	Opening Balance at 1 April 2022*	Movement in Reserve	Commitments	Proposed Movement	Forecast Closing Balance at 31 March 2023
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
General Reserves/Balances					
General Fund	(70.081)	-	25.000	-	(42.081)
Total General Reserve	(70.081)	-	25.000	-	(45.081)
Ring-Fenced Reserves/Balances					
Housing Revenue Account	(29.874)	-	0.796	-	(29.078)
Major Repairs (HRA)	(10.214)	-	(1.102)	-	(11.316)
HRA Capital Investment	(2.177)	-	0.262	-	(1.915)
Total Earmarked HRA Reserves	(42.265)	-	(0.044)	-	(42.309)
Specific Reserves/Balances					
Capital Grants Unapplied	(61.304)	-	10.000	-	(51.304)
Capital Receipts	(0.183)	-	0.183	-	-
Capital Receipts - HRA	(4.768)	-	(1.306)	-	(6.074)
Total Specific Reserves/Balances	(66.255)	-	8.877	-	(57.378)

	Opening Balance at 1 April 2022*	Movement in Reserve	Commitments	Proposed Movement	Forecast Closing Balance at 31 March 2023
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Earmarked Reserves					
ADC Parks & Open Spaces	(0.009)	0.009	-	-	-
ADC Section 106	(0.046)	0.044	-	-	(0.002)
Balances held by Schools	(9.192)	8.770	(5.335)	-	(5.757)
Borderlands Energy Masterplan	(0.816)	-	-	-	(0.816)
Business Recovery Reserve	(2.322)	-	-	-	(2.322)
Cessation of NHS Partnership Agreement	(0.262)	0.262	-	-	-
Collection Fund Smoothing	(15.155)	-	13.211	-	(1.944)
Community Led Housing	(0.687)	0.073	0.015	-	(0.599)
Contain Outbreak Management	(2.130)	2.130	(0.103)	-	(0.103)
Council Commissioned Services	(8.981)	-	2.251	-	(6.730)
Council Transformation Fund	(17.902)	0.019	1.105	-	(16.778)
Council Tax Hardship & Discount Scheme	-	-	(6.588)	-	(6.588)
Dedicated Schools Grant	(4.032)	1.063	(1.347)	-	(4.316)
Economy & Regeneration Investments	(0.358)	-	0.073	0.285	-
Empty Dwelling Management Order	(0.047)	-	(0.019)	-	(0.066)
Estates Rationalisation	(7.242)	0.697	0.016	-	(6.529)
Exceptional Inflationary Pressures	(5.208)	-	5.208	(1.017)	(1.017)
FRS HMICFRS Improvement	(0.050)	-	0.032	-	(0.018)
Firefighters' Immediate Detriment	(0.250)	-	0.050	-	(0.200)
FPF Admin Grant	(0.033)	-	0.033	-	-
Food Waste	-	-	(0.058)	-	(0.058)

	Opening Balance at 1 April 2022*	Movement in Reserve	Commitments	Proposed Movement	Forecast Closing Balance at 31 March 2023
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Haltwhistle Repairs Reserve	(0.039)	-	0.025	-	(0.014)
Highways Commuted Maintenance Funds	-	-	-	(1.127)	(1.127)
Highways Maintenance Investments	(0.225)	-	-	-	(0.225)
Home for Ukraine	-	-	-	(5.026)	(5.026)
Insurance	(8.479)	-	0.200	-	(8.279)
Legal Challenge	(1.800)	-	0.792	-	(1.008)
NCC Economic Regeneration	(0.139)	-	-	(0.050)	(0.189)
Open Spaces Maintenance Agreements	(0.087)	(0.007)	-	-	(0.094)
Parks and Green Spaces	-	-	-	(0.250)	(0.250)
Planning Delivery	(0.654)	-	0.156	(0.565)	(1.063)
Problematic Empty Properties	(0.050)	0.002	0.006	-	(0.042)
Recruitment & Retention	(0.500)	0.061	-	-	(0.439)
Regeneration Additional Capacity Reserve	(0.190)	-	0.190	(0.385)	(0.385)
Regeneration Development Reserve	(2.473)	0.397	1.588	(1.000)	(1.488)
Repair and Maintenance	(0.250)	-	-	-	(0.250)
Replacement of Defective Street Lanterns	-	-	-	(2.930)	(2.930)
Restructuring Reserve	(2.000)	-	1.367	-	(0.633)
Revenue Grants	(17.333)	7.630	(1.628)	-	(11.331)
School Libraries	(0.007)	-	-	-	(0.007)
Sealodge	(0.023)	-	0.016	-	(0.007)
Section 106	(10.830)	0.003	(4.173)	-	(15.000)
Severe Weather	(7.500)	-	-	-	(7.500)
Social Fund	(2.936)	-	2.528	-	(0.408)

	Opening Balance at 1 April 2022*	Movement in Reserve	Commitments	Proposed Movement	Forecast Closing Balance at 31 March 2023
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Sports Development	(0.253)	-	(0.010)	-	(0.263)
Storm Arwen	(2.178)	1.701	0.352	-	(0.125)
Strategic Management Reserve	(48.237)	-	(2.145)	0.615	(49.767)
Transformation of the Revenues & Benefits Service	(0.215)	-	-	-	(0.215)
Violence Reduction	(0.030)	0.011	(0.020)	-	(0.039)
Winter Services	(2.000)	-	-	-	(2.000)
Women's Safety in Public Places	-	-	-	(0.020)	(0.020)
Total Earmarked Reserves	(183.150)	22.865	7.788	(11.470)	(163.967)
Total Usable Reserves	(361.751)	22.865	41.621	(11.470)	(308.735)

	Opening Balance at 1 April 2022*	Movement in Provision	Commitments	Proposed Movement	Forecast Closing Balance at 31 March 2023
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Provisions					
NNDR Appeals	(8.699)	-	-	-	(8.699)
Estates Rationalisation Project	(0.577)	-	-	-	(0.577)
Compensation Claims	(0.147)	-	0.068	-	(0.079)
Contractor Claims	(0.233)	-	(0.097)	-	(0.330)
Total Provisions	(9.656)	-	(0.029)	-	(9.685)
Total Reserves & Provisions	(371.407)	22.865	41.592	(11.470)	(289.187)

*Provisional un-audited opening balance figure

Virements January to March 2023

Directorate	Reason for Virement	Virement from	Virement to	£
There were no virements to report.				

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Northumberland County Council

CABINET

9 MAY 2023

Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group

Report of: Jan Willis, Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer

Cabinet Member: Councillor Richard Wearmouth, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

1. Purpose of Report

The following report summarises proposed amendments to the Capital Programme considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group (CSG) via email on 6th April 2023.

2. Recommendations

In relation to the matters at 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 which were considered by the Officer Capital Strategy Group, Cabinet is recommended to:

2.1 Fly Tipping Intervention Grant Award:

Accept a grant of £33,025 into the Capital Programme for 2023-24 awarded from DEFRA's fly tipping intervention fund for investment in CCTV to support fly tipping enforcement.

2.2 Northumberland Play Zones:

Approve an allocation of £300,000 from the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget within the Capital Programme for 2023-24 to support the development of a network of PlayZones across the county.

2.3 Reallocation of funding for IT Capital Schemes:

Approve the reallocation of IT capital funding to support the DeskTop Refresh Project as detailed in para 7.6 below noting no overall increase in capital spend for 2023/24.

2.4 Local Authority Housing Fund Grant Award:

- Accept a Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) grant award of £1,120,827 into the Capital Programme for 2023-24 to fund the acquisition of 12 homes.
- Approve match funding of £1,069,628 from the Council, funded from a revenue contribution of £566,400 from the Homes for Ukraine funding and £503,228 from the HRA Affordable Homes Budget as detailed in para 8.5 below.

3. Links to Corporate Plan

The Council's Capital Programme is consistent with the priorities in the Corporate Plan in particular the 'Living', 'Enjoying' and 'Thriving' priorities.

4. Background

This paper summarises reports considered by the officer Capital Strategy Group on the allocation of funding within the Medium Term Plan to specific projects.

SUMMARY OF NEW CAPITAL PROPOSALS CONSIDERED BY OFFICER CAPITAL STRATEGY GROUP VIA EMAIL ON 6 APRIL 2023.

5. Fly Tipping Intervention Grant Award

- 5.1 CSG was asked to consider a request to accept a grant of £33,025 into the Capital Programme for 2023-24 awarded from DEFRA's fly tipping intervention fund for investment in CCTV to support fly tipping enforcement.

Background

- 5.2 Fly-Tipping in the towns of Ashington and Blyth. account for the main percentage of reports in the County. A breakdown of the issues shows that 2,413 of the 2,776 reports in 2022 occurred in these areas. The dumped items were household waste ranging from fridges and sofas to bagged food and general rubbish.
- 5.3 The areas which are problematic are older housing estates with back lanes which have high walls on each side providing many opportunities for the dumping of waste without detection. They are also the more deprived areas of the County where residents struggle to provide their own transport to dispose of their larger waste items lawfully.
- 5.4 The award was confirmed on 13th March 2023 to be used for the deployment of CCTV in hotspot areas to facilitate the identification of fly tippers and act as a deterrent.

6. Northumberland Play Zones

- 6.1 CSG was asked to consider a request to allocate £300,000 from the Strategic Regeneration Projects budget within the Capital Programme for 2023-24 to support the development of a network of PlayZones across the county.

Background

- 6.2 Bringing together investment via the Football Foundation from the Premier League, The FA and the Government through Sport England, the PlayZones Programme aims to engage with local communities across the country to create outstanding sports and activity spaces and tackle inequalities in participation.
- 6.3 It is targeted in the first instance to the 25 areas, including Northumberland, previously shortlisted through the Active Through Football Programme. The rationale for this is to focus investment and resource into communities with

the greatest need. Priority groups across the country face stubborn inequalities in activity levels and access to sports facilities. As a result of the Covid-19 impact, this inequalities gap has widened further. The Programme therefore aims to offer safe and inclusive facilities that will help local communities overcome these challenges. The priority groups are as follows:

- Low Social Economic Groups
- Women and Girls
- Disabled and Long-Term Health Conditions
- Ethnically Diverse Communities

6.4 Community Engagement is at the heart of this programme. Facilities will be designed in partnership with local communities to ensure that the final design and surface works for football and other sports and activities identified for that area. Activation and management of the space is as important as the facility itself. PlayZones will be available for community use day and night, all year round.

6.5 The Football Foundation aims to deliver 330 PlayZones by 2025 via a portfolio-based approach with each application expected to consist of multiple sites. Although the investment is football-led, PlayZones are designed not only for recreational football, including Premier League Kicks, FA Weetabix Wildcats and walking football programmes, but a whole host of other sports and activities, from basketball to netball, rugby, hockey, cricket and more.

6.6 The cost of each facility depends on various factors including specification and site conditions. However, it is broadly estimated that a new build facility will cost around £350,000, with lower costs for refurbishing existing spaces. For each Play Zone, a minimum partnership funding contribution of 25% of the total capital cost across the portfolio of facilities is required.

6.7 In terms of outcomes, each successful application will be measured against two key outcomes:

- Increased physical activity levels in priority groups using PlayZones
- Behaviour change leading to improved and sustained long-term physical activity habits

Approach adopted in Northumberland

6.8 In July 2022, NCC submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) to Sport England detailing 11 communities in areas of Northumberland where a PlayZone had a high chance of being developed. The EOI took into consideration:

- Demographics of target audience
- Mapping of facilities available to target audience.
- Potential site to be developed either as refurbishment or new build

- Interest from stakeholders in response to widespread communication to all Town and Parish Councils and Elected Members and Community Networks and a series of workshops delivered.
- 6.9 In October 2022, Sport England confirmed that the EOI had been accepted and as such, the Council was invited to submit a full application, confirming all aspects of the bid, by 14 April 2023. It was also made clear that a further bidding round would be undertaken with a deadline of 14 October 2023, before the Programme is opened up to all local authorities / organisations in the country.
- 6.10 Over the past six months, extensive community engagement with key stakeholder organisations and Elected Members have been held in each community to identify preferred and potential sites. As part of this work, additional locations were revisited with the portfolio of possible PlayZones across the county rising to 16. Feasible sites in each community were identified at each location.
- 6.11 For each potential site, the Football Foundation will conduct site surveys to produce options of design that will be matched with the results from the community engagement on the sports and activities that community requires. This process will generate accurate capital build and indicative maintenance costs. Until these surveys are complete, all costings are based on predicted costs provided by Sport England. All costs tend to be on the higher end of prediction to reduce risk of insufficient match funding.
- 6.12 Whilst each PlayZone is a fantastic asset to the community, they require ongoing maintenance. As a result, consistent with the Programme, the Council is encouraging lead organisations or consortiums within the community to assume responsibility for the subsequent maintenance and management of the PlayZones.
- 6.13 For Council-owned sites, both Strategic Estates and Neighbourhood Service have been involved in agreeing the local arrangements, whilst on other sites, the owner has approved the proposed scheme. In addition, planning officers have been consulted to highlight any potential planning concerns ahead of full Planning Application being submitted and no major concerns have been raised at this stage.

Phasing

- 6.14 In order to maximise their success rate, the Council is taking a two-phased approach to its applications with potential PlayZones prioritised based on their ability to meet all criteria in time for the first deadline of 14 April 2023. Match funding is already in place for this first phase covering sites at Alwick, Amble, Newbiggin, Ashington, Bedlington, Hexham, West Wylam and Choppington. These largely relate to existing Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) which need upgrading and/or the insertion of floodlights.

- 6.15 A further potential 8 facilities are being explored for Phase 2 including sites at Haltwhistle, Seaton Valley, Berwick, Cramlington, Wooler, Blyth, Lynmouth and East Bedlington. Some of these, as yet, do not have a site or lead organisation identified but there is sufficient interest and reason to be optimistic. Equally, more work is required to exploit all the potential opportunities for match funding.
- 6.16 In order to enable Phase 2 to be progressed, a match funding allocation of £300,000 is being sought with specific amounts for each site being confirmed in a later paper once detailed designs and costs have been received and further consultation carried out with interested stakeholders and partners. The number of sites ultimately taken forward will depend on costs for individual sites and our ability to identify other match funding sources.

7. Reallocation of funding for IT Capital Schemes

- 7.1 CSG was asked to consider a request to reallocate capital funding across several IT budget categories as detailed below to support the DeskTop Refresh Programme.

Background

- 7.2 The DeskTop Refresh (DTR) scheme is a capital programme to replace our desktops and laptops to ensure that our staff are using devices that are secure, in warranty and perform reliably and reduce ongoing support, repair and replacement costs. Devices typically reach end of life after 3-4 years and require replacing.
- 7.3 The DeskTop Refresh – Phase 1 capital funding was set in 2018 for the initial 3-year period, with Desk Top Refresh – Phase 2 set in 2020. Both budgets were based on hardware prices at the time of Phase 1 (6 years ago). Since the budget was allocated to the schemes, costs of hardware have increased by approximately 40% due to the pandemic, microchip shortages, Brexit and inflation amongst other factors. In 2021 and 2022, NCC Tupe'd in 944 staff from NHCT and 67 from Action for Children and Barnardo's. The devices for these staff will cost an extra £530,000 to incorporate into the DTR programme.
- 7.4 With the assistance of Mason Advisory and internal Procurement colleagues, IT completed a procurement exercise starting in October 22 and running through to tender evaluation in Feb 2023. This allowed us to seek to adopt a more modern way of delivering the Desktop Refresh programme and

provided an accurate cost for replacement of our end-user device estate. With guidance from Procurement colleagues, we will be looking to move from a 4-year programme to a 1 year, rolling replacement programme.

- 7.5 This modern approach to Desktop Refresh is aligned with the BEST programme, allowing us to deploy devices more cost-effectively to end-users. Laptops can be delivered directly to our end-users without IT officers needing to perform time-consuming “Build” activities.
- 7.6 The combination of increased costs of hardware, and our increase in staff numbers, has resulted in the total cost of replacing the entire estate rising by around £1.5million to £2.75million (this is based on a 90-10 split of standard, to “enhanced” laptops). Some of our Service Level Agreement customers are also due to have their devices replaced. They pay annually and are contracted to receive replacement devices in year 4.

Capital Scheme budgets

1. Current Scheme Profile (includes estimated slippage from 2022-23)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	Total
DTR Phase 2	150,000	500,000	750,000	1,400,000
CISCO	953,000	100,000	100,000	1,153,000
Cloud	352,600	0	0	352,600
Total	1,455,600	600,000	850,000	2,905,600

2. Proposed Scheme Profile (includes estimated slippage from 2022-23)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	Total
DTR Phase 2	922,600	920,000	920,000	2,762,600
CISCO	533,000	100,000	100,000	733,000
Cloud	0	0	0	0
Total	1,455,600	1,020,000	1,020,000	3,495,600

3. Net Proposed Adjustments (includes estimated slippage from 2022-23)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	Total
DTR Phase 2	772,600	420,000	170,000	1,362,600
CISCO	(420,000)	0	0	(420,000)
Cloud	(352,600)	0	0	(352,600)
Total	0	420,000	170,000	590,000

Information services will include the Capital growth bids for 24/25 and 25/26 as part of capital budget setting in summer 2023.

CISCO (FA210015)

- 7.7 The CISCO Infrastructure Capital Scheme was created in 2020 and was established to replace all the perimeter/ security equipment that protects the Councils network, the switching equipment in all our buildings and the WiFi equipment in all buildings. If this equipment is not replaced in a timely fashion, then the Council Network could become vulnerable to cyber-attacks and penetration. This was last replaced in 2011 but needs to have a rolling programme of upgrades established to ensure that devices do not become end-of-life or unsupported.
- 7.8 This scheme has incurred delays. This was partly due to the unavailability of hardware and exceptional lead times on some equipment. This has resulted in IT having to rationalise perimeter devices and to re-evaluate the outcomes of this Capital scheme and prioritise accordingly. In 2023/24 we will be able to perform the Cisco Firewall Replacement project using funds unspent in 2022/23. Planned works for 2023/24 will be carried out in 2024/25 using profiled capital funds in the CISCO Scheme. The CISCO project can therefore be completed utilising the remaining funding already approved in the Capital Programme.

Cloud Migration (FA210016)

- 7.9 The Cloud Migration Capital scheme was created in 2021 and was established to assist in investigating the move of on-premise infrastructure to Cloud Services. The Council's Digital strategy supported the move of aspects of hardware infrastructure to the Cloud over coming years. The Council didn't have the skills to implement and support this move and therefore external project resource was required. Investigations into using cloud-based containerisation to host websites proved only partially successful and was halted. Funds were also used for professional services to assist in the migration to Amazon Connect Contact Centre.
- 7.10 The £100,000 which was reprofiled from Cloud into DTR was used to bring in professional services from Mason Advisory to assist IT with a full review and modernisation of the Desktop Refresh tender process due to lack of resource in this area.
- 7.11 Further cloud migration was completed as part of a Disaster Recovery As A Service Project (DRAAS) - allowing us to decommission one of our data-centres. The costs are revenue based and have been funded via contingency. We therefore need not transfer the £100k from DTR back into the cloud scheme. The cloud scheme can now be closed down.

Desktop Refresh Project

7.12 To maintain high speed, secure and reliable access to systems and data, our end user hardware (laptops and desktops) need to be replaced at least every four years. Longer refresh cycles would result in staff using devices that are out of warranty and any faults and replacements would be costly.

7.13 NCC currently have a desktop estate of approximately 5,000 Enterprise devices, largely Lenovo, but also a smaller number of Dell, Microsoft and HP devices. The estate also consists of a mix of desktop, laptop, and hybrid devices. These have been provisioned through the outgoing contract which provided the initial tranche of devices four to five years ago and have continued to provide devices on an ad-hoc basis since.

Data on age of devices and profile

Year of Installation (Age)	Approx No of Devices	Replacement Due	Proposed replacement year (*estimate)
2018 (5-Year-old)	1320	2021	Year 1 (2023)
2019 (4-Year-old)	1620	2022	350 in Year 1 (2023) 1270 in Year 2 (2024)
2020 (3-Year-old)	947	2023	400 in Year 2 (2024) 547 in Year 3 (2025)
2021 (2-Year-old)	1000	2024	Year 3 (2025)
2022 (1-Year-old)	160	2025	Year 3 (2025)

* Based on 1670 device replacements per year.

7.14 The reasonable, usable life of a modern laptop is 3-4 years. Older devices become slow, unreliable and unusable more quickly than newer devices which have more modern components and processing power. All NCC devices are purchased with an extended 3-year warranty, so failures are irreparable after that time.

- 7.15 The new DTR program will allow us to realise the following benefits:
- **Autopilot** - the pre-configuration of devices at manufacturer level to allow them to not require old fashioned, traditional manual and insecure build methods by IT staff.
 - **Bios configuration** – software asset tagging, and security enhancements without manual intervention.
 - **Delivery** - devices can be delivered direct to the end user’s home address as well as centralised NCC buildings without the need for IT intervention.
 - **Environmental** - improved device and material recycling and re-selling with payback. CO2 offsetting resulting in carbon neutral device lifespan.
 - **Cost saving**. Reduction in number of unnecessary high specification devices due to customising and vetting any requests for advance machines. Small form factor devices are now available as standard.

Cost Benefits

7.16 In comparison with continuing to buy devices on an ad-hoc basis and by dramatically reducing the unnecessary procurement of enhanced devices, the following cost reductions have been estimated over the proposed DTR period.

Device Type	Total Number	Previous Cost	Proposed Cost	Estimated Saving
Desktop	750	£588.50	£439.26	£111,930
Notebook	3300	£614.80	£511.14	£342,078
Ultrabook	1000	£939.75	£520.28	£419,470
Total	5050			£873,478

*Estimated based on pricing as of Feb 2023, based on standard devices only.

8. Local Authority Housing Fund Grant Award

8.1 CSG was asked to recommend acceptance of a Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) grant award of £1,120,827 into the Capital Programme for 2023-24 for the acquisition of 12 homes.

Background

8.2 The LAHF was launched on 14 December 2022. It is a £500m capital grant fund to support local authorities in England to provide sustainable housing for those unable to secure their own accommodation that meet certain eligibility criteria.

8.3 In summary the objectives of LAHF are to:

- Ensure recent humanitarian schemes (Afghan and Ukraine schemes) which offer sanctuary, via an organised safe and legal entry route, to those fleeing conflict, provide sufficient longer-term accommodation to those they support.
- Reduce emergency, temporary and bridging accommodation costs.
- Deliver accommodation that as far as possible allows for the future conversion of housing units to support wider local authority housing and homelessness responsibilities to UK nationals (i.e. after usage by this cohort ends).
- Utilise accommodation solutions to enable effective resettlement and economic integration of the eligible cohort.
- Reduce pressures on the existing housing and homelessness systems and those waiting for social housing.

Grant Terms

8.4 DLUHC has accepted the Council's plan to provide 12 homes ('the delivery target') under LAHF, and DLUHC will provide a grant of £1,120,827 ('the total allocation'). The Council has agreed the following targets to deliver at least:

- 8 x 2 & 3 bed properties ('main element') to be allocated to Ukraine visitor households that now need to move into their own independent housing
- 4 x Four+ bed properties ('the bridging element') to be allocated to Afghan households currently in bridging accommodation located outside of Northumberland

8.5 Estimated costs and funding split:

Total Cost	
8 properties	£1,104,000
4 Properties	£1,086,455
	£2,190,455
Grant	
8 properties	£537,600
4 Properties	£583,227
	£1,120,827
NCC Contribution	
8 properties	£566,400
4 Properties	£503,228
	£1,069,628

8.6 The Grant from DLUHC will be matched by contributions from NCC with funding for 8 'main element' properties being met from the Homes for Ukraine levy and funding for 4 'bridging element' properties being met from the HRA affordable homes capital programme.

8.7 As a result of the tight timescales under the grant terms (in contract by Nov 2023) properties will be acquired rather than new build. Due to the restrictive level of the funding per unit and the need for Afghan families to be located near to Tyneside for cultural facilities, all of the 12 units will be acquired in the South East of Northumberland. The Asylum Seeker and Refugee team will be responsible for allocating these properties which will sit within the Housing Revenue Account and will remain there as affordable housing stock and rented out on an affordable rent basis.

Implications

Policy	The capital programme is part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2023-27. The plan supports the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	The report outlines proposed project allocations and amendments to the approved Capital programme. The financial implications of these proposals are outlined in the main body of the report. The projects will be funded from the existing capital programme or external funding.
Legal	Subject to any contractual implications arising from the receipt of grant funding, there are no direct legal implications. The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council
Procurement	In line with all other capital expenditure, the additional spend will be subject to the Council's recognised procurement procedures.
Human Resources	Not applicable.
Property	The properties affected by the proposals are identified in the main body of the report.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Any equality issues arising are addressed under the relevant item in the main body of the report.
Risk Assessment	The risks associated with the proposals are regarded as acceptable but these risks will continue to be reviewed up to and during implementation of the proposals.
Crime & Disorder	There are no Crime and Disorder implications.
Customer Consideration	Any impacts on customers are addressed under the relevant item.
Carbon reduction	Carbon Reduction measures have been considered within each project and Carbon Impact Assessments have been completed for the relevant projects.
Health & Wellbeing	Health and wellbeing implications are addressed under each relevant item.
Wards	All wards.

Background Papers:

Medium Term Financial Plan 2023-27

Cabinet: 9 May 2023

Page 12

Report sign off:

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

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Northumberland County Council

CABINET

Date: 9 May 2023

Outcomes of the Consultation on Proposals for the Berwick Partnership

Report of Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson

Lead Officer: Audrey Kingham, Executive Director of Children, Young People and Education

Purpose of Report

This report presents the outcomes and analysis of feedback received from stakeholders arising from Phase 2 pre-statutory consultation with stakeholders in the Berwick Partnership area approved by Cabinet on 22 October 2022. The Phase 2 consultation set out possible models of school organisation within both the current 3-tier system and within a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system. Consultation was also undertaken with stakeholders on proposals for increased specialist provision within the Berwick Partnership area and feedback and analysis arising from this aspect of the consultation is also set out in the report.

Feedback received during consultation has been used to assist with the determination of the final conclusions and recommendations. Cabinet is now asked to approve the recommendation to publish statutory proposals for the implementation of a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure in the Berwick Partnership, which includes the proposed closure of some schools.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Note the feedback from the informal and pre-statutory consultations set out at paras. 30 to 77.
- b) Decide in the light of the feedback from consultation set out in this report and any recommendations from the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny

Committee whether to approve the publication of the statutory proposals setting out the intention of the County Council to implement the following proposals:

- i. Extend the age range of Spittal Community First School from an age 4-9 first school to an age 4-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025; although not a prescribed alteration, approve the reduction of the planned admission number of the school from 40 to 30 from the same date;
 - ii. Extend the age range of Tweedmouth Prior Park First School from an age 3-9 first school to an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025;
 - iii. Extend the age range of Tweedmouth West First School from an age 4-9 first school to an age 4-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025;
 - iv. Extend the age range of Wooler First School from an age 2-9 first school to an age 2-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025;
 - v. Extend the age range of Scremerston First School from an age 4-9 first school to an age 4-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025; although not a prescribed alteration, approve the reduction of the planned admission number of the school from 18 to 10 from the same date;
 - vi. Close Berwick Middle School with effect from 31 August 2026;
 - vii. Close Glendale Middle School with effect from 31 August 2026;
 - viii. Close Tweedmouth Community Middle School with effect from 31 August 2026;
 - ix. Establish an SEN unit at the site of Berwick St Mary's Church of England First to be managed by the school with specialist provision for up to 30 places reserved for pupils aged 4 to 11 with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN with effect from 1 September 2025.
- c) Cabinet would be asked to approve the following non-statutory proposals included in Phase 2 pre-consultation in conjunction with its final decision on the statutory proposals set out in para. b) and these proposals would be included in the published statutory proposal for information;
- i. Extend the age range of Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School from an age 3-9 first school to an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025 and reduce the planned admission number of the school from 30 to 15;
 - ii. Extend the age range of Holy Trinity Church of England First School from an age 3-9 first school to an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025;
 - iii. Extend the age range of Holy Island Church of England First School from an age 3-9 first school to an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025;
 - iv. Extend the age range of Hugh Joicey Church of England First School from an age 4-9 first school to an age 4-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025;
 - v. Extend the age range of Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School from an age 2-9 first school to an age 2-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025;
 - vi. Extend the age range of Norham St Coelwulf's C of E Controlled First School from an age 3-9 first school to an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025.

- d) Approve the allocation of the catchment area of Belford Primary School (including a slight reduction in its size) from the Berwick Partnership to the greater Alnwick Partnership as part of an amendment to the Council's admissions arrangements taking effect from 1 September 2024, and thereby permit that a request is submitted to the Schools Adjudicator to amend the relevant admissions arrangements approved in February 2023.
- e) Note that local authorities do not have powers to propose or change the organisation of academies. Therefore, the proposed changes to the age ranges of St Cuthbert's Catholic First School to become an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025 and for Berwick Academy to become an age 11 to 18 secondary academy, consulted on as part of the Phase 2 wider Berwick partnership reorganisation would need to be approved by the Bishop Bewick Academy Trust and Trustees of Berwick Academy respectively. In addition, the Trustees of Berwick Academy would need to approve the establishment of an SEN unit on the site of Berwick Academy to be managed by the academy with specialist provision for up to 40 places reserved for pupils aged 11 to 16 with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN with effect from 1 September 2026.

If approved, the academy trusts would need to take a request for final approval forward to the Regional Department for Education (DfE) Director North East. The decision of the Bishop Bewick Academy Trust and Trustees of Berwick Academy Regional DfE Director to approve the changes in ranges of St Cuthbert's and Berwick Academy and to approve the establishment of an SEN unit on the site of Berwick Academy would be contingent on the Council's final approval of the statutory proposal, if approved for publication.

- f) Note that the outcomes of the publication of the Statutory Proposals would be brought back to Cabinet in July and in any event within two months of the date of their publication for a final decision in relation to the proposals set out in paras. b) to d).
- g) Note the indicative capital costs outlined in this report and the implications for the Medium-Term Capital Programme.
- h) Note the implications for Home to School Transport set out in this report.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the corporate objectives, and specifically the "Living, Learning" and "Thriving" priorities of the Corporate Plan 2021-24. The key priorities of tackling inequalities, growth and value for money also focus on different aspects of the annual report and contribute to the work of Northumberland County Councils Inequalities Action Plan.

Key Issues

1. Cabinet has approved just under £40m of capital funding in the Medium-Term Financial Plan to be invested in buildings within the Berwick partnership of schools.

2. It was agreed Cabinet would require assurance that this investment would be made in an organisational structure that would be viable and sustainable in the medium to long-term. Such a viable structure would need to retain the majority of students across all phases within Berwick schools and would be the most likely to deliver improved educational outcomes for all children and young people in the Berwick area.
3. Discussions on what would be the best school structure in the Berwick Partnership have been ongoing for many years, and pre-date many of the incumbent headteachers of the schools. However, the informal discussions that began with headteachers and Chairs of Governors in the partnership in April 2021, the community survey in October 2021 and the two phases of pre-statutory consultation on proposed structures of school organisation have now led to the clear recommendations set out in this report.
4. Following a period of informal discussions with leaders of schools in Berwick and a community survey in 2021, Cabinet approved two phases of pre-statutory consultation on proposals for the organisation of schools in Berwick Partnership; Phase 1 consultation took place between 23 May and 22 August 2022, while Phase 2 consultation has taken place between 31 October 2022 and 3 March 2023. The background detail, rationale and implementation of these consultations is set out in paras. 17 to 29 of this report, while feedback from the Phase 2 consultation is summarised in paras. 30 to 77.
5. Phase 1 pre-statutory consultation asked schools, parents and the wider community whether the current 3-tier system or a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system of school organisation would be better placed to address the issues facing the Berwick Partnership and meet the objectives of the shared vision signed up to by all Governing Bodies, particularly in relation to improving educational outcomes at Key Stage 4, financial viability and sustainability of schools in the light of falling pupil numbers.
6. Feedback from Phase 1 consultation indicated that most Governing Bodies were clear on their preference for schools to be organised within either the 3-tier or 2-tier model, with a clear majority of first schools and Berwick Academy favouring the 2-tier system. However, feedback from parents and the wider community indicated that the level of support for the 3-tier and the 2-tier systems was broadly similar. It was therefore recommended that Cabinet approve the initiation of Phase 2 pre-consultation setting out specific proposals for individual schools, both within a 3-tier and a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure, to provide clarity on how both systems could operate in future. Pupil and school data and information was used in conjunction with feedback from Phase 1 pre-statutory consultation to develop the 3-tier and 2-tier models consulted upon in Phase 2.
7. It is clear that those stakeholders who submitted their views during Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultations responded with the best educational interests of pupils and families at heart. However, while there has been a shift in the views of some stakeholders, there remains a clear disagreement among some schools and the wider community as to which model of school organisation would be better placed to address the issues facing the partnership now and in the future. Therefore, consensus agreement across all stakeholders who responded was not gained during the two phases of informal consultation.

8. The Council has a duty to support schools to improve standards, support continuity of education, support schools to be financially viable and sustainable and support smooth transition of pupils between schools. The Council also has a duty to provide best value to the residents of Northumberland in relation to Capital investment of public monies in school buildings. Following the two phases of consultation, the local authority now has a responsibility to provide system leadership regarding school organisation and therefore a clear recommendation to propose a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure for Berwick Partnership is set out in this report.
9. Officers have concluded that the establishment of a 2-tier structure across the whole of the Berwick Partnership, necessitating the closure of the middle schools, the extension of the age ranges of the first schools and the extension of the age range of Berwick Academy would be in the best educational interests of the current and future pupils in that area.
10. Phase 1 consultation also established the need to create additional provision for children and young people with SEND within the Berwick area, specifically for those with primary needs in SEMH and ASD. While two models of provision were proposed for consultation, feedback has clarified that only the model proposing specialist provision within units on the site of St Mary's Church of England Primary School (as it would be) and on the site of Berwick Academy would be an achievable option at this stage.
11. While the Council has powers to extend the age ranges of maintained community schools and to close maintained and voluntary schools, it does not have powers to make changes to the structure of academies. Therefore, any proposals by the Council to establish a 2-tier structure in the Berwick Partnership would require the approval of the Bishop Bewick Catholic Trust, the Trustees of Berwick Academy and the final approval of Regional Department for Education Director North East with respect to the proposed changes to the age ranges of St Cuthbert's Catholic First School and Berwick Academy.

Background

12. As stated, although discussions about the structure of schools in the Berwick partnership have been ongoing for many years, the allocation of capital funding crystallised the beginning of a clear process towards determination of an agreed school structure that would be viable, sustainable and deliver improved outcomes for the children and young people and their families living in the area served by the schools now and in the future.
13. Throughout the work undertaken with the Berwick Partnership, headteachers and school governors understood that whatever structure was ultimately agreed, this would have to be within the context of some other fundamental changes, such as a possible reduction in the current number of schools in the partnership and the reallocation of some schools to other partnerships.
14. A key achievement arising from the discussions on structure with school leaders in Berwick Partnership has been the development of the Vision for Change for Berwick Partnership which all schools have signed up to:
 - **Improving Education Outcomes** at each phase to ensure every child meets their potential;
 - **Sustainability of Education** across the whole of the Berwick Partnership for the long term;
 - **Improving and extending the SEND offer** for children and young people in the Berwick Partnership area so that their needs are met locally, and travel times are reduced significantly;
 - **Engaging the Berwick Community** in the review process to build an understanding of all the issues and to grow support for any proposed changes within schools in order that the community engages, supports and thrives;
 - **Ensure schools work together** to further develop the partnership and create a sustainable model for the future;
 - **Underpinning best value for NCC capital investment** as well as any wider investment opportunities that may arise.
15. The preferred model of organisation for Berwick Partnership would need to demonstrate that it had the greatest potential to fulfil the ambitions set out in this vision.
16. The key issues facing the partnership that necessitate the need for change to the current organisation of schools in Berwick that were discussed and continue to be relevant:

- i. Education Outcomes

While schools' performance data is presented below for information, it should be noted that the DfE have stated that due to the uneven impact of the Covid pandemic on results in 2021/22 for schools and academies, direct comparisons with performance from previous years or between schools is not reliable and therefore not recommended.

Key Stage 1 performance and Ofsted

- KS1 assessments are not published. 11 first schools are graded Outstanding or Good by Ofsted. While two first schools are currently graded Requires Improvement, one is making good progress towards Good or better while the other is a relatively new judgement.

Key Stage 2 performance and Ofsted

- The DfE has stated that Year 6 pupils in Summer 2022 who undertook KS2 assessments experienced disruption to their learning during the pandemic, particularly at the end of Year 4 and in Year 5.
- With that caveat in mind, the DfE has reported that attainment in England at KS2 in 2022 fell below that in 2019 (the last year that 2022 results are able to be compared against) in all assessed areas except reading. There was a performance drop for all pupils in 2022, but disadvantaged pupil's performance fell more sharply.

Table 1 - %Pupils who met the standard in Reading, Writing and Maths at KS2

School	KS2 2019	Eng. Avge 2019	KS2 2022	Eng. Avge 2022
Berwick Middle	72%	65%	48.5%	59%
Belford Primary*	88%*	65%	25%*	59%
Glendale Middle	63%	65%	48.3%	59%
Tweedmouth Middle	75%	65%	62%	59%

**Note: Belford Primary Year 6 cohorts can be very small - very small cohorts under 10 pupils means individual pupil results have greater impact on overall average.*

- The three middle schools in Berwick Partnership are graded 'Good' by Ofsted.

GCSE (KS4) performance

- The DfE has stated that, given the unprecedented change in the way GCSE results were awarded in the summers of 2020 and 2021, as well as the changes to grade boundaries and methods of assessment for 2021/22, caution should be taken when considering comparisons over time, as they may not reflect changes in pupil performance alone.
- Berwick Academy's GCSE results in 2019
 - Grade 5 in English and Maths (strong pass) - 21% compared to Northumberland and England average of 43%
 - Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores were below the Northumberland and England average

- The school reported improved outcomes in these measures in 2020 and 2021, although these are not able to be compared to 2019 due to differences in assessment.
- Berwick Academy's GCSE results in 2022
 - Grade 5 in English and Maths (strong pass) - 28% compared to Northumberland average 46% and England average of 50%
 - Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores were below the Northumberland and England average

'A'-level (KS5) performance

- DfE have stated that, given the unprecedented change in the way 'A' level and vocational and VTQ grades were awarded in 2020 and 2021, as well as changes to the grade boundaries and methods of assessment for 2021/22, caution should be exercised when considering comparisons over time, as they may not reflect changes in student performance alone.
 - Berwick Academy's 'A' level results in 2019
 - Progress score was the same as the average for England
 - The average grade was a D+, compared to the Northumberland and England average grades of C+
 - Berwick Academy's 'A' level results in 2022
 - Progress score was below the national average for England
 - The average grade was a D+, compared to the Northumberland average grade of B- and England average grade of B
 - Berwick Academy was inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and judged to be an improving school, moving from Inadequate to Requires Improvement.
- ii. Falling Pupil Numbers and Viability and Sustainability of Schools

- The number of children being born within the Berwick Partnership area has been falling consistently for a number of years and is predicted to continue (see Table 2):

Table 2

Phase	Current average cohort size based on number living in Berwick area
High School (Year 9 to 11)	218
Middle School (Year 5 to 8)	226
First School (Reception to Year 4)	193
Reception 2023 to Reception 2025	163

- In Reception 2025, the cohort size will be 150 noting that not all parents may select to educate their children within the partnership.
- There are already significant surplus places in first schools in the partnership, with 166 pupils on roll in Reception in March 2023 with capacity

for 293 pupils in schools (note in January 2022 there were 182 pupils on roll in Reception). Without taking into account any potential additional late applications, at this stage the reception cohort across the partnership in September 2023 is predicted to be 141. As cohorts move through the school phases, the middle and high schools will also feel the impact of falling pupil numbers on their budgets. Currently there are three schools forecast to be in deficit budget by 2024/25, with four forecasted to be in deficit by 2025/26 - eight schools currently have an in-year deficit.

- Compounding the fall in pupil numbers is the continuing drift of pupils into neighbouring partnerships, into Scotland and into private education (see Table 3 data from 2021/22):

Table 3 (2021/22 data)

Phase	Attending Alnwick Schools	Attending Scottish Schools	Attending Private Schools	Total
High (Yr9-11)	103	48	32	183
Middle	27 (5 in primary)	32 (14 in primary)	35	94
First	28	3	9	40

- The above data equates to 28% of high school (Year 9 to Year 11) students living in the Berwick area choosing to attend other schools. Of students in the Berwick area of middle school age, 10% choose to attend the schools noted in Table 2; at first school phase, just 4% of pupils living in the Berwick area attend these schools. In economic terms, at high school phase these student numbers equate to around £915k while at middle school phase this equates to £470k.
 - There will be a variety of reasons why students attend certain schools, for example distance from home being a factor, while some parents would send their children to private schools in any event. However, some feedback received during the various consultations carried out in the Berwick Partnership at high school phase indicated that some parents are choosing an alternative pathway even earlier in their children’s educational journey.
- iii. The Need for additional specialist provision in the Berwick area

In Northumberland, the number of children and young people who have been diagnosed as having Autism (ASD) or Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) as a primary need has been increasing, with significant additional capacity in the county’s nine special schools being required year on year for the past 10 years. Overall, this steady upward trend in demand for special school places equates to an average increase over this period to date of 7% each year (actual variation from year to year has been between 2% and 12%). There continues to be an increasing demand from parents for their children to be educated within special school provision both in and out of the county. It is also widely acknowledged nationally that there are significant financial pressures on mainstream schools in supporting SEND provision, not least due to school

budget pressures and expectations on schools to fund the first £6k of support for each SEND learner with an EHCP.

As at January 2022, there were 58 students residing in the Berwick Partnership area who were on roll in special schools in Northumberland or an out of county specialist provision. Of these, 36 were on roll at The Grove Special School. This means 22 students were attending special schools outside of the Berwick area, mainly in the South East of the county, and of these students' half had either ASD, SEMH or Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) as a primary need – note that SLCN often leads to a later diagnosis of ASD.

Table 4 shows the projected number of students expected to have an EHCP primary need in ASD living in the Berwick area, with data based on current Berwick-resident students with an EHCP in schools and special schools.

Table 4 – Projected number of students living in Berwick area with ASD as a primary need

Final Forecasts															NOR
Year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Totals
2022	1	1	4	1	6	6	8	4	16	5	9	3	6	2	72
2023	3	2	1	6	2	7	8	7	8	15	7	8	2	6	82
2024	3	4	2	2	7	2	9	7	15	8	22	6	6	2	95
2025	3	4	4	2	2	8	2	8	15	15	11	20	5	6	105
2026	2	4	4	5	3	2	10	2	18	15	22	10	15	5	117

Table 5 shows the projected number of students expected to have an EHCP primary need in SEMH living in the Berwick area, with data based on current Berwick-resident students with an EHCP in schools and special schools.

Table 5 - Projected number of students living in Berwick area with ASD as a primary need

Final Forecasts															NOR
Year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Totals
2022	0	3	2	9	16	18	8	13	8	9	13	7	4	2	112
2023	0	0	5	3	11	20	15	10	12	9	9	10	3	3	110
2024	0	0	0	8	4	14	16	17	9	13	9	6	4	2	102
2025	0	0	0	1	9	4	11	19	16	10	13	7	3	3	96
2026	1	0	0	0	1	11	4	13	18	17	10	10	3	2	90

While not all projected students with a primary need in SEMH and ASD in the tables above would necessarily need to attend a special school, nonetheless it is clear that the overall trend is for increasing numbers of students with these primary needs in the Berwick area. Therefore, additional specialist provision for these students is required in the Berwick Partnership area in order to reduce the need for so many of this vulnerable group of students to travel a considerable distance to school and to be educated closer to their home communities.

The Consultation Process

Informal Discussions and Meetings with school leaders and community survey April 2021 to March 2022

17. In order to identify the most likely structures to provide such assurance, officers have been working with the headteachers in their capacity as educational professionals and school governors since April 2021. This work began with meetings with these

groups at partnership and individual school levels; themed workshops with headteachers on a number of possible models of organisation including the current 3-tier model structure have also taken place. In addition, the question of whether Belford Primary, Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools should remain within the Berwick Partnership was also discussed.

18. Throughout the work undertaken with the Berwick Partnership, headteachers and school governors understood that whatever structure was ultimately agreed, this possibly would have to be within the context of some other fundamental changes, such as a reduction in the current number of schools in the partnership, including some schools moving to other partnerships.
19. Following the full partnership meeting in April 2021, six potential models of organisation were discussed with the headteacher and Chair of Governors of each school/academy; these models were based on previous discussions with the partnership, including a model put forward to NCC by a group of schools. Following workshops and further meetings, three models were discounted as they had little to no support and three were taken forward for further analysis.
20. A high-level survey was also carried out with the wider Berwick Partnership community in Autumn 2021 to gauge their key priorities when considering school organisation in the area and to assist in formulating the next steps in the process.
21. Overall, the work undertaken with school leaders and feedback from the high-level survey suggested the two preferred models of organisation most likely to achieve long-term viability and sustainability for education in the partnership were the current 3-tier structure or the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure. This conclusion was reached as a result of the views of schools on the potential positives and challenges of a 2-tier system in the partnership where there was a mixed response, with nine Governing Bodies in support of 2-tier, four against and three unsure or undecided.
22. Officers therefore recommended that in order to inform detailed models of school organisation for consultation, a high level informal consultation (Phase 1) with the parents, staff, pupils and the wider community of the Berwick Partnership area should be carried out on the benefits and rationale for both the 3-tier structure and the 2-tier structure in order to establish whether there was a general preference for either, and whether they had any views on the potential for some schools to become part of other partnerships.
23. Further information and detailed feedback from this initial work with schools and the high-level survey is set out in the Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, Berwick Partnership Organisation, 12 April 2022.

High level summary of feedback received from Phase 1 consultation May to August 2022

24. On 22 April 2022, Cabinet approved the commencement of Phase 1 pre-consultation on the high-level question of whether the current 3-tier system of school organisation or a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system would be better placed to address the issues facing the Berwick Partnership, recommended by officers for the reasons set out in para. 22.

25. Phase 1 began on 23 May for 11 weeks, concluding on 12 August 2022. 365 responses were received via the online consultation response form and via email.
26. As there are currently two federations of school Governing Bodies in the Berwick Partnership (Lowick with Holy Island and Glendale with Wooler), there are only 16 Governing Bodies for 18 schools. During Phase 1 consultation, the Governing Bodies of 10 schools (eight Governing Bodies) responded that they were in favour of a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure of education during this consultation. This group of Governing Bodies/Trustees (including the two federated Governing Bodies) have responsibility for eight first schools, one middle and Berwick Academy. Five Governing Bodies were strongly in favour of retaining the 3-tier structure, made of two of the town's first schools, the two town middle schools and one of the rural schools. One first school Governing Body was non-committal about which structure it favoured as the proposal was vague (but stated it could work in either system), while Belford Primary and the Governing Body of The Grove Special School felt unable to comment on the organisation of the mainstream school system as it was up to the impacted schools and their communities. Therefore, at this stage, the Governing Bodies of a small majority of schools favoured a move to a 2-tier structure.
27. Not including Governing Bodies, 349 responses were received from parents, staff and the wider community received during the Phase 1 consultation; for context it should be noted that 2,323 pupils were on roll in mainstream Berwick schools in January 2022. Overall, of those consultees who responded, the split in preference between the 3-tier system and the 2-tier (primary/secondary) system was almost equal. In relation to how specific groups of consultees responded, first school parents and staff were split in relation to preference, high school staff were entirely in favour of 2-tier, while middle school staff and parents were mostly in favour of 3-tier.
28. Given the split in preference for either system, it was recommended to Cabinet that Phase 2 consultation should set out proposed models of school organisation within both the 3-tier system and the 2-tier system. However, the proposed 3-tier model consulted on at Phase 2 did not set out the status-quo as it had been made clear during the early discussions with school leaders and during Phase 1 consultation that changes would need to be made to the organisation of schools in the Berwick Partnership, including some school closures, in order to address the issues of viability and sustainability as a result of consistently falling pupil numbers.
29. Further information and detailed feedback from Phase 1 consultation is set out in the Report of the Joint Interim Director of Children's Service, The Outcomes of Consultation on Berwick Partnership Organisation, 11 October 2022.

Summary of Feedback received from Phase 2 Consultation October 2022 to March 2023

30. At the outset of Phase 2 consultation, over 6,400 stakeholders were sent a link to the informal consultation document and questionnaire published on 31 October 2022. Other interested parties were able to access the online consultation document and questionnaire from the Council's website. In total, 724 responses were received to the consultation including from Governing Bodies representing the 18 schools in the Berwick Partnership. A Consultation Register is provided at Appendix 2.

Governing Bodies of schools impacted by the proposals

31. Governing Body of Belford Primary School

The Governing Body is of the view that organisation of schools, in and around Berwick, is a matter for the schools and their communities and do not feel that they should comment collectively as a Governing Body on the proposals for reorganisation in the Berwick area.

Regarding the proposal for Belford Primary School to formally become part of the Alnwick Partnership the governors fully and strongly support this proposal. Very few of Belford Primary's students progressed to Berwick Academy and since Belford became a primary school, in line with the organisation in the Alnwick Partnership, that trickle has ceased.

Governors accept, as a consequence of joining the Alnwick Partnership, the minor adjustment to Belford's catchment area.

Extract from their response:

"Becoming part of the Alnwick Partnership makes sense educational for our children and staff and would mean that our parents will qualify for free home-to-school transport."

"There has been a demand for this from parents and the wider community for a large number of years, and there is strong support for it from our parents and the wider community."

32. Governing Body of Berwick St Mary's CE First School

The Governing Body firmly believe in moving to a 2-tier structure as soon as possible.

Governors appreciate the challenges currently faced by the Berwick partnership and accept that we must act quickly to reduce the loss of children, and revenue, from our schools.

The Governing Body would like to highlight the following key factors:

- The 2-tier model is designed to fully support the implementation of the National Curriculum and the teaching of key stages.
- Transition within the current 3-tier model is not a strength of the partnership.
- 2-tier reduces transitions from two to one and is at the end of a key stage rather than part-way through.
- Within the 3-tier model the high school, which is arguably the most important phase, has the shortest time with students. Within the first term students need to make life choices on educational/vocational pathways and a 2-tier system will provide the time required for trusted relationships to develop more effectively than at present.
- Staff are trained as primary or secondary teachers. The current 3-tier model limits opportunities for career progression and doesn't utilise staffs' full

training as primary practitioners. This may be why Berwick struggles to attract a wide pool of high-quality candidates for vacancies.

- The 2-tier model provides the partnership with a more robust approach to the financial sustainability of the locality.

Although not proposed in the consultation, the importance of long-term financial sustainability needs to be addressed and the model proposed for Norham and St Mary's (hub model) is a means to ensure long-term success and survival. As governors we feel the benefits of bringing small schools together ensures a brighter future for the children and staff.

The Governing Body has considered the issues around SEND and recognise the need to support an increasing number of children/families dealing with SEMH. The proposal from St Mary's and Berwick Academy to create a new collaborative offer to meet the needs of SEMH and other complex needs within the locality is fully supported by the Governing Body and recommended for consideration under this consultation.

The Governing Body have also expressed the need to develop/relocate early years provision north of the river as current provision is based on the south side of river making it difficult for some families to access flexible preschool provision.

As a Governing Body we would like both Wooler and Belford schools to stay within the Berwick Partnership as they add strength to the partnership in terms of the current and future potential of our joint education offer.

Extract from their response:

"In considering how best to support the children of Berwick achieve the outcomes we want for them all, the Governing Body have considered all viewpoints and consider the only viable educational structure moving forward is the 2-tier option."

33. Governing Body of Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First School

The Governors strongly support the proposed move to a 2-tier structure of education for the Berwick partnership. A 2-tier structure will produce the necessary improvements in outcomes for all our young people from 0-25, enable the locality to be educationally sustainable and support the future of the wider Berwick area.

Governors highlighted several key factors in their response, which are the same as those highlighted by Governors at St Mary's C of E First School and are outlined in Para 32.

In relation to the future of Norham School governors noted:

- The important role the school plays in supporting the community. Without a school many children/families could move to schools in the Scottish Borders.
- The vast nature of Norham's catchment area.
- Federation with Berwick St Mary's CE First School will enable the school to continue to deliver high standards of education whilst being financially sustainable. Governors also supported the proposal to federate with

Tweedmouth Prior Park First believing joint working will enhance the educational offer, the viability and reflects the policy of the DfE who are promoting good practice through co-operative working via a 'family of schools' approach.

The Governing Body also considered the issues around SEND, Early Years and whether schools in Wooler/Glendale and Belford should remain in the Berwick partnership or move to the Alnwick partnership. Their comments and reasons match with those provided by the Governors at St Mary's and are summarised in para. 32.

Extract from their response:

"The Governing Body is supportive of the proposed change to a 2-tier system, for all of the above-mentioned reasons. We appreciate change is often a difficult process to go through, however, change is what is needed in Berwick to offer the children of our area, for future generations, the best possible start to their lives. We believe we have the people in place to make the change happen and the knowledge/expertise to help manage that change."

34. Governing Body of Holy Trinity CE First School

More Governors at Holy Trinity expressed support for 2-tier reorganisation. Only significant change to the current system would have the desired impact on outcomes at Key Stage 4 and above and deliver the required improvements in the SEND offer. Reasons for this decision included:

- Syncing of key stages.
- Better staff recruitment and retention.
- The changing socio-economic background which some believed was having a negative impact on teacher/pupil relationships.

Despite cautious approval for 2-tier a number of reservations were expressed that if this model was chosen that careful management of the process was vital in order to minimise disruption to the education of cohorts most affected.

The revised campus model put forward by leaders of Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools represented a compromise for 3-tier supporters but was not the preferred model for our 3-tier advocates. Reservations about the previous incarnation of the campus model still apply (eg. congestion at the site, removal of provision from north of river and potential impact on school rolls at Holy Trinity and St Mary's). Governors were unsure whether there would be public support for a five-form entry middle school sited alongside a high school which would mean nine-year-olds making a significantly more challenging transition and negates the attraction of the current system.

Governors welcome a high-quality peripatetic service, but questions remain about how this will operate within the 3-tier system and think it is better for SEND learners to be supported in their home school rather than making multiple transitions to a specialist unit. Governors believe a custom build for The Grove and a Berwick based SEMH Hub providing a specialist run peripatetic service to local schools is non-negotiable. The PAN at The Grove needs to be increased so that more children

can attend but the siting of the SEMH hub is a matter for experts and if The Grove are reluctant to extend its provision an alternative should be explored.

Governors felt the current offer for Post-16/Post-18 was unsuitable and there was a need for better provision in the Berwick area. Governors suggested investment in community-based education, close collaboration with Northumberland College, subsidised youth provision and re-instatement of a community centre or venue for groups to hold events and classes.

Early years provision is good although more mainstream SEND support is required and governors did have concerns that the closure of Scremerston and Norham schools may limit access to nurseries for those catchments.

Extract from their response:

“... regardless of our individual opinions, this Governing Body is committed to collaborating with NCC and the wider Partnership to ensure the smooth implementation of whichever model is chosen by the community and this is key to minimising disruption and improving prospects for children and young people.”

35. Governing Body of Hugh Joicey C of E Aided First School

The Governing Body felt 2-tier would be the most appropriate model.

It would need careful planning and consideration to maximise outcomes and provision for young people both in rural and urban localities. An appeal of the 2-tier option is that it provides for closer relationship with pupils and teachers as they progress through the key milestones of their education but will inevitably diminish something of the precious value that exists in the first school model of early year's provision.

Governors did have concerns regarding the ongoing issues around capacity within the SEND school. Whilst acknowledging there has been some consideration of supporting further development of peripatetic services felt there is much more detailed planning required to ensure the needs of the SEND community are planned for and well met through appropriate resourcing.

Extract from their response:

“Governors recognise that Model B would support the rationalisation of school places within the partnership whilst future proofing the partnership.”

36. Governing Body of Lowick and Holy Island CE First Schools

The Governing Body of Lowick and Holy Island C of E First Schools would prefer to see a 2-tier model of education for the following reasons:

- Beneficial to undertake transition at a slightly older age (eg. 11 rather than nine) and to only have one transition between schools (eg. primary to secondary).
- The 2-tier model provides opportunities for nurturing children from early years to the end of key stage 2, capitalising on community links and school values.

- An advantage for the Holy Island children in that they would not be required to board and travel to Longridge Towers at nine years old.
- Would provide scope for increased capacity for staff leadership and professional development.

The governors strongly agree that The Grove school deserves a purpose-built new building, with sufficient places for local demand into the future, and that it needs to retain its current SEND provision rather than splitting into two different types of SEND under one roof.

In relation to Post-16 and Post-18, governors would like to see more aspirational choices for children and to see both vocational and academic options with sufficient choice, so pupils don't have to travel long distances to find the course they desire.

For early years governors would like to see the current provision continuing and thriving.

Extract from their response:

“As a governing body, we acknowledge, appreciate and value the expertise of the middle schools and their role in the community. However overall, we would prefer to see a 2-tier model.”

37. Governing Body of Scremerston First School

The Governors believe that a 2-tier model will provide the best learning outcomes for the children of Berwick. It would:

- Provide a consistent approach in the delivery of the curriculum with less upheaval for children transitioning to middle school.
- Provide more accountability for teaching leading up to SATs.

Governors envisage Scremerston First as an integral part of this future structure. All teachers are primary curriculum trained and by providing teaching up to age 11 will hold accountability for SATS results. Scremerston First plans to extend the SEND provision they have on offer to be a 'hub' for the rural schools in the partnership.

Scremerston has an outstanding reputation with almost 60% of pupils coming from out of catchment through choice and a reputation for being a school that will accommodate those children who need specialist teaching but at the lower end of the spectrum that does not attract the additional funding. Scremerston is the only rural, non-church affiliated school and the 2021 census reveal that only 46% of the population identify as Christian and the choice of a non-church affiliated school is important based on feedback received from parents.

Extract from their response:

“We appreciate that change is necessary and indeed vital to ensure an ever-improved environment, but we fundamentally believe that here at Scremerston we

can be a positive part of and enhance that change to support the provision of quality education for the children of our community.”

“We hope that you can recognise the potential of our school in your future plans and include the strengths it can offer as part of your future proposals.”

38. Governing Body of Spittal First School

The Governing Body supports 3-tier believing the needs of the children are best met under the current system. While governors understand the need for closure or amalgamation, they do not feel it is their position to comment on individual schools.

In relation to Wooler and Belford Schools the governors felt it was a decision for those individual schools to decide whether they remain in the Berwick partnership or move to the Alnwick partnership.

Governors agree that the needs for SEND learners can be met under the 3-tier system with additional specialist provision at St Mary’s, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy. The Grove Special School should have a new site as it is currently oversubscribed and there is an increasing demand for spaces. The possibility for a separate site for SEMH learners should be explored further.

To secure better outcomes for young people Post-16/18 provision should work in collaboration with local employers to engage with apprenticeship programmes which will provide real work experiences and develop skills to enhance the local workforce.

Extract from their response:

“Unless there is a considerable evidence base for cost saving or educational improvement by converting to a 2-tier system, we don’t see any benefit.”

“We continue to believe Spittal School can continue to meet the needs of children in either a 2-tier or 3-tier system.”

39. Governing Body of St Cuthbert’s Catholic First School

The Governing Body unanimously and firmly support the 2-tier model of education and wish to become a primary school.

The education system in England is organised around key stages and it follows logically that school organisation should be too. Pupils can complete each entire key stage in one school, with only one point of transition. The 2-tier system ensures that pupils are taught by subject specialists from Year 7 onwards providing them with a challenging curriculum and expertise in preparation for GCSE which governors believe is conducive to the raising of standards.

Extract from their response:

“Becoming a Primary School would allow us to continue to cherish and nurture our pupils right up to the age of 11 and to prepare them for secondary education ourselves. Having only one point of transition would lessen the danger of lost learning, especially as there would not be breaks in the middle of key stages.”

40. Governing Body of Tweedmouth Prior Park First School

The Governing Body support the move to establish a 2-tier structure as it will create a more sustainable education system for children as well as addressing the growing number of surplus places. Governors' reasoning for 2-tier includes:

- Retain more sustainable primary schools across the partnership.
- Single change of school which comes at a natural point in the education cycle (eg. end of key stage 2).
- Fewer transitions benefit all children, especially children with SEND.
- Secondary school has longer to develop the growing child and to prepare them for important exams (eg. GCSE/A Levels).
- 2-tier is the backbone to the National Curriculum Framework and teachers are trained to teach either primary or secondary.
- Ensures greater accountability for educational outcomes with schools becoming accountable for whole key stages.
- 2-tier is in line with the majority of schools nationally.
- First Schools are well placed to deliver the primary curriculum and Tweedmouth Prior Park First has primary teachers who are trained to teach the full primary age range and have the expertise.
- Berwick is no different to other areas of the country that have their own unique challenges. The only difference is that Berwick has too many schools for the falling pupil numbers. Berwick children deserve equality of opportunity with the rest of the country which is predominantly 2-tier.

Governors felt that if Berwick retained 3-tier education more first schools would have to close and pupils continue to have two school changes, occurring part-way through important stages of their education. The falling birth rates is already affecting first schools' sustainability and would make middle schools, in any form, unviable within the next few years and could result in another reorganisation of education. Maintaining the 3-tier system is not a viable solution for the long-term future of the partnership.

The Governing Body believes there needs to be an expansion in the provision of special school places to minimise the need for pupils to travel long distances to find suitable education but do not think that this can be provided unless The Grove moves to a larger site.

Extract from their response:

"We appreciate the challenges that the necessary reorganisation will present to the schools that have to close, but changes must be made to help to improve the education offered to pupils across the partnership and to respond to the significant fall in pupil numbers. We believe that the 2-tier structure of primary/secondary schools is the most effective way of doing this."

"We understand that some parents, staff in other schools and decision makers, including councillors, may favour 3-tier because it is what they know best from their days at school, but it is important that this decision is based on knowledge of the wider national educational landscape."

41. Governing Body of Tweedmouth West First School

The Governing Body was in opposition to moving to 2-tier. Governors are not convinced that a move to 2-tier is the correct decision but were interested in the plan put together by Tweedmouth and Berwick Middle Schools and would like to investigate this possibility further.

As a priority, governors want The Grove School's facilities to significantly increase in capacity to meet the needs of the community as they recognise the specialist support provided by The Grove to be an asset to be proud of. Governors completely support the plan put together by The Grove.

Extract from their response:

"We believe a 2-tier system is likely to create more issues than it may solve for our unique and rural arm of Northumberland and would not build on the successes and positive elements that we already have. Namely our first schools, middle schools and The Grove."

42. Governing Body of Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools

The Federated Governing Body's preference is that the schools become a one form entry primary school, with a new build school, and are re-aligned to the Alnwick Partnership.

Governors are deeply passionate about and also very proud of the pupils, staff and provision here in Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools and outlined the rationale for these decisions:

- Most parents opt to send their children to Alnwick High and currently a third of pupils leave Glendale Middle at the end of Year 6 to ensure a place at Alnwick High.
- Year 8 pupils are unable to select Duchess High as their next school through the local authority transition processes, adding further confusion, difficulty and anxiety to the process.
- A survey of current parents/cares indicate over 50% would make Alnwick their first choice, 27% Berwick as their preferred option with 18% expressing no preference.
- Pupil numbers at Glendale continue to fall and future numbers indicate further reduction over-time. This impacts class sizes, staff deployment, capacity to sustain effective high-quality curriculum coverage and leads to difficulties in recruiting/retaining staff.
- Wooler First School's numbers continue to fall and Wooler First is the only feeder school into Glendale. Previously there had been six feeder schools but two are now primary schools and feed into Duchess' High and three schools have closed.

The governors gave full support to the need to review and expand the SEN education offer in the north of the county.

Extract from their response:

“As governors we understand the challenges facing our local schools in the Berwick partnership. We are committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure the best outcome for our children and young people in our community and would love to be able to maintain the provision for children in the Wooler and Glendale area from two years old to 13 years of age that we have built. However, factors out of our control have led our Governing Body to the following conclusions:

- *Transition to a primary model would safeguard our future viability and the viability of education provision for our rural community.*
- *The need to support all staff as we go through the process with clear guidance and timescales for change and clear staff protocol that identifies how at-risk staff will be supported through the process.*
- *A designated new school build or comprehensive redesign and refurbishment of current facilities.*
- *Early Years provision – maintaining existing provision with possibility to extend provision for the under two-year-olds. Pre-school provision is very limited in this part of the authority.*
- *A possible development of SEND provision to meet needs within the wider area.*
- *Possibility of maintaining current swimming provision on site including sharing this facility with local partners.”*

43. Governing Body of Berwick Middle School

The Governing Body of Berwick Middle School is in complete agreement with Model A (Revised 3-tier system of schools in Berwick).

As governors they understand that middle schools have a very important role to play in driving continual improvement with the partnership, and parents have told them that from the start of the consultation and asked middle school leaders to find an alternative option.

The partnership is in a unique situation and while other parts of the County/Country have changed to a 2-tier system, with questionable results, the Berwick partnership continues to provide the pastoral and educational support which inevitable will lead to excellent outcomes for all pupils within a system that supports high quality learning across all phases. A 2-tier system of education is not, and never will be a “fits all” solution.

In supporting Model A, the governors also support ‘*Option C – An Inclusive Model*’ which has been proposed by Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools and which has significant backing from school leaders within the partnership. Option C is the only proposal which fully addresses all the important statements set out in the ‘*Vision for Change*’. It is a supportive model which will benefit all schools in the partnership and promote successful collaboration across all phases.

Extract from their response:

“As the Governors of Berwick Middle School, we remain passionate about the existing 3-tier system of education in the Berwick Partnership.”

“We are also in agreement that the revision which is necessary can be effectively and efficiently brought about through Option C – An Inclusive Model and therefore give this our full backing.”

44. Governing Body of Tweedmouth Middle School

The Governing Body of Tweedmouth Middle School is in complete and unanimous agreement with Model A (Revised 3-tier system of schools in Berwick).

Their rationale for supporting 3-tier is the same as Berwick Middle and is summarised in para. 43.

Extract from their response:

“As Governing Body of Tweedmouth Community Middle School, we are passionate about the existing 3-tier system of education in the Berwick Partnership. It is the very best system to deliver high-quality outcomes to the pupils of the Berwick catchment, support young people through education and into a successful adult life where they can thrive.”

“We are also in agreement that the revision which is necessary can be effectively and efficiently brought about through Option C – An Inclusive Model and therefore give this our full backing.”

45. The Trustees of Berwick Academy

The Trustees strongly support the proposed move to a 2-tier structure of education for the Berwick Partnership.

Trustees considered the effects for the whole partnership and reviewed the proposal and believe a 2-tier structure will provide the necessary improvements in outcomes for all our young people, which will enable the locality to be educationally sustainable and prosperous.

Specifically:

- Children should be taught the National Curriculum in complete key stages.
- Children should move between schools less often, so that children, families and school can build positive relationships.
- Children and families benefit from developing longer-term relationship with the school, including familiarity with subjects (from Year 7) before choosing GCSE options in Year 9.
- National picture is heavily in favour of 2-tier education, with only 102 3-tier middle schools out of 32,163 schools.
- Teachers are trained to teach either primary or secondary education.
- Schools take responsibility and accountability for whole key stages enabling the delivery of a cohesive and progressive curriculum, the aim currently seen as the main driver in excellence within education (*DfE/OfSTED vision*).

- Reduces the need for testing/assessments within key stage as teachers/schools have a more robust knowledge of the child, their achievements and their areas for development (eg. no need for unnecessary baseline assessments within Year 5).

Trustees considered the issues around SEND and fully support the development of additional provision for the existing and emerging SEND needs. They are aware and supportive of the excellent work of The Grove but recognise the need to support an increasing number of children/families with issues related to SEMH. Berwick Academy has worked with St Mary's to deliver a proposal which relates to providing a new provision to meet the needs of SEMH and other complex needs and hope it can be considered within the context of any decisions.

In respect of Wooler and Belford, the Trustees would like both schools to stay within the Berwick Partnership. They add strength in terms of the current and future potential of our joint education offer and Trustees would like those students to benefit from the partnership work with local employers.

Extract from their response:

"The Trustee Board is unanimously behind the proposed change to 2-tier and passed a resolution to pursue this in January 2021."

"We believe that with falling birth rates in the area, this is the only way to sustain a commercially viable, effective and scalable educational offering within the Berwick Partnership area."

"We acknowledge that many people are wary of change, which can make it a difficult process to go through. However, fear of change should not stop us from executing a strategy in Berwick which will offer the children of our area now, and in future generations, the best possible start to their lives".

46. Governing Body of The Grove School

During Phase 2 Consultation, the Governing Body submitted a proposal explaining the need for a new build for The Grove School on a new site for the PMLD and SLD learners it supports. A commentary on the proposal is set out at para. 78, e. and a full copy of the proposal can be found in the Background Papers to this report.

47. Governing Body of Duchess High School

It is the Governing Body's belief that it is not for them to comment on the relative strengths and weaknesses of reorganisation in other schools' catchment area.

They do feel able to comment on the effect this reorganisation would have on the students/families currently attending the Duchess's High School. Assimilating Belford and Glendale into our catchment would be a positive move for these families (eg. free county provided transport).

The governors felt strongly that Option A is the best option for the families who currently attend Duchess High School, as this will allow for the free provision of transport for our students. What frustrated the governors with the consultation is

having to choose between Option A/B as it may appear that they approve/disapprove of a particular structure.

Extract from their response

“We do not have a view either way on how Berwick should be organised, this is an opinion based on what is best for our current students here. We would like to see all schools thrive in North Northumberland, and we hope that the voices of all stakeholders are heard through this NCC consultation in order to build a better, fairer and more certain future for all involved.”

Staff Groups (collective responses) of schools impacted by the proposals

48. Belford Primary School Staff

The staff at Belford Primary School fully and strongly support the proposal for Belford Primary School to become part of the Alnwick partnership. Since becoming a primary school in 2018 children from Belford have chosen to progress to Duchess Community High School. Parents currently fund transport to Duchess Community High School and many struggle with these costs but if Belford became part of the Alnwick partnership parents would qualify for free home-to-school transport. Staff agreed with the proposed plan to slightly reduce Belford’s catchment area.

The proposal for additional special educational needs provision in the Berwick area is supported by staff as there is clearly a need to reduce the distances that some children travel to access appropriate provision. The Grove School provides outstanding provision in a very small building and whilst staff see the benefits of moving the provision to the larger Tweedmouth Middle School site they are uncertain about extending The Grove’s specialist provision to include SEMH.

Extract from their response:

“There is strong support for Belford Primary to become part of the Alnwick partnership from our parents and the wider community.”

49. Berwick St Mary’s CE and Norham St Ceolwulf’s C of E First Schools Staff

The staff of Berwick St Mary’s and Norham First Schools submitted a joint response to the consultation. Staff are resolute in their belief the option that will produce the best outcomes now and in the future is the proposed move to a 2-tier. Staff are aware of the challenges and barriers children face but believe that a move to an educational system that is fully in line with the National Curriculum and which:

- utilises the training and potential of the teaching community;
- allows schools to be fully accountable for children’s progress through key stages;
- lowers children’s anxiety by reducing the number of transitions;
- builds on purposeful and effective staff/pupil relationships; and
- supports the needs of most vulnerable students, including those with SEND

will give the children the best chance to succeed. Staff reiterated the key factors outlined by governors and these are summarised in para. 32.

Within a 2-tier structure St Mary's would like to expand its offer for SEND which is sadly lacking in relation to SEMH, ASD and ADHD within Berwick. Under a 2-tier structure St Mary's would like to offer children with SEMH, ASD and ADHD a more long-term solution through the development of a Specialist Support Base. The provision will be part of a wider Berwick SEND offer working collaboratively with The Grove School and Berwick Academy, enabling a flexible approach to meeting the needs of individual SEND learners now and in the future.

The staff have experience of supporting other settings in terms of providing targeted support and sharing good practice. In the restructure we propose to formalise that offer with a hard federation between Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First School and Tweedmouth Prior Park First School. This federation will improve long-term financial sustainability working in a model supported by the DfE's current promotion of 'family of schools' initiative.

Extract from their response:

"As a staff we have put the future of our children at the forefront of our decision, not our jobs, and as such see the urgency required to restructure the Berwick Partnership into something that meets the needs of the modern world and National Curriculum.

Although we recognise the difficulty of change, we do not recognise the argument that is currently being put forward that we have always had a 3-tier structure in Berwick, and it works. As evidence suggests otherwise and this is not just about key stage 4 results but:

- *our lack of continuity between the 3-tiers for curriculum offer,*
- *increasing numbers leaving our partnership post first school,*
- *lack of inclusive provision for SEND learners,*
- *major issues with recruitment and retention,*
- *our children are ill prepared for the next stages of education, especially at high school.*

50. Holy Trinity CE First School Staff

The staff from Holy Trinity First School were unable to come to a consensus view and therefore declined to submit a response.

51. Hugh Joicey C of E Aided First School Staff

Staff from Hugh Joicey C of E First School responded independently via the online survey.

52. Lowick and Holy Island CE First Schools Staff

The staff at Lowick and Holy Island C of E First Schools have mixed views with regards to Model A and Model B.

Staff strongly support a new building for The Grove School and felt we should defer to the expertise of The Grove staff that the suggested mix of SEND in The Grove would not work. The Grove should keep their current area of expertise but be relocated into a larger purpose-built school which should be future proofed by ensuring there are enough spaces to enable children in the Berwick partnership to attend special school in their local area.

Children in the partnership have limited options post-16 and have to travel long distances to access courses therefore staff felt there should be more choice for children post-16 onwards.

To the best of staffs' knowledge early years provision is sufficient.

Extract from their response:

“On one hand we appreciate that middle schools are a valuable stepping-stone between small first schools and a large high school. We recognise their pastoral care for Year 5s and helping children develop ahead of mixing into the high school. We appreciate and respect the good work done by our middle schools.

On the other hand, we also recognise that, as small schools, we know our children extremely well and can tailor our curriculum to their educational needs. We feel that we could develop this well into upper key stage 2 in our context.”

53. Scremerston First School Staff

Staff at Scremerston First support the 2-tier model and would like the following points considered:

- Catchment - 60% of families choose the Scremerston offer over their catchment school. This choice should not be taken away as no other rural school is close and families send children here because of the smaller class sizes, nurturing ethos and reputation for supporting children with SEND (50% of children received additional support come from out of catchment).
- Church – Scremerston is the only rural school offering non-church school provision in the partnership, a choice several of our parents have made. Under the 2-tier proposal the partnership would have twice as many church primary schools as non-church, an imbalance which does not reflect the demographic of the town/nation. Under 3-tier option the ratio is seven church schools to four non-church, again a predominance of church schools.
- Community – Scremerston is a distinct rural community and would be very much diminished if deprived of its school, which is the hub of the community. School grounds are kept open out of hours to enable the local community to access a safe play area and school has numerous ways it has got involved with the community.
- Early Years Provision – Lucky Ducks Nursery operates in a building administered by the school and would have to close if the school closed resulting in reduced early years places.

- Spare Places – Closure of Scremerston First would not solve the issues of spare places; a more realistic PAN for each school would immediately reduce the number of space places.
- Transport – Additional cost with more children requiring transport to schools potentially further away. Children living in Scremerston could not be expected to walk to the next school as the road is very fast (60mph).

Extract from their response:

“We believe that a 2-tier model will provide the best learning outcomes for the children of Berwick but envisage Scremerston First as an integral part of this future structure.”

54. Spittal First School Staff

Staff at Spittal First School share the views of their Governing Body that 3-tier is the best option and it is a choice for Wooler and Belford whether they remain in the Berwick partnership or move to the Alnwick partnership.

Regarding SEND provision the staff agreed that the needs for SEND learners could be met under the 3-tier system and that the Grove Special School should have a new site as it was currently over-subscribed with an increasing demand for spaces. Options for separate purpose-built site(s) for SEMH learners should be explored further.

The staff felt that opportunities for Post-16/Post-18 needed to be considerable extended to provide relevant training and education.

Extract from their response:

“As a staff we feel the best option to meet the needs of the children in the Berwick Partnership is through a 3-tier system. We don’t feel it is appropriate for us to comment on which schools close or remain open. We feel it would be appropriate to explore further the alternative model for a single middle school and wider opportunities for closer working between all schools across the phases”

55. St Cuthbert’s Catholic First School Staff

Staff at St Cuthbert’s Catholic First School support the 2-tier model of education and their response clearly sets out why they wished to become a primary school:

- Able to provide Catholic education to their children for longer. This is cherished by families and currently there is no provision for this after Year 4.
- Children should complete full key stages in the same school, with minimum points of transition during their school life.
- Minimise disruption to progress during a key stage and gives teachers a greater opportunity to develop and nurture children. Particularly important when it comes to preparing for key assessments (eg. SATS).
- GCSE preparation from Year 7 upwards in secondary education with specialist teachers in each subject – giving the children two extra years of GCSE preparation in the same school they will sit their exams in.

- Teachers are trained to teach in either the *‘primary’* or *‘secondary’* phase of education. By becoming 2-tier it would give teaching staff the opportunities to teach across the age range they have trained to teach in.

The staff support a real investment into an expansion of The Grove School which is over-subscribed. This needs to be part of the plan for the local authority moving forward to continue to enhance the outstanding provision The Grove provides for families across Berwick.

Extracts from their response:

“As a school we are ready for 2-tier and have the space and capacity to accommodate a Year 5/6 class.”

“Transition to a secondary school at Year 7 would have to be well planned, as it is across most of the rest of the UK, but we are a dedicated team of staff who would ensure that this move would be carried out very carefully and work closely with Berwick Academy.”

“We feel for the reasons set out above, the 2-tier model will secure better outcomes for the children of Berwick for years to come.”

56. Tweedmouth Prior Park First School Staff

Teaching staff at Tweedmouth Prior Park First School submitted their response online and supported reorganisation to a 2-tier structure. Their reasons are summarised as follows:

- Reorganisation to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure represents the best option for securing sustainable and viable education.
- Falling birth rate is impacting on first schools at present but will eventually impact upon middle and high schools making the 3-tier model no longer sustainable.
- Key Stage 2 should not be divided between two education settings. Allowing full Key Stages to remain in one school will ensure continuity and greater accountability.
- Reducing the number of transitions will be less disruptive to children's education therefore achieving better outcomes and reducing anxiety.
- By becoming a primary school, we would be able to build upon the immense progress made over the previous six years they have spent in first school.
- Students should not be expected to select GCSE subjects after one term in High School.

Every child with SEND has the right to education as close to home as possible. The current Grove site is no longer big enough for the number of children who need to access it and there are increasing numbers with SEMH. As a partnership we need to address the growing numbers and provision. However, staff believe the current Tweedmouth Middle building is not fit for purpose as a SEND specialist provision and would need significant adaptations or a rebuild to make it suitable. In the current 3-tier structure there isn't the capacity to support and educate our high number of SEND children in the Berwick Partnership.

In relation to Post-16/Post-18, Berwick children deserve more options that can be accessed locally. There are not enough options currently to suit all learners and children often have to travel huge distances in order to access the courses they want, often at great personal expense. Could there be partnerships with universities and employers?

Staff believe all early year's provision from age 3+ should be teacher led as this does help to improve educational outcomes. With the current falling birth rate in Berwick there are too many early years providers in the town. School nurseries need to be allowed more flexibility to support working parents and therefore putting them on a level playing field with private and voluntary providers.

Extract from their response:

"We believe Tweedmouth Prior Park First School should become a 2-tier primary school to ensure the best education is continued to be provided to the children in the Prior Park catchment area.

57. Tweedmouth West First School Staff

Staff at Tweedmouth West First School have expressed a difference of opinion to that of their Governing Body and are in favour of a reorganisation to 2-tier system.

As a priority, The Grove School require a new suitable building to increase the school's capacity and improve outcomes for SEND children in Berwick by:

- Reducing the number of children travelling to alternative provision.
- All children in Berwick to have their needs met in a suitable environment.
- Relieve pressure on mainstream schools who are accepting increasing numbers of high needs children.

Extracts from their response:

"Our majority opinion is in favour of moving to a 2-tier system."

"Tweedmouth West School should remain open on its existing site."

58. Wooler First School Staff

Wooler First School Staff didn't give their support to either model but provided their views and question as follows:

If we become a primary school and remain in the same building, there are lots of concerns regarding the financial implications and the suitability/condition of the building. How long would it be able to serve as a primary school? What is the long-term plan given the intention of the consultation to create a sustainable education system?

What happens if we become a primary school, remain in the current building and become financially unviable because of it? The building is too big for a primary school with facilities (eg. swimming pool) which we will be unable to fund. Has there

been consideration to sharing the building (eg. alternative provision)? If adaptations are made to the building, to make it suitable, what would these be, would they impact the quality of education and what would the timeframe be?

Our Early Years provision need better facilities, the outdoor play equipment is end of life, the outdoor area needs to be redesigned, facilities for breakfast/after school clubs are limited and would need to be improved to accommodate the older primary aged children. Looking to the future of our Early Years Provision staff think it is important to investigate the possibility of providing under-twos childcare which could greatly strengthen numbers coming into Reception.

Extract from their response:

“There is a feeling that by assigning the school to one secondary school and requiring parents to pay for transport to the other at the end of Year 6 would lead to some of our pupils being disadvantaged due to their geographical location. It also may mean parents would not choose to send their children to our primary school. If Berwick also goes 2-tier would it be possible for our parents to have a choice at the end of Year 6 whether they went to Alnwick or Berwick for secondary school? This did used to be the case at the end of Year 8.”

59. Berwick Middle School Staff

The staff of Berwick Middle School is in complete agreement with Model A (revised 3-tier system of schools in Berwick).

Staffs’ reasons for supporting 3-tier are the same as those expressed by the Governing Body and summarised in para. 43.

Extract from their response:

“As staff of Berwick Middle School, we remain passionate about the existing 3-tier system of education in the Berwick Partnership.”

“We are also in agreement that the revision which is necessary can be effectively and efficiently brought about through Option C – An Inclusive Model and therefore give this our full backing.”

60. Glendale Middle School Staff

The staff at Glendale are aware that under the current proposals in this consultation that Glendale Middle School is under serious threat of closure and would like to express our unhappiness at this proposal and the decision by our Governing Body seeking to have a primary school located on this site.

Outlined below are staffs’ collective thoughts and possible solutions to the issue:

- Glendale is a good school (*OFSTED rating*). The proposal is to send over 40% of the children to educational establishments which are not rated good (both options require improvement). If education is the priority this is not a good move.

- The increased travel distance (by more than 16 miles in most instances) is not a benefit to the child or the carbon footprint which is supposed to be a key factor in the consultation. This hampers pupils' ability to attend after school clubs/sports events and will have an adverse effect on our pupils.
- One option is to be part of the Alnwick partnership. Our Key Stage 3 children will be educated at Duchess High School, a school which requires improvement and according to its latest OFSTED report does so due to poor provision for Key Stage 3 children. This will not improve their outcomes.
- Clearly there is a falling demographic in the locality, but the position of the school has been further jeopardised by changing our catchment area following the changes to school organisation in the Alnwick Partnership, something we were strongly opposed to at the time.
- The destabilising effect of changing catchment and falling numbers has had a knock-on effect of making staff recruitment and retention very difficult.
- We have excellent SEND provision and pupils attend this school specifically to access this provision. We are a very nurturing school and currently have 27% SEND allocation, which is above the national average and our outcomes are excellent. We would like to suggest that this provision be expanded as there is nowhere near enough SEND provision in the North Northumberland area. Staff feel with their experience they are ideally positioned to offer provision for all SEND pupils but especially in some specialist areas, which go beyond the physical disability and difficult behaviours provision at the Grove and St Mary's (eg. ASD provision and SEMH provision for girls and pupils who find it difficult to attend school due to their Autism and anxiety, but who do not present with challenging behaviour). Being able to expand the range of this provision in our nurturing school would be a cost-effective asset to our area. This would also allow Wooler First School to stay on this current site as the building would be fully utilised and become affordable.

Extract from their response:

"We feel Glendale offers a nurturing environment for a rural location. Our location is fairly unique, and we feel should have an education system to fit the locality and in our opinion, this is at a middle school.

We have excellent staff, amazing facilities and the desire to make things better for all the pupils in our locality. This could be by remaining as a middle school or enhancing the excellent SEND provision we currently offer. Either way, education up to until the age of 13 on this site is what is needed not only for our pupils but to secure the education and facilities for all pupils in this locality."

61. Tweedmouth Middle School Staff

The staff of Tweedmouth Middle School is in complete agreement with Model A (revised 3-tier system of schools in Berwick).

Staffs' reasons for supporting 3-tier are the same as those expressed by Governors from Berwick Middle Schools and summarised in para. 43.

Extract from their response:

“As staff of Tweedmouth Middle School, we remain passionate about the existing 3-tier system of education in the Berwick Partnership.”

“We are also in agreement that the revision which is necessary can be effectively and efficiently brought about through Option C – An Inclusive Model and therefore give this our full backing.”

62. Berwick Academy Staff

Berwick Academy staff strongly supports the proposed move to a 2-tier structure of education for the Berwick partnership.

The move to a primary/secondary structure is based on the strong educational case that has been made by the headteacher, senior leadership team and wider staff body, supported by evidence, advice and experience from schools in the region and nationally. The key reasons are summarised as follows:

Educational outcomes

- Children should be taught the National Curriculum in complete key stages – as they are in the majority of schools across the country.
- National picture is heavily in favour of 2-tier education, with only 102 3-tier middle schools out of 32,163 schools.
- Teachers are trained to teach either primary or secondary education. 2-tier allows for specialist secondary teachers with recent GCSE/A Level teaching experience to teach these subjects from Year 7 – leading to improved outcomes for students.
- Schools take responsibility and accountability for whole key stages enabling the delivery of a cohesive and progressive curriculum, the aim currently seen as the main driver in excellence within education (*DfE/OfSTED vision*).
- Reduces the need for testing/assessments within key stage as teachers/schools have a more robust knowledge of the child, their achievements and their areas for development and means that baseline assessments within Year 5 would be unnecessary which are currently needed as an element of 3-tier transition).

Relationships

- Children and families benefit from developing longer-term relationship (from Year 7) with the school and familiarity with subjects, before choosing GCSE options during Year 9.
- Children should move between schools less often rather than changing three times and in the middle of a key stage. Children, families and the school can build positive relationships with a clear understanding of expectations.

Sustainability

- Fewer schools within the partnership will lead to a more sustainable model for the future. Fluctuations in birth rates, and therefore funding a school receives, can be more easily weathered by schools which have a stronger funding base to begin with.
- Schools within the partnership are keen to maintain our sense of rural identity and we feel that the best way to secure this for the future is to move to a stronger 2-tier model.

Berwick Academy believes that the 'Vision for Change' can be best achieved through implementing a 2-tier structure across the partnership.

Berwick Academy is committed to developing a post-16 provision which ensures young people in the area have access to a range of options. The Academy is committed to working in a complimentary, non-competitive partnership to ensure the Northumberland Strategic Skills Plan can be fully implemented.

The Academy has worked in partnership with St Mary's to provide new provision to meet the needs of SEMH and complex needs. The impact of Covid on children's mental health, is just emerging and staff believe any proposed changes should provide the correct provision and resources both now and in the long-term. The proposal suggested is fully aligned to the National Strategic Inclusion Strategy.

Extract from their response:

"Berwick Academy fully supports the structural change to a 2-tier primary/secondary future for the partnership. This is based on sound educational, relational and financial considerations, which we believe can only be delivered sustainably within a 2-tier structure within the Berwick partnership area."

Berwick Academy remains committed to our clearly stated aims of ensuring that our school community is framed within a context of "friendship, learning and respect". We will ensure that transition arrangements are handled sensitively and efficiently to secure a positive experience for all students."

63. The Grove School Staff

The Staff at The Grove School are in complete agreement that more localised provision for children with SEMH as their primary need is needed in Berwick but believe that pupils, whose learning needs fall within the mainstream range, should have the opportunity to learn within a mainstream school, with access to the appropriately trained staff to further their education but with appropriate accommodations made to support their SEMH needs. It would be inappropriate for those pupils to be expected to join The Grove school, both under our current name or under a new name. Concerns are around school refusals and pupils not being given an outstanding opportunity to learn at their cognitive level.

In addition to appropriate provision made for SEMH under either a 3-tier or 2-tier system we feel strongly that a new school for the current pupils at The Grove School needs to be a priority. I understand that the data does not seem to show that there is a need for additional PMLD or SLD places for our school, however we know that there are currently more than enough pupils in the Berwick Partnership to fill at least another class and that is before our current large class sizes are split.

Extract from their response:

"Appropriately staffed, equipped and run 'hubs' within a first/middle/high or primary/secondary model would be a far more inclusive way to support these pupils. As a staff we see our role in an advisory and supportive role to the other schools within the partnership, should they desire this, whilst still educating the PMLD and SLD pupils we are currently designated to support."

64. Overall responses from Parents with children on roll at schools in the Berwick Partnership

Question 7 of the consultation questionnaire asked whether the revised 3-tier structure (Model A) represented the best option for securing sustainable and viable education in the Berwick partnership and parents/carers responded as follows:

Phase	Yes	No	Don't Know
First School	57	64	12
Middle Schools	66	50	8
High Schools	15	16	0

The main reasons given for selecting 'Yes' are summarised below:

- 3-tier works best in Berwick.
- The middle schools are excellent schools which produce excellent results, give children better learning opportunities with specialist teachers and access to specialist facilities.
- Pupils in Berwick benefit from attending the Middle Schools, particularly given the long-standing poor performance of the Academy.
- 3-tier proves a safe stepping-stone into high school.

The main reasons given for selecting 'No' are summarised below:

- The 3-tier system is not sustainable.
- Believe that a 2-tier system would better support the learning needs of the children in the area as it follows the key stages thus making the schools responsible for the learning outcomes of the children.
- Don't agree with the proposed closure or amalgamation of first schools.

The main reasons given for selecting 'don't know' are summarised below:

- Don't agree that Scremerston First should close.
- Don't agree with the proposals to close as many schools.
- 2-tier is okay but don't agree with the proposal to close Scremerston.
- 3-tier is okay but not the closure of Scremerston.

Question 14 of the consultation questionnaire asked whether reorganisation to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure represents the best option for securing sustainable and viable education across Berwick and parent/carers responded as follows:

Phase	Yes	No	Don't Know
First School	46	74	13
Middle Schools	24	96	4
High Schools	10	21	0

The main reasons for selecting 'Yes' are summarised below:

- One less transition so provides much needed consistency and is much less disruptive, so children cope better.
- 2-tier structure is nationally recognised as the best model as it moves children to coincide with key stages of the curriculum and aligns Berwick with the majority of the UK.
- Education in middle schools for Years 7 and 8 is minimalistic with pupils working hard in Years 5 and 6 to achieve good results in their SATS but the following two years aren't challenged.
- Moving schools at the end of Year 8 does not give children long to settle at High School before they have to choose GSCE options.

The main reasons given for selecting the 'No' option are:

- Middle Schools provide excellent education and provide specialist teaching from age 9+ that a 2-tier system cannot provide.
- Berwick Academy is in no position to provide adequate education to our children currently without sending them there sooner.
- There is no guarantee that outcomes will improve.
- At age 11, the children are far too young to be in a school with other children up to ages 16, 17, 18. The middle school environment provides an ideal environment to nurture the children and help them mature and build the confidence to deal with the transition to the academy.

The main reasons given for selecting 'don't know' are summarised below:

- Don't want Scremerston First to close.
- Both models have pros and cons.

Pupils

65. Responses from pupils in the following schools were received during the consultation

- Norham St Ceolwulf's C of E First School
- St Mary's C of E First School
- Lowick C of E First School
- Holy Island C of E First School
- Holy Trinity C of E First School
- Scremerston First School
- St Cuthbert's Catholic First School
- Tweedmouth Prior Park First School
- Tweedmouth West First School
- Tweedmouth Middle School
- Berwick Middle School
- Berwick Academy

Responses from pupils included the following themes:

- I love my school.

- I don't want to leave at the end of Year 4, I as I know the teachers and my friends.
- Meet new people and make new friends.
- I want to go to middle school as I have friends/family there.
- Really like this school.
- I don't want to leave first school, there is no detention.
- I don't want to walk all the way to middle school, I would like to stay here with my friends and it is near my home.
- We have 'outgrown' the school. It will be cool to see older children, we are the oldest here.

Full responses from pupils and students are available in the Background Papers to this report.

Responses from other groups and organisations

66. Response from the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board (NDEB)

The NDEB is of the opinion that a 2-tier system would be the most beneficial way forward for the children of the partnership.

It recognises there has been robust debate about the correct model for Berwick and fully appreciates the challenges of the number of 'tiny' and 'rural' schools as well as pressures on all schools of falling rolls and the detrimental impact of this on school budgets. The Board would welcome at the earliest opportunity consideration to hard federate Norham C of E First School with St Mary's C of E First School to support longer term viability of Norham and support options for shared CPD between the smaller schools.

There are six C of E schools directly affected and in pre-consultation all indicated a preference for becoming primary. The NDEB would wish to avoid the continuation of a "mixed economy" of both first and primary schools in nearby geographical areas which was partly exacerbated by the closure of Belford Middle School. Should the outcome be to move to 2-tier it would mean that schools on the partnership's border would be in line with those of the neighbouring partnership.

With regards to Glendale Middle and Wooler First Schools the NDEB would wish to support the views of the Governing Body of those schools. However, the NDEB has a concern that losing several children from the partnership may jeopardise the viability of KS3 and KS4 in Berwick. In considering the geographical location of Belford the NDEB would suggest that Belford Primary should remain within the partnership.

The NDEB are already aware of, and support, the offer put forwards from Berwick St Mary's C of E First School to support children with Special Needs and Disabilities within the partnership. As inclusive schools we welcome this potential opportunity provided the correct and sustained investment is made to the building and surrounding grounds to support this possibility.

With regards to EYFS Provision it notes the capacity already available in the area – but would support any enhancements to this provision. In relation to 6th Form/post

sixteen provision, NDEB would support a partnership approach of all stakeholders to ensure the needs of all children and students are met.

Extract from their response:

“There is an ongoing wider debate about the value of 2-tier versus 3-tier and we remain neutral on this wider debate whilst recognising that local context and area is very important to this. After consultation with Officers in the Joint Education Team the NDEB are of the opinion that, in the Berwick context, increased continuity of the curriculum; reduced transitions for children; increased level of accountability at given key stages and the wider opportunities for CPD in a 2-tier system would all benefit the school system in Berwick. We also note that in a number of our 2-tier systems secondary schools are moving to a model of working on syllabus earlier in a child’s pathway through schools to support with long term outcomes.”

67. Response from the Diocese of Hexham of Newcastle

The view of the Diocese is that we are supportive of a move to a 2-tier system.

Educationally this would be better for the children of Berwick. We would like to offer families a Catholic education up to the end of Key Stage 2 at St Cuthbert’s School. The Diocese, as responsible body, has invested LCVAP and SCA funding in St Cuthbert’s School in anticipation of a potential for an expansion of the age group to Year 6. Our preference, if the proposal goes ahead, that the children in Year 4 in the academic year of 2023-24 stay at St Cuthbert’s as Year 5 pupils in the academic year of 2024-25 so as to minimise the disruption to the children’s education.

Extract from their response:

“I know that there will need to be co-ordination across the partnership but I would encourage the Council to consider bringing the date forward. I am aware that the Diocese has only one school in the partnership. However, we are fully committed to working closely together with other schools and Trusts to support an improved system for all families.”

68. Summary of feedback from Trustees of Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust

The Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust believes that 2-tier provides better educational opportunities for children.

There are three main reasons:

- Within 2-tier there is expert curriculum delivery from Year 7 and only one point of transition. Subject specialist teachers are able to ensure that all children have access to a challenging and exciting curriculum, where the expert subject knowledge of teachers will enthuse and stretch the learning of students, preparing them more readily for GCSE and Post-16 qualifications. In a 3-tier system, there is more chance of lost learning where there is less access to subject expertise or experience of delivering GCSE qualifications. There may not be secure knowledge of curriculum sequencing between KS3 and KS4 and so opportunities to make these vital links may be impacted.

- Moving to a 2-tier system will provide students with a more seamless social transition to high school. It is clear from the Trust's experience across five high schools that Year 7 students benefit from the role models provided by Years 11-13.
- For children with SEND transition points can also be high risk for children with additional vulnerabilities. Therefore, reducing these moves will lessen the issues faced by these children. There will be more time to forge relationships with key adults in the primary school along with their peers. The process of transition to secondary will be more effective because of the deeper knowledge acquired of specific needs, the child's progress through KS1 and KS2 and what has worked best to support them.

Extract from their response:

"Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust is committed to supporting St Cuthbert's Catholic First School in its desire to offer full primary provision to the families of Berwick."

"As a faith Trust, we are clear that extra years within a Catholic school will help our children to develop their own sense of spirituality and a sense of their uniqueness and importance to the world around them. We will work with the high school in Berwick to ensure there are opportunities for further development in this area."

69. North Northumberland Branch of the National Autistic Society

The view of the NAS North Northumberland Branch is that 2-tier is the better model.

The 3-tier system has too many transitions and for students dealing with SEND and puberty it can be difficult. Within 2-tier there is only one transition and better transfer of knowledge with access to more specialisms earlier and it is easier to mix emotionally at Year 7.

Agree with Wooler becoming a primary school, but parents should be able to choose either Berwick or Alnwick mainly because of geographical reasons.

Having the old Belford Middle School as a specialist provision would undoubtedly improve the outcomes for children with SEND, especially those that are not reaching their potential or are home schooled as no suitable provision. It would also be a peripatetic service where expertise could be accessed. The potential addition of multi-agency working there with health and social care services would enhance such an offer.

Would not like to change the current criteria for Grove admission but SEMH may be part of that, and the numbers will continue to increase. Happy for Tweedmouth Middle but awareness of stairs for some students being a problem.

70. Summary of feedback from County Councillors with wards in Berwick Partnership area

Online responses to the consultation were received from two County Councillors (Cllr Mark Mather and Cllr Isabel Hunter) with wards in the Berwick partnership. Both supported the 2-tier system of education as they believe it is a better model of education and would be financially sustainable for the future.

Cllr. Mather support the proposal of Wooler moving to the Alnwick partnership if Berwick remained 3-tier as the school had suffered due to being on the border of 2-tier and 3-tier education systems. Cllr Mather also proposed that if Wooler went 2-tier it could provide opportunities for the community to have community provisions, eg. family hub, gym, 0 to 2 years provision, office space, sure start and new location of Wooler football pitch which could free up an area that could be used for affordable rented housing.

71. Summary of feedback from Town and Parish Councils in the Berwick Partnership area

Responses to the consultation were received on behalf of four Parish Councils (Ancroft, Duddo, Lowick and Norham). All four Parish Councils did not support the belief that the revised 3-tier structure represented the best option for securing sustainable and viable education across the Berwick partnership whilst three (Duddo, Lowick and Norham) believed that reorganisation to a 2-tier structure was the best option.

In response to the question about Belford Primary School, three Parish Councils (Adderstone with Lucker, Belford and Duddo) were in support of Belford Primary becoming part of the Alnwick partnership.

Other responses received during consultation

72. This summary feedback is drawn from the responses of individuals who used the online consultation document including individual governor, staff and community member feedback, but does not include parent feedback which has been extracted and summarised at para. 64.

Question 7 (Having read the consultation document thoroughly, I believe that the revised 3-tier structure (Model A) represents the best option for securing sustainable and viable education across the Berwick Partnership of schools and for achieving the objectives of the 'Vision for Berwick' (refer to page 5 of Consultation Document). This model includes the following proposals:

- *Closure of Scremerston First School*
- *Closure of Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First School*
- *Amalgamation of Tweedmouth West and Tweedmouth Prior Park First Schools*
- *Closure of Glendale Middle School)*

The main reasons given in support are:

- Middle schools and the 3-tier system needs to be retained as it provides an excellent education for pupils, supports the Berwick area and gives:
 - children time to grow and develop
 - safe and nurturing environment

- benefits of specialist teaching
- excellent pastoral care
- natural stepping-stone to high school
- provide high quality teacher and consistency perform well
- No guarantees, and very little evidence to suggest that a move to 2-tier would bring about an improvement.
- Collaboration between schools is required and Option C – An Inclusive Model proposed by the middle schools would support that.

Main reasons given against:

- 2-tier is the best way forward and would be more beneficial to children's educational needs.
- 3-tier doesn't work and is outdated and in the long term not financially sustainable due to falling birth rates.
- Having two transition is disadvantageous.

Question 10 (*Extension of the age range of Wooler First School to become a primary and for the Wooler and Belford Primaries to join the Alnwick Partnership, with pupils feeding to Alnwick The Duchess High School.*)

The main reasons given in support are:

- It makes sense as Belford is already a primary school and almost all its pupils attend Alnwick High School and the families would receive support with funding transport.
- There are already a number of Wooler students who attend the Alnwick partnership and geographically the distance to travel to the schools is about the same.
- We believe Key Stage 2 should not be divided between two education settings. Students should not be expected to select GCSE subjects after one term in High School.

Main Reasons give against:

- Parents in Wooler and Belford should not have their choice of school limited.
- In order to retain pupil numbers in the Berwick partnership it is important that both Wooler and Belford remain in the partnership.
- Do not support 3-tier and believe 2-tier should be implemented.

Question 12 (*Proposed changes to school catchment areas arising from the closure of Scremerston and Norham St Ceolwulf's First Schools, the amalgamation of Tweedmouth West and Tweedmouth Prior Park First Schools, and the move of Belford Primary to the Alnwick Partnership.*)

The main reasons given in support are:

- Currently there are too many first schools.

- Due to the falling school roll numbers, closures and amalgamation of schools would seem sensible.

Main reasons given against:

- If Option C – An Inclusive Model was supported it could mean that Scremerston First School would be viable and could remain open. Norham children would be offered places at Scremerston. Tweedmouth West could stand alone and St Mary’s would join with Prior Park.
- Do not support the closure of Scremerston First School as it is a much needed, non-church rural school.
- Do not agree with the amalgamation of Tweedmouth West and Tweedmouth Prior Park.
- 3-tier is outdated and 2-tier should be implemented.

Question 14 *(Having read the consultation document thoroughly, I believe that the reorganisation of the Berwick Partnership to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure represents the best option for securing sustainable and viable education across the Berwick Partnership of schools and for achieving the objectives of the ‘Vision for Berwick’ (refer to page 5 of Consultation Document). This model includes the following proposals:*

- *Closure of Scremerston First School*
- *Closure of Glendale Middle School*
- *Closure of Berwick Middle School*
- *Closure of Tweedmouth Middle School)*

Main reasons given in support:

- 2-tier gives children the best opportunity for educational achievement:
 - specialist teaching
 - transition at end of key stage 2, rather than in the middle
 - access to pastoral support earlier will help build trust and relationships and help navigate students through hormonal/emotional changes
 - greater accountability
- National Curriculum, teacher training and key stages all align with the 2-tier system and would be in step with the majority of schools in the UK and those boarding Berwick.
- Only one transition, resulting in less disruption to children’s education that multiple changes can have.

Main reasons given against:

- 3-tier works effectively. Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools deliver good education and play a vital role in developing and nurturing young people.
- The Academy is the problem and is unable to cope with its current pupils.
- Doesn’t achieve the “Vision for Berwick” and there is no guarantee that it will improve outcomes, especially as good schools would be closed.

Question 19 (*Proposed changes to school catchment areas arising from the closure of Scremerston First School and the move of Belford Primary to the Alnwick Partnership.*)

The main reasons given in support are:

- Appears to be the most sensible option as majority of students already attend Duchess High School and would streamline the process.
- Tweedmouth Prior Park has the capacity to welcome all pupils from Scremerston First School.
- Schools need to be sustainable financially in the future which means catchment areas may need to change.

Main reasons given against:

- Scremerston First is an excellent school and should not close:
 - it supports children's learning and is a big part of the community
 - children would have to travel further, along a busy road.
 - it is a commuter schools which provides a non-church option for parents
 - its closure would impact on the pre-school which is run from the site
- Scremerston Primary does not need to close, however there is a need for Belford Primary to move to Alnwick Partnership
- Scremerston First School could be financially viable under the proposed Option C – An Inclusive Model.

Feedback on proposals to create additional specialist (SEND) provision in Berwick

73. This summary feedback is drawn from all the responses of individuals who used the online consultation document.

Question 22 of the consultation questionnaire asked, "*whether responders supported the proposed model for additional Special Educational Needs provision within the revised 3-tier structure of schools in the Berwick Partnership through the addition of specialist provision within St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle School and Berwick Academy, with The Grove Special School continuing with its current provision at its current site. This model included a proposal for all schools in the partnership to have additional SEND support through a peripatetic service to be explored.*"

Via the on-line questionnaire, 334 of the responses received were in support of this proposal with the main reasons summarised as follows:

- Additional specialist SEND support is desperately needed in the Berwick area as vulnerable children should not be made to travel.
- Provision for SEMH is essential for pupils in the Berwick Partnership and would be best facilitated by staff working at each phase.
- Agree with the proposals and would also want expanded provision to cater for differing needs for all ages.
- The Grove School needs to have a new, purpose-built site to allow it to extend its offer as it does not have enough capacity to meet the needs of learners eligible within the partnership

There were 215 responses opposed to the proposal with the main reasons summarised as follows:

- Don't support the 3-tier system and would prefer the 2-tier model.
- The Grove needs to be bigger, preferably in a new purpose-built facility.
- In the current 3-tier structure there isn't the capacity to support and educate our high number of SEND children in the Berwick Partnership.
- SEND provision would also benefit from students having fewer transitions, a single transition at age 11 is preferable.

Question 24 of the questionnaire asked, *"whether responders supported the proposed model for additional Special Educational Needs provision within the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure of schools in the Berwick Partnership through the extension of The Grove's specialist provision to include SEMH and its relocation to the current Tweedmouth Middle School site, and for a proposal for all schools in the partnership to have additional SEND support through a peripatetic service to be explored"*.

Via the on-line questionnaire, 261 of the responses received were in support of this proposal with the main reasons summarised as follows:

- Every child with SEND has the right to education as close to home as possible.
- This will bring much needed additional capacity to The Grove School and allow for expansion.
- Possible opportunities for integration for some SEND secondary age children to attend mainstream school.

There were 302 responses opposed to this proposal and the main reasons are summarised as follows:

- Do not believe Tweedmouth Middle School site is suitable for the needs of The Grove. The Grove needs a new purpose-built building not a school site where the building is not fit for special educational needs (eg. wheelchair users).
- Doesn't make sense to include SEMH within a school that provides for SEND students with very complex needs. SEMH has different needs and should remain separate so that students receive the best outcome.
- Centralised hubs would provide SEMH provision across all phases as outline in the Option C Model proposed by the middle schools.

Early Years Feedback

74. This summary feedback is drawn from all the responses of individuals who used the online consultation document.

Consultees were asked whether *"the current Early Years provision, in schools or other providers, was sufficient in the Berwick area"* and 80 responded to say that they *"agreed"* with the statement. Other comments received in response to the question are summarised as follows:

- Lack of early years provision for children with SEHM needs or ASD.

- Early years provision from age 3+ should be teacher led as this does help to improve educational outcomes.
- If Scremerston First School closes Lucky Ducks would have to close leading to a reduced number of rural early years provision.
- In Wooler, there is minimal childcare options particularly for 0-2.
- Limited childcare options for children under 3.

Post 16/18 Feedback

75. This summary feedback is drawn from all the responses of individuals who used the online consultation document.

The questionnaire asked for thoughts or ideas on how to improve the Post-16 and Post-18 provision in the Berwick area and the main comments are summarised below:

- Improve the academy and post-16 offer including collaboration with Northumberland College.
- College Campus for north Northumberland.
- Extend Northumberland College to give more choice.
- Greater links with local businesses to offer apprenticeships for those pupils who are skilled in manual tasks but are not academic.
- More vocational courses.
- More accessible courses for leavers of The Grove.
- Under a revised 3 tier system “Option C An inclusive Model” post 16/18 provision is included and this option could be a viable option to see closer working relationships with local businesses and career initiatives.

Petition and Facebook Responses

76. Two petitions, requesting support to prevent the closure of various schools, were carried out during the Phase 2 consultation as follows:

- Save our Middle Schools (SOMS) - Had over 500 members of the public attend the SOMS event at the local Town Hall, 813 signatures on the online petition to save the middle schools and 3-tier.
- Scremerston First School (Save Our School Online Petition) – 837 signatures

A selection of the responses is included in the Background Papers.

SOMS have 2000 members on their SOMS Facebook page.

Summary of Feedback received via meetings at schools

77. Council Officers had meetings with the Governing Body and staff body of all 18 schools in the Berwick Partnership on the proposals put forward for Phase 2 informal consultation. Union representatives were invited to attend the meetings held with staff groups. Officers also met with the Governing Body of The Duchess’s High School to discuss the proposal regarding the inclusion of the Wooler/Glendale and Belford Schools catchments within the Alnwick Partnership. Summaries of these meetings are set out below:

Scremerston First School (7th November 2022)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - 11 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed educational outcomes, planned admission numbers, catchments, why Scremerston was the only school proposed for closure under both models and false information/rumours circulating in the partnership.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Seven governors were present.
 - Questions received in respect to the 2019 data, funding and the reasons why parents leave the partnership.

Tweedmouth Prior Park First School (8th November 2022)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - 17 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed the use of data, School's URNs, mixed education models and why pupils aren't attending the academy.
 - Issues in respect to staffing was raised and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed briefly.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Seven governors were present.
 - Questions were raised in relation to why Tweedmouth West's DfE number, whether other models were considered, when building costs would be available and false information/rumours circulating in the partnership.
 - Queried whether it would be a fair process for staff and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.

Berwick Middle School (14th November 2022)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - 31 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed whether the Academy could offer places for Years 7 and 8 even if Berwick remained 3-tier, questioned the use of 2019 data and number of pupils educated outside Berwick.
 - Staffing issues were raised, and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Six governors were present.
 - Discussed the funding available, the local authority's control over academy, why pupils leave the catchment and could there be changes to the models.

Tweedmouth Middle School (15th November 2022)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - 28 staff members attended the meeting.

- Discussed data, reasons why pupils leave the partnership and how responses would be processed.
 - Staffing issues were raised, and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
- Six governors were present.
 - Discussed the relationships between NCC and the academy, financial viability and a request for holding meeting of all governors.

Tweedmouth West First School (5th December 2022)

- a. Staff Meeting
- 13 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed whether the options proposed were the only options available, how had the proposal to amalgamate two schools come about, the DfE number and is the funding guaranteed.
 - Staff issues were raised, and the staffing protocol was briefly discussed.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
- Seven members were present.
 - Discussed building issues and funding, how the schools had been selected for merger and whether other models had been considered.
 - Staffing issues were raised, and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.

Berwick Academy (12th December 2022)

- a. Staff Meeting
- 36 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed the process of the consultation, is the investment guaranteed and the number of students leaving the partnership.
- b. Trustees Meeting
- Five trustees were present.
 - Discussed funding and was it at risk due to spending cuts, opportunities for staff and who make decision in relation to academy status.
 - Staffing issues were raised, and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.

Norham St Ceolwulf's C of E First School (15th December 2022)

- a. Staff Meeting
- Five staff members attended the meeting.
 - Following the presentation staff didn't have any questions for NCC officers.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
- Seven governors were present.
 - Discussed figures and whether the numbers included Belford and Wooler pupils, the numbers leaving the partnership and could the decision be subject to a judicial review.

Holy Trinity C of E First School (10th January 2023)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - 14 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Staffing issues were raised, and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - 10 governors were present.
 - Discussed the academy, lack of centralised services and educational outcomes.

Wooler First/Glendale Middle Schools (12th January 2023)

- a. Wooler Staff Meeting
 - 18 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed issues with the building – condition, viability and other options, if the academy gets a new building does the school become the responsibility of the local authority and what happens to pupils who currently attend Berwick?
- b. Glendale Staff Meeting
 - 18 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed the objectives of the meeting, SEND provision and whether pupils north of Wooler would have to attend Duchess.
 - Staff issues were raised, and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.
- c. Governing Body Meeting
 - T10 governors were present.
 - Discussed whether the school could consult independently about going 2-tier, their financial viability and timeline.
 - Staffing issues raised and discussed the proposed staffing protocol including when the protocol would be agreed.

The Grove School (16th January 2023)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - 24 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed forecasted numbers in respect of SEMH, PLD and SLD pupils, the proposed site and how SEMH pupils would feel about attending “The Grove”.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Six governors were present.
 - Discussed pupils leaving the partnership and whether the data/reasons were available as to why, the school’s local knowledge about pupils and their issues compared to forecasted numbers, whether costs are known for either model and what the timeframe is for any change.
 - Debated the proposal to extend The Grove’s specialist provision to include SEMH students but governors rejected the proposal.

Belford First School (18th January 2023)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - Five staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed the proposal to join the Alnwick partnership made more sense for the school and when would transport apply.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - No Governors attended therefore the meeting didn't take place.

Hugh Joicey C of E First School (24th January 2023)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - Six staff members attended the meeting.
 - Discussed the Academy, what would happen if the birth rate increased and funding available.
 - Staffing issues were raised, and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Five governors were present.
 - Discussed the Academy, funding and building implications and what the timescale was for any change.
 - Staffing issues were raised, and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.

St Cuthbert's Catholic School (2nd February 2023)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - 11 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Following the presentation staff didn't have any questions for NCC officers.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Six governors were present.
 - Governors had questions in relating to SEND and AP support and when any implementation would be.
 - The employment of 'at risk staff' was raised and the proposed staffing protocol was discussed.

Berwick St Mary's C of E First School (6th February 2023)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - 14 staff members attended the meeting.
 - Following the presentation staff didn't have any questions for NCC officers.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Seven governors were present.
 - Discussed the number and reason why children are educated outside the partnership, the SEN model, pre-school provision and funding available.

Spittal First School (9th February 2023)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - Eight staff members were in attendance.
 - Discussed the catchment area and the provision offered at St Mary's.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Six governors were present.
 - Discussed number of pupils attending Duchess and Scottish schools and the SEN model.

Duchess High School (13th February 2023)

- a. Governing Body Meeting
 - Nine governors were present.
 - Discussed Wooler pupils currently attending and whether Wooler Governors have expressed a preference, what the benefits would be for students and what the timeline is.

Lowick and Holy Island C of E First Schools (16th February 2023)

- a. Staff Meeting
 - Seven staff members were in attendance.
 - Staff had questions in relating to the reasons why parents move to other schools and how they could encourage children to attend the school.
- b. Governing Body Meeting
 - Seven governors were present.
 - Discussed numbers attending schools in Berwick and what the percentage drift is and how this compares to other areas, building work required on the site of Tweedmouth Middle and when changes would take place.

78. Alternative Proposals received during consultation

- a. *Alternative Proposal submitted by Berwick Middle School and Tweedmouth Community Middle School – Option C (as part of Model A, revised 3-tier system)*

The main alternative proposal submitted during Phase 2 consultation came from The Governing Bodies of Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Community Middle Schools. The full proposal is included as Appendix 4 of this report, and the key structure set out in the proposal is as follows:

- Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Community Middle School would merge on the current Tweedmouth middle site to become one 5-form entry (150 pupils per year group) middle school;
- The amalgamated middle school would form part of a 'Campus' site with Berwick Academy, which would reduce its intake to 6-forms of entry (180 per year group) and The Grove Special School;
- The amalgamated middle, Berwick Academy and The Grove would be accommodated in separate new buildings;
- The Grove School would have an increased capacity and also in a new building;

- Glendale Middle School would become a 1-form entry (30 pupils per year group) on its current site;
- Belford Primary School would leave Berwick Partnership and its catchment would become part of Alnwick Partnership;
- Berwick St Mary's First School reduces to 0.5 form entry (15 pupils per year group) and implements specialist provision for pupils with SEMH to support first schools in partnership;
- Holy Island CE, Holy Trinity CE, Hugh Joicey CE and Lowick CE First Schools would remain unchanged;
- Norham CE First School would close and its catchment area goes to Scremerston First School;
- Scremerston First School would remain unchanged
- Spittal First School would remain unchanged;
- Tweedmouth Prior Park First School would reduce to 0.5 Form entry (15 pupils per year group);
- Tweedmouth West First School would remain unchanged
- St Cuthbert's Catholic First School would remain unchanged.
- In total, there would be
 - 6 forms of entry into high school phase
 - 6 forms of entry into middle school phase
 - 7.4 forms of entry into first school phase

The benefits and objectives of this structure as perceived by the two middle schools would be:

- The two Berwick town middles are moving towards 'Outstanding' Ofsted;
- The middles would seek teaching-school status and potentially support all Northumberland schools;
- There would be significant cost savings from restructuring all middle school departments;
- The middle school would offer specialist teaching to first schools in art, computing, languages, technology, science, music and P.E.;
- The middle school would have the financial capacity to support first schools with budgeting and cost-saving;
- The middle school would have leadership capacity to support first schools with absence, illness or job moves;
- Local specialised services could be provided at the Campus for the whole community e.g. parent support hub, citizens advice, Adult Learning;

The proposal has been linked to the ambitions set out in the Vision for Berwick (see para. 14) with its perceived strengths to meet the vision as follows:

- *Engaging the community* – using the reputation of the middle schools to drive change; more specialist buildings in Berwick 'Jewel in the Crown' for Northumberland; interest from employers re increased vocational offer;
- *Long-term sustainability* – it is a strong model that will retain pupil numbers across all phases; potential around academisation with other 3-tier partnerships or creation of Berwick MAT;
- *Ensure schools work together* – build long-lasting relationships at close quarters; vast array of expertise and knowledge; campus environment can be utilised in individual settings;

- *Underpin best value for NCC capital investment* – three new school buildings instead of one on the campus and specialist SEMH provision.

Commentary

The Option C Alternative Model proposed by the Governing Bodies of Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Community Middle Schools in fact revisits (with some minor modifications) a previous model assessed during the early part of consultation with school leaders. Had this model had more support or been suggested in its current format at the earlier stages of discussion and consultation, there may have been merit in bringing it forward as an alternative model for wider consultation, as there has been interest expressed by some consultees who responded to Phase 2. 126 responses of the 724 received expressed an interest in this model, including one first school Governing Body, although 40% of the responses were from consultees with an association with one of the town middle schools as a parent, member of staff or governor.

However, at this stage in the process there are a number of key issues in the proposal, which are;

- The Governing Bodies/Trustees of 12 of the schools/academies in Berwick Partnership have responded at Phase 2 consultation that they support the move to a 2-tier(primary/secondary) structure; this has increased from 10 at Phase 1 consultation and indicates a clear majority of school leaders in favour of a 2-tier structure. Two schools have decided not to comment on what they believe would be the best organisational structure for mainstream schools, as neither would be impacted directly by such change.
- Other than the two town middles, there is only one school in the Berwick Partnership where both the Governing Body and staff indicated potential interest in this model and at one school only the Governing Body has shown support. Neither school is The Grove Special School nor Berwick Academy; without their support or interest in the model, there is no remit or rationale in pursuing it.
- The Governing Body of Wooler First and Glendale Middle School has clearly set out their desire for Wooler to become a primary school and for Glendale to close due to the consistent loss of pupils at the end of Year 6. Governors do not believe pupil numbers at Glendale will enable it to have the capacity to sustain an effective and high-quality curriculum at Key Stage 3 in Wooler in the medium to long-term;
- The Option C proposal sets out the middle school's intention to support first schools with specialist teaching, management of budgets and leadership capacity. However, there is no specific plan or strategy included as to how the middle school would work more effectively with Berwick Academy to provide support to achieve the significant improvement in outcomes at Key Stage 4 and beyond.
- The merged middle school would mean that there would no longer be educational provision for pupils at Years 5 and 6 in the north of Berwick, necessitating their travel at age 9 to a middle school only slightly smaller in numbers than the high school. This may be an issue for parents of those pupils.

- Without knowing construction and maintenance costs, it is unclear how the construction of three new buildings, two of them requiring secondary facilities can be put forward as cost-effective or sustainable in the long term in the face of falling pupil numbers. In fact, a conservative estimate of the costs for a new high school, middle school and building for The Grove with 70 places would be circa £53m. There is currently £39.9m in the Council's medium-term plan for capital investment to support organisational changes across the whole partnership.
- The possibility of a 3-tier campus model was one of the original six potential models of organisation discussed with school leaders, which were then reduced to four potential models. This model was eventually discounted to be taken into Phase 1 consultation to the wider public as overall, while headteachers felt it had some merit, they felt it could operate under either a 2 or 3 tier structure they also did not believe it addressed the issues facing the partnership across all phases. Similarly, the majority of Governing Bodies did not support the model as they believed the benefits would be limited to those schools sited on the campus. The full analysis and feedback on these models are set out in the Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, Berwick Partnership Organisation, 12 April 2022 in the Background Papers to this report.

For the reasons set out above, it is not recommended that further consultation should be undertaken on the alternative proposal Option C.

- b. Keep Scremerston open under either model / Scremerston to become a primary school*

Commentary

It is recommended that Scremerston First School should remain open, but with a reduced Planned Admission Number; the rationale for this recommendation is set out in the 'Conclusion' at para. 80.

- c. Academy to convert back under local authority control*

Commentary

There is currently no legislation to enable an academy to reconvert to become a local authority-maintained school. Academies can consult on proposals to join established multi-academy trusts or form their own multi-academy trust, with the final approval being made by the Regional DfE Director North East.

- d. Delivering an all-through SEMH provision within Berwick locality – an initial draft proposal from Berwick Academy and Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School*

The Trustees of Berwick Academy and Governing Body of St Mary's Church of England First School submitted an alternative model of specialist provision within the Berwick area, with similarities to the Council's proposal to create specialist units on school sites but also with some key differences. The proposal is included in the Background Papers.

Considerable thought and planning have clearly gone into the model, including a proposed management structure, approach to staffing and proposed offer of provision to students. The proposal aligns with the Council's aims with respect to creating SEMH and ASD provision within the Berwick locality and supports its aims with regard to the provision of a bespoke curriculum in line with best practice and the new statutory framework for SEND provision.

Furthermore, the Governing Body and staff body of the Grove Special School and staff body have responded that they would not support the relocation of the school to a larger site if it was in order to include provision for SEMH pupils. They believe this would be detrimental to the excellent educational and therapeutic experience enjoyed by the cohort of students whom they currently provide for i.e. particularly those students with primary needs in SLD and PMLD

Commentary

Overall, this model to increase SEND provision is the same as that proposed in Model A during Phase 2 consultation, except for one fundamental difference, which is that in this model it is proposed that those pupils with more challenging behaviours would receive their education offsite at Alternative Providers. This element of the proposal is contrary to the Council's intention with regard to specialist SEN units located on school sites, which is that all pupils with needs within the specified categories would receive their education on-site, except where the unit would be unsuitable for the student's ability, aptitude or special educational needs or where accepting the student would affect other pupils' education.

It is encouraging and welcomed that the Governing Body of St Mary's and Trustees of Berwick Academy have supported the overall proposal to create specialist units on their respective sites and have set out a detailed proposal on how they could meet the needs of this vulnerable group of young people. Therefore, subject to the adjustment in relation to the proposed on-site provision, this proposal is recommended to be taken forward to statutory consultation as set out at para. 81.

e. Paper/proposal of The Grove Special School Governing Body

In order to address the need for additional specialist provision specifically for the growing number of children and young people with SEMH and ASD in the Berwick area (ref para. 16(iii)), the Council consulted on two proposals.

Feedback received from the Governing Body and staff of The Grove Special School has made it clear categorically that they did not support the proposal to extend the school's provision to meet the needs of SEMH students, facilitated through its relocation to the current Tweedmouth Middle School site. This is because they feel this would be detrimental to the educational experience of the current cohort of pupils whose needs are met by The Grove, particularly those pupils with PMLD and SLD. The Governing Body has indicated that it supports the proposal of the Governing Body of St Mary's and Trustees of Berwick Academy, and therefore the Council's proposal, to create specialist units for pupils with SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN on site.

The Governing Body of The Grove has also submitted an alternative proposal for consideration by Cabinet, the premise of which is a request for a new building for The Grove on a new site. The proposal is included in the Background Papers to this report, but in summary sets out where the school, in the Governing' Body's view, lacks space both inside and outside of the building which impedes on the school's ability to provide an even better educational experience for its students. The school also included a list of 24 future students that it suggests would require a place at The Grove.

Commentary

The requirement to increase specialist provision is not limited to the Berwick area, but is an acknowledged need across the whole of Northumberland, hence why the SEND Capacity Strategy has been developed and is being implemented in stages over a five year period across the county. However, the Council's data indicates that the greatest area of growth is in relation to primary needs in SEMH and ASD; the Governing Body of The Grove has reiterated in its proposal that its specialism is in PMLD and SLD and that it does not wish to extend its designation to include provision for pupils with SEMH as previously outlined.

It is a probable that had officers asked every special school in the county to put forward a proposal for a new build and additional space, they would have put forward a proposal very similar to The Grove's, citing similar issues. In other words, the issues in relation to the suitability of The Grove buildings are not unique and as the school does not wish to extend its provision to meet the area of need that data indicates as shown is showing the highest area of growth i.e. SEMH, there is no rationale for the Council to place its request in greater priority than other special schools within the county. Indeed, the Council's data does not show that there is any increasing growth in the need for PMLD and SLD places or significant maintenance issues with the buildings to justify the capital investment in a new build school.

In relation to the list of pupils submitted by The Grove whom they imply would require a place at the school in the future, other than those pupils with a primary need of PMLD, it is unclear at this stage whether the school would be the most appropriate provision for the other pupils listed e.g. five pupils are listed as currently on roll at a middle school which would indicate that their needs may be able to be better met via the proposed specialist unit at Berwick Academy, while 13 pupils (including the middle schools pupils) do not have a primary need indicated.

In summary, the proposal of The Grove is highlighted to Cabinet for noting, but is not recommended to be taken forward as part of the proposal to increase specialist provision in the Berwick area at this time.

- f. *Provide Specialist SEMH provision from Belford St Mary's CE Middle School Building*

Commentary

The former Belford St Mary's CE Middle School building is owned by the Church of England. The building is in the process of being undesignated as a school by

the DfE and will be taken on by a commercial operator. Therefore, it would no longer be possible to use the building as a specialist provision.

g. Middle schools could become primary schools

A small number of consultees put forward the alternative proposal that existing middle schools could convert to become primary schools.

Commentary

It is possible to change the age range of a middle school so that it can provide primary education only and this has occurred on a small number of occasions within Northumberland. However, where this has occurred in the county, such proposals have been put forward by the Governing Body of the middle school or academy. Furthermore, even if such proposal had been put forward, it is unlikely that they would have been supported as the buildings at Tweedmouth and Berwick Middle Schools would not have been sustainable as primary schools without the closure of several other first schools in the vicinity.

Conclusion

79. Rationale for the Proposed educational system of schools in the Berwick Partnership to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure

As stated within this and previous reports, discussions have been ongoing for many years within the Berwick Partnership about which school structure would best serve all pupils across the whole of their years in statutory education. However, continuing to operate the same system with perhaps some minor tweaks will continue to deliver the same results and will not support schools to effectively address the significant issues facing the Berwick Partnership. A point has now been reached where a radical change in the organisational structure in the partnership is now required in order to strengthen and build on the good outcomes up to and including KS2, to effect the significant impact required to improve educational outcomes at Key Stage 4 and to provide sustainable and viable schools for the future.

Strong arguments from educationalists, parents, staff and governors within the partnership have been put forward during the Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultations (and before) outlining the benefits of the 3-tier system and its continuation (ref. Paras. 43,44,64 and 72). In particular, the supporters of the 3-tier system point to the consistently good results at Key Stage 2, the pastoral support given to students and the opportunities offered in specialist subjects, sports and so on and these are valid arguments. The campus model put forward by the Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Middle Governing Bodies proposes the continuation of the 3-tier system, with those two schools amalgamating in one building and becoming part of a campus model on the same site with Berwick Academy and The Grove Special School. Yet the key question of how the continuation of the 3-tier system would deliver the step-change that would significantly improve outcomes at Key Stage 4 for young people in Berwick remains unanswered by its supporters who responded to this consultation.

At Phase 1 Consultation, the Governing Bodies of 10 of the 17 mainstream schools supported a move to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system as the preferred structure to achieve improvements in educational outcomes across all phases. In Phase 2

consultation, the Governing Bodies of 12 of the 17 mainstream schools now support a reorganisation of the partnership to a 2-tier system, with four schools (two of them the town middles) being in favour of retaining the current system. It appears that a critical mass of support for 2-tier among the educationalists in the partnership has been reached and this should be noted by Cabinet. These schools have put forward compelling arguments (ref. to feedback within Paras 32 to 63) as to why they believe a 2-tier structure of organisation would better serve the children and young people living in the Berwick area across all phases with an expectation that results at Key 4 would be positively impacted as a result.

Furthermore, the following bodies and organisations consulted as part of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultation support the proposal for a 2-tier(primary/secondary) structure for the Berwick Partnership:

- Newcastle Diocesan Education Board (6 of the 12 first schools are CE)
- RC Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
- Bishop Bewick Academy Trust (of which St Cuthbert's forms part)
- North Northumberland Branch of the National Autistic Society
- Ancroft, Duddo, Lowick and Norham Parish Councils (i.e. those pcs that responded)
- 2 local councillors representing wards that include Berwick Partnership schools.

Of those consultees who responded from the wider community, there differing views remain in equal measure on which model of school organisation would be better placed to address the issues facing the partnership now and in the future. Therefore, consensus agreement across all stakeholders who responded was not able to gained during the two phases of informal consultation. It should also be noted that with 2,323 pupils on roll in mainstream schools in the Berwick Partnership in January 2022, 724 responses were received from all consultees during Phase 2 consultation, including schools, individual governors, staff, parish councils and community members.

The Council has a duty to support schools to improve standards, support continuity of education, support schools to be financially viable and sustainable and support smooth transition of pupils between schools. The Council also has a duty to provide best value to the residents of Northumberland in relation to Capital investment of public monies in school buildings schools. Following the two phases of consultation, the local authority now as a responsibility to provide system leadership regarding school organisation. In the light of the rationale and reasons put forward by the majority of schools in the partnership who support a structural change to a 2-tier system, officers now recommend that a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure should be implemented across the mainstream schools within the Berwick Partnership for the following educational reasons:

- There would be only one transition point between primary and secondary education at the end of Key Stage 2 for pupils to cope with and schools to manage. Furthermore, having just one transition would be of particular benefit to pupils with special educational needs and this was supported by the North Northumberland Autistic Society in Phase 2 consultation;

- Schools would have responsibility for whole key stages (primary schools for EYFS, KS1 and KS2 and Berwick Academy for KS3, KS4 and KS5) allowing for consistency of curriculum and planning and this matches the National Curriculum and is the predominant structure across the country;
- Teachers are trained in either the primary or secondary system; there is no longer specific middle school teacher training;
- First school teachers are primary trained, with many having worked in primary schools, and already teach the first half of KS2. Therefore, the expertise and knowledge to deliver good outcomes at KS2 already exists in these schools (noting that currently in the 3-tier system when pupils are assessed at KS2 at the end of Year 6, they have been educated in first schools for five of their seven years in statutory education at that point);
- Schools would have longer relationships with pupils and their families;
- Students joining Berwick Academy in Year 7 would have two years to settle and become familiar with specialist subjects while teachers would have the opportunity to learn about their students in order to advise them before making critical subject choices for GCSE in Year 9. It is expected that this will be a key factor in delivering steady and significant improvement in outcomes at KS4 over time;
- It is expected that a 2-tier organisation of schools would support recruitment and retention of teaching staff, with wider opportunities for within individual schools;
- Pupils on roll in first schools becoming primary, especially the rural village schools would be able to be educated within their local communities for an additional two years;
- Education in Years 5 and 6 would continue to be provided in the North of Berwick.

80. Rationale for the changes to schools within the preferred 2-tier model for Berwick Partnership

In the light of the continuing fall in pupil numbers within the partnership, there is a need for sustainable and viable schools within Berwick Partnership. Under the current 3-tier system, there are 9.7 FE in first schools in the partnership; under the proposed preferred 2-tier model, there would be 7.6 FE provided by the primary schools remaining open in the partnership, taking into account the reallocation of Belford to the Alnwick Partnership. In the current middle school phase, there are 8.3 FE and at high school phase there are 7.5 FE; under the proposed 2-tier model there would be 6 FE at the secondary phase. The full preferred model is set out at para. 82, while the rationale for the proposed school closures and other aspects of the model are set out below:

- *Proposed closure of Berwick Middle, Tweedmouth Community Middle and Glendale Middle:*
Under a 2-tier system, middle schools do not exist and therefore the middle schools would close if this model were to be approved for implementation. The process for supporting staff who would be placed at risk of redundancy as a result the proposed reorganisation is set out at para. 85.
- *Proposed reduction in the Planned Admission Numbers (PANs) of Scremerston First School and Spittal First:*
In both the Model A and Model B proposed structures for Berwick Partnership, Scremerston First School was proposed to close. There has been a concerted effort made by the school, parents and other supporters of Scremerston First

School to put forward a rationale for the school to remain open since it was proposed for closure under both the 3-tier and 2-tier models consulted on in Phase 2, and that is to be commended. In setting out their vision as to how the school could operate effectively and sustainably as a primary school, the Governing Body, staff and parents have presented a persuasive argument and therefore it is proposed that the school should reorganise to become a primary school in line with the other first schools in the partnership.

However, while Scremerston is popular with its own community, only approximately 30% of the students on roll live in the Scremerston catchment and the remaining 70% of pupils live in other catchments and travel daily to the school, passing other schools along the way. The number of pupils being born in the Scremerston catchment has been falling consistently for some years; with future cohorts well under 10 pupils per year group (and some with five or fewer pupils), the school is being sustained by the pupils who live out of catchment. With reducing numbers of pupils across the Berwick area, and a planned admission number of 18 this has a serious impact on the viability of the other local schools within whose catchment area these pupils live. Furthermore, the significant movement of pupils across the partnership to attend out of catchment schools runs contrary to the aims of the Council's Climate Action Plan, which aims to reduce unnecessary car journeys and thereby reduce emissions within Northumberland. For these reasons, it is therefore proposed that the PAN of Scremerston should be reduced to 10 to better match the local community it serves; with an additional two year groups as a primary school and in light of its popularity, it is considered that the school would remain viable.

In relation to Spittal First school, a number of years ago there was a surge in the birth rate within its catchment area and additional capacity was added to the school at that time, with its PAN increased from 30 to 40. However, this surge in birth rate now appears to have been a temporary bulge and it is proposed that a PAN of 30 would now better match the number of children now being born in its catchment. For the same reasons set out in relation to Scremerston with regard to the impact of surplus places, it is proposed that the PAN at Spittal should be reduced to 30 to better match the catchment area it serves.

The four schools in the Tweedmouth area (Spittal, Tweedmouth West, Tweedmouth Prior Park and St Cuthbert's) and Scremerston currently have a total capacity in each year group of 133 places; with an average of 73 pupils per cohort actually living in this area in the next three years expected to join Reception classes, there is clearly an overprovision of places. In relation to forms of entry (FE), there are currently 4.4 FE across these four schools, while under the proposal to reduce the PANs of Scremerston and Spittal Primary Schools (as they would be) there would be 3.8 FE in the Tweedmouth and Scremerston area of the partnership.

- *Proposed reduction of Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School PAN*
Along with Holy Trinity Church of England First School, St Mary's serves the area of Berwick north of the Tweed. These two schools currently have a joint capacity of 60 places in each year group; with an average of 30 pupils per cohort actually living in this area expected to join Reception classes in the next three years, there is a significant overprovision of places across these two catchment areas. While there could be an argument to close one of the schools in this area, there would

be too little capacity remaining and parental choice would be removed as the schools serve two different communities. Furthermore, it is proposed that the additional capacity in St Mary's would support the development of an SEN Unit for pupils specifically with SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN as part of the proposed SEN solution for the partnership (ref. Para. 81). Therefore, it is proposed that the current forms of entry of 2 FE in this area of Berwick are reduced to 1.5 FE, with St Mary's reducing to 0.5 FE.

- *Proposed reduction of Berwick Academy PAN*
Given the continuing fall in pupil numbers in the Berwick area, it is proposed that a more realistic PAN for Berwick Academy would be 6 FE, or 180 pupils per cohort. This is slightly less than the proposed 7 FE at primary level as there is expected to continue to be some flow of pupils out of the partnership at the secondary phase e.g. from the south of the Wooler catchment into DCHS.
- *Proposed allocation of Belford Primary School to Alnwick Partnership:*
The Governing Body of Belford Primary School has been consistent in its response to Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultation that it wishes the school catchment area to be incorporated within the Alnwick Partnership and for the feeder secondary school of pupils living in the catchment to become The Duchess's Community High School. The community in Belford supported a move for the first school to become a primary in conjunction with the closure of the middle school in the village several years ago so that pupils were able to join cohorts moving from Alnwick Primary schools when they joined DCHS, following the closure of the middle school in the village. Most pupils leaving Belford join DCHS in Year 7 and this proposal means that pupils will now be eligible for home to school transport if they meet the criteria.
- *Proposed retention of Wooler Primary (as it would become) in Berwick Partnership*
The federated Governing Body of Wooler and Glendale have been concerned for a number of years about the financial impact of reducing numbers in Glendale Middle's Year 7 and 8 classes on the school's ability to continue to provide the broad and balanced curriculum required. With regard to models and proposals of organisation discussed since April 2021 within the Berwick Partnership, the school leaders of Wooler and Glendale have clear that they wished to move to a 2-tier structure but have been ambivalent as to which partnership the school or schools in the Wooler area would be aligned to. However, in Phase 2 consultation, the Governing Body has stated a preference not just for 2-tier organisation, but also for Wooler Primary School (as it would be) to be allocated to the Alnwick Partnership.

However, officers do not agree that it would be in the best interests of pupils living in the Wooler catchment area or for the greater Berwick Partnership for the catchment to be allocated to Alnwick on the grounds that it preserves the ability of those pupils in the north of the catchment to continue to attend Berwick Academy should they wish to do so with home to school transport, while supporting the viability of Berwick Partnership while it transitions through reorganisation. Those pupils living in the Wooler catchment area who live closer to DCHS than to Berwick Academy would continue to be eligible for home to school transport to that school.

Finally, Cabinet should note that while Tweedmouth Prior Park, Norham St Ceolwulf's Controlled First Schools and Berwick Academy currently have Requires Improvement gradings from Ofsted, these schools would need to extend their age ranges as part of the overall proposed reorganisation of the Berwick Partnership to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure should it be approved.

81. Rationale for the Proposed Model for Special Educational Needs

The need to create additional specialist provision within the Berwick area specifically for pupils with SEMH or ASD as a primary need is set out at para. 16(iii). Of the two proposals to increase SEND capacity put forward for consultation, either would be able to exist within a 3-tier or a 2-tier organisation of schools.

The majority of stakeholders who responded to the question relating to the proposed creation of additional SEND provision within the Berwick area agreed that this was needed. In relation to responses received overall on the two proposed models of provision, the proposal to create specialist units on the site of mainstream schools to be managed and staff by those schools was the more popular (ref. Para. 73).

At their meetings with officers during Phase 2 and in a written response submitted by staff, Governors and staff of The Grove Special School have indicated that they support the creation of additional specialist provision in the Berwick area. However, in the light of the needs of the pupils currently on roll at The Grove they believe that it would be detrimental to their interests to be co-located with pupils who have primary needs in SEMH and therefore they could not support such a proposal. The Governing Body submitted a paper to the Council during Phase 2 consultation setting out their rationale for a new building and expansion of pupil numbers for The Grove School and this is commented on at para. 78(e).

Also during Phase 2 consultation, the Governing Body of St Mary's and the Trustees of Berwick Academy submitted a proposal to create specialist units at their respective sites, although there were some differences in this model compared to the intention of the specialist unit model put forward for consultation by the Council (ref. Para. 78(d)).

Therefore, it is proposed that the model of provision with specialist units based at existing schools is the preferred option and as the overall preferred school organisation model is for a 2-tier structure, St Mary's Church of England Primary School (as it would be) and Berwick Academy are proposed as the location for the units to be managed and staffed by the school and academy respectively. The following model is proposed to be included that the units in order to meet the needs of pupils with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD (moderate learning difficulties) and SLCN (speech, language and communication) as follows:

- Berwick St Mary's Church of England First, in addition to the proposed age range change to also add an SEN unit with specialist provision for up to 30 places reserved for pupils aged 4 to 11 with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN.
- Berwick Academy in addition to the proposed age range change to also add an SEN unit with specialist provision for up to 40 places reserved for students aged 11 to 16 with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN. This element of

the proposal would require the approval of the Trustees of Berwick Academy and final approval from the Regional DfE Director North East.

Implications of the Proposal for reorganisation of the Berwick Partnership to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure

82. The proposed preferred model of school organisation for Berwick Partnership

Table 6 shows the current structure of schools in the Berwick Partnership. In this structure, pupils leave their first school at the end of Year 4 and join middle schools in Year 5, then leave middle schools to join Berwick Academy as the feeder secondary for Year 5, (or another school according to parental choice).

Table 6 – Current Structure of schools in Berwick Partnership

School	Number on roll in statutory education Jan 2023	Capacity (net no. Pupils able to be educated in the building)	Forms of Entry in each year group (1FE = average class of 30 pupils)	Planned Admission Number (PAN – the number of children admitted to the school at usual transition point in September)
Belford Primary	84	187	1	30
Berwick St Mary's CE First	68	114	1	30
Holy Trinity CE First	140	150	1	30
Holy Island CE First	3	25	0.2	5
Hugh Joicey CE First	47	73	0.5	15
Lowick CE First	16	50	0.3	10
Norham CE First	26	50	0.3	10
Scremerston First	54	90	0.6	18
Spittal First	121	171	1.3	40
Tweedmouth Prior Park First	111	150	1	30
Tweedmouth West First	114	150	1	30
Wooler First	93	150	1	30
St Cuthbert's	71	75	0.5	15
Berwick Middle	335	456	3.8	114
Glendale Middle	103	169	1.4	42
Tweedmouth Middle	359	440	3.1	93
Berwick Academy	545 (inc 6 th Form)	916	7.5	225

Table 7 shows the proposal model of organisation of schools in the Berwick Partnership under a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure. In this structure,

- Berwick Academy would become an age 11-18 academy, with admissions into Year 7, 8 and 9 in September 2026, and then admissions into Year 7 only from September 2027
- 12 first schools (including an academy) would change their age range to become primary schools.
- Three middle schools would close.
- One primary school would have its catchment area reallocated to Alnwick Partnership.
- There would be significant capital investment in schools as appropriate to facilitate this, including a rebuild/refurbishment for Berwick Academy.
- In January 2023, there were 2,290 pupils on roll across all phases of the Berwick Partnership, with the capacity for 3,442 places in schools and academies; this equates to 33% surplus places.
- As stated, the partnership currently has the capacity for 3,442 places. Should the preferred model be implemented there would be 2,710 places available in schools and academies in the partnership, therefore 732 places would be removed.
- There are currently 7.5 FE into high school phase, 8.3 FE into middle school phase and 9.7 FE into first school phase. Under the preferred model, if every pupil living in the Berwick Partnership attended a school in the partnership, there would be 5.3 FE required at both secondary and primary phases. Under the preferred model, it is proposed that there would be 6 FE available into secondary phase and 7.6 FE available into primary phase.

Table 7 – Proposed 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure of schools in Berwick Partnership

School	Number on roll Jan 2023	Proposed Capacity (net no. Pupils able to be educated in the building)	Proposed Forms of Entry in each year group (1FE = average class of 30 pupils)	Proposed Planned Admission Number (PAN – the number of children admitted to the school at usual transition point in September)
Belford Primary	Moves into Alnwick Partnership and small area of current catchment allocated to Lowick.			
	84	187	1	30
Berwick St Mary's CE First	Becomes primary, reduces PAN, no change to catchment Opens on-site primary specialist SEN provision			
	68	105	0.5	15
Holy Trinity CE First	Becomes primary, no change to catchment			
	140	210	1	30
Holy Island CE First	Becomes primary, no change to catchment			
	3	35	0.2	5
Hugh Joicey CE First	Becomes primary, no change to catchment			
	47	105	0.5	15

Lowick CE First	Becomes primary, small extension to catchment area as a result of reduction of Belford catchment.			
	16	70	0.3	10
Norham CE First	Becomes primary, no change to catchment			
	26	70	0.3	10
Scremerston First	Becomes primary, no change to catchment			
	54	70	0.3	10
Spittal First	Becomes Primary and reduces PAN to 30, no change to catchment			
	130	210	1	30
Tweedmouth Prior Park First	Becomes primary, no change to catchment			
	124	210	1	30
Tweedmouth West First	Becomes primary, no change to catchment			
	118	210	1	30
Wooler First	Converts to become a primary and remains in Berwick Partnership, no change to catchment			
	103	210	1	30
St Cuthbert's*	Becomes Primary (RC schools do not have catchments)			
	71	105	0.5	15
Total forms of entry in primary phase – 7.6FE				
Berwick Middle	Closes			
Glendale Middle	Closes			
Tweedmouth Middle	Closes			
Berwick Academy*	Catchment area reduced as Belford Primary moves to Alnwick Partnership, transition into Year 7 (age 11) from 2026 onwards			
	523 (inc 6 th Form)	1100	6	180

83. Implications for individual schools and academies of the proposed preferred 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure

- a. Belford Primary School – As the school is already an age 2-11 primary school, there are no structural proposals for Belford but in light of the historical pattern of pupils feeding to Alnwick The Duchess's High School, it is recommended that the catchment area would be re-allocated to the Alnwick Partnership with effect from 1 September 2024, with the reallocation of a small part of the north of the catchment to be reallocated to Lowick Church of England Primary School (as it would be). If Cabinet approves the recommendation, a request to amend the Council's admissions arrangements from September 2024 would be submitted to the Schools Adjudicator.
- b. Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 3-11 primary school with a reduced PAN of 15 with effect from 1 September 2025. This is a non-statutory prescribed alteration and therefore Cabinet would be requested to approve this in conjunction with recommendations for schools set out in the published statutory proposal (if the

latter is permitted for publication). It is also recommended that a 30 place SEN unit reserved for pupils with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN be established at the St Mary's site to be managed and staffed by the school with effect from 1 September 2025; as a prescribed alteration this recommendation would be required to be included in the statutory proposal. There is no proposed change to the school's current catchment area.

- c. Holy Trinity Church of England First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025. This is a non-statutory proposal and therefore Cabinet would be requested to approve it in conjunction with recommendations for schools set out in the published statutory proposal (if the latter is permitted for publication). There is no proposed change to the school's current catchment area.
- d. Holy Island Church of England First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025. This is a non-statutory prescribed alteration and therefore Cabinet would be requested to approve it in conjunction with recommendations for schools set out in the published statutory proposal (if the latter is permitted for publication). There is no proposed change to the school's current catchment area.
- e. Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 2-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025. This is a non-statutory prescribed alteration and therefore Cabinet would be requested to approve it in conjunction with recommendations for schools set out in the published statutory proposal (if the latter is permitted for publication). It is also recommended that the school's catchment area would be expanded slightly to include part of the catchment area of Belford Primary School (ref. sub-para. a. above).
- f. Hugh Joicey Church of England First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 4-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025. This is a non-statutory prescribed alteration and therefore Cabinet would be requested to approve it in conjunction with recommendations for schools set out in the published statutory proposal (if the latter is permitted for publication). There is no proposed change to the school's current catchment area.
- g. Norham St Ceolwulf's C of E Controlled First School – It is recommended that the school would become an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025. This is a non-statutory prescribed alteration and therefore Cabinet would be requested to approve it in conjunction with recommendations for schools set out in the published statutory proposal (if the latter is permitted for publication).
- h. Scremerston First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 4-11 primary school with a reduced PAN of 10 with effect from 1 September 2025 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. There is no proposed change to the school's current catchment area.
- i. Spittal Community School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 4-11 primary school with a reduced PAN of 30 with effect from 1 September 2025 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. It is also recommended that

the school's catchment area would be amended slightly to include a small area of the Scremerston First School catchment.

- j. St Cuthbert's Catholic First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. As St Cuthbert's is an academy, approval for this recommendation would need to be given by the Bishop Bewick Trust and subsequently by the Regional DfE Director North East. Both decisions would be contingent on Cabinet approving the publication of the statutory proposal and approving a final decision for implementation at a later date.
- k. Tweedmouth Prior Park First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. There is no proposed change to the school's current catchment area.
- l. Tweedmouth West First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 4-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. There is no proposed change to the school's current catchment area.
- m. Wooler First School - It is recommended that the school would become an age 2-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. There is no proposed change to the school's current catchment area.
- n. Berwick Middle School – It is recommended that the school would not receive a Year 5 intake in September 2025 and would close on 31 August 2026 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. Displaced pupils would be guaranteed a place in Berwick Academy or would join another school according to parental preference.
- o. Tweedmouth Community Middle School - It is recommended that the school would not receive a Year 5 intake in September 2025 and would close on 31 August 2026 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. Displaced pupils would be guaranteed a place in Berwick Academy or would join another school according to parental preference.
- p. Glendale Middle School - It is recommended that the school would not receive a Year 5 intake in September 2025 and would close on 31 August 2026 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. Displaced pupils would be guaranteed a place in Berwick Academy or would join another school according to parental preference.
- q. Berwick Academy - It is recommended that the school would become an age 11-18 secondary school with a reduced PAN of 180 with effect from 1 September 2025 and that it is included in the statutory proposal. As an academy, approval for this recommendation would need to be given by Berwick Academies Trustees and subsequently by the Regional DfE Director North East. Both decisions would be contingent on Cabinet approving the publication of the statutory proposal and approving a final decision for implementation at a later date.

84. Timeline for Implementation

Belford Primary School

Autumn Term 2023

- Parents of pupils in Year 6 of Belford Primary would apply for places in Year 7 at Alnwick The Duchess's High School (DCHS) for 1 September 2024 as catchment students (subject to Schools Adjudicator approval) or another school according to parental preference.

1 September 2024

- Pupils in Year 6 on 31 August in Belford Primary would join Alnwick DCHS in Year 7 or another school according to parental preference.
- Belford Primary catchment would be slightly reduced (with area removed going to Lowick CE First School) and would become part of DCHS greater catchment. As a result, pupils living within Belford Primary catchment would now become eligible for Home to School Transport to DCHS, subject to meeting relevant criteria.

First Schools in the Berwick Partnership proposed to become Primary schools

Autumn Term 2024

- Parents apply for places in Reception classes for September 2025 as usual.

1 September 2025

- Pupils in Year 4 on 31 August 2025 in first schools would be retained by their new primary schools as Year 5 as the schools extend their age ranges.
- New Reception classes join school as usual but Berwick St Mary's CE, Scremerston and Spittal Primary Schools would have reduced PANs in that year group (see model).

1 September 2026

- Pupils in Year 5 on 31 August 2026 in first schools would be retained by their new primary schools as Year 6 as the schools extend their age ranges.
- Parents of Year 6 pupils would apply in Autumn for places in Year 7 classes for September 2027 at Berwick Academy (which would have a reduced PAN of 180) or another school according to parental preference.

Middle Schools in the Berwick Partnership proposed for closure

Autumn Term 2024

- Parents of pupils in Year 8 in Berwick, Tweedmouth and Glendale Middle Schools apply as usual for a place in Year 9 at Berwick Academy or another school according to parental preference for 1 September 2025.

1 September 2025

- Pupils on roll in Year 8 at Berwick Middle, Tweedmouth Middle and Glendale Middle Schools on 31 August 2025 transfer as usual into Year 9 at Berwick Academy or another school according to parental preference.
- Middle schools would not receive a Year 5 and would operate with Years 6, 7 and 8 only.
- Parents of pupils on roll in Year 8 at Berwick Middle, Tweedmouth Middle and Glendale Middle Schools apply as usual for places in Year 9 at Berwick Academy or another school according to parental preference.
- Pupils on roll in Years 6 and 7 at Berwick Middle, Tweedmouth Middle and Glendale Middle Schools would be guaranteed a place in Years 7 and 8 in Berwick Academy in September 2026 should they wish to take it up or would apply for places in other schools according to parental preference.

31 August 2026

- Glendale, Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools close.

1 September 2026

- Pupils on roll in Year 8 at Berwick Middle, Tweedmouth Middle and Glendale Middle Schools on 31 August 2026 would transfer as usual into Year 9 at Berwick Academy or another school according to parental preference.
- Pupils on roll in middle schools in Years 6 and 7 on 31 August 2026 would take up guaranteed places as the new Years 7 and 8 to Berwick Academy or join another school according to parental preference.

Berwick Academy

1 September 2026

- Berwick Academy would change its age range from an age 13 to 18 academy to an age 11 to 18 secondary school.
- Pupils on roll in Year 8 at Berwick Middle, Tweedmouth Middle and Glendale Middle Schools on 31 August 2026 would transfer as usual into Year 9 at Berwick Academy or another school according to parental preference.
- Pupils on roll in middle schools in Years 6 and 7 on 31 August 2026 would take up guaranteed places as the new Years 7 and 8 to Berwick Academy or join another school according to parental preference.

1 September 2027

- Berwick Academy reduces its PAN from 225 to 180 for students joining in year 7.
- Pupils in Year 6 in the primary schools on 31 August 2027 would transfer as the new Year 7 to Berwick Academy or another school according to parental preference.
- From this point forward transition is into Year 7 only, with entry into other year groups treated as in-year transfers.

85. Implications for staff working in maintained mainstream schools and academies in Berwick Partnership

Should approval be given for the schools in the Berwick Partnership to reorganise to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure, there would be implications for staff in all of the relevant schools in the partnership. Staff in schools proposed for closure would be at risk of redundancy, while the staffing structures of schools and academies proposed to continue would need to be amended to reflect the additional year groups and to identify new posts.

In the light of proposed changes to school structures being required whether the 3-tier structure remained in place or whether reorganisation to 2-tier was approved, Council Officers have begun working with headteachers in the Berwick Partnership to broker a draft Staffing Protocol agreement with the ambition to have all Governing Bodies sign up to the agreement. The purpose of the protocol is to ensure where new posts are identified in the continuing schools, a fair and equitable selection process is in place that provides a job interview guarantee for such posts for staff at risk of redundancy and that these staff are supported to find alternative suitable posts throughout the period of transition to the new structure i.e. to 1 September 2026.

The allocation of new posts within the reorganised structure ahead of implementation to as many at risk staff as possible will not only provide stability to them on a personal level but will assist in provide educational stability across schools in the partnership as well as aiding with successful pupil transition. Trades Unions would also be consulted on the terms of the protocol agreed with the schools and academies.

Wooler First School and Glendale Middle School are federated under one Governing Body, therefore should Glendale be approved to close, there would be an element of protection for the middle school staff to be redeployed in the primary school.

86. Catchment areas

A number of amendments to catchment areas are proposed arising from the preferred 2-tier model.

The move of the catchment area of Belford Primary School into the Alnwick Partnership, with feeder secondary school for pupils living in the Belford area becoming The Duchess's High School, is included in the recommendations to Cabinet. It is also recommended that a small area of the northern-most part of the catchment is allocated to Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School (as it would become).

First schools would retain their current catchment areas as they become primaries, noting that as for all Roman Catholic schools in the county, St Cuthbert's Catholic First School (academy) does not have a catchment area but allocates places in accordance with the oversubscription criteria set out in its Admissions Policy (when oversubscribed).

Berwick Middle, Tweedmouth Community Middle and Glendale catchment areas would apply to students in Years 6, 7 and 8 only from 1 September 2025 and would become invalid after 31 August 2026. The first school catchment areas would apply up to Year 5 from 1 September 2025 as they become primary schools and would then

apply until the end of Year 6 from 1 September 2026. Similarly, the catchment area of Berwick Academy would apply from Year 7 from 1 September 2026.

87. Special Educational Needs Provision within mainstream schools and academies

The specific proposal to increase SEND provision in the Berwick Partnership in relation to the growth in the number of children and young people diagnosed with a primary special educational need in SEMH or ASD is set out at para 16(iii).

Current SEN provision at those schools proposed to remain open would continue to be provided should reorganisation be approved. Reorganisation may benefit some pupils with SEN who would be able to remain at their primary school for an additional 2 years. During consultation, some first schools stated that they would benefit from specialist peripatetic send support accessed from a specialist provision hub at St Mary's and Berwick Academy as well as The Grove Special School. It is hoped that this type of support provision can be developed within the partnership going forward.

88. Early Years Provision

While the extent and the quality of early years provision in the Berwick Partnership was considered as part of this consultation, officers in the Council's Early Years team confirmed that there is enough provision of sufficient quality currently in the partnership area, including provision for two-year-olds. As any changes to current early years provision in first schools as they became primaries could have a destabilising effect, no proposals to change or increase Early Years provision in those schools remaining open are included within the preferred 2-tier model proposed for statutory publication. However, with the introduction of the Government's new scheme to introduce free childcare to all children from the age of nine months from September 2024, this may bring additional opportunities to extend provision in some settings and this would be supported and monitored by the Council's Early Years Team.

89. Transport

Eligibility for Home to School Transport in Northumberland is arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. Should the proposal for reorganisation of the Berwick Partnership to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system be approved, pupils remaining in their first schools as they become primary would have shorter distances to school in Years 5 and 6. This is likely to result in a saving of circa £14,000 per annum to the Council's Home to School Transport budget in relation to those pupils that would normally have been eligible for transport to the middle schools in those year groups.

90. Buildings Implications

Building costs set out in Table 8 below are indicative and would be subject to further detailed work should the proposed to reorganise schools to a 2-tier structure be approved:

Table 8 – Estimate of Building costs to implement reorganisation

School	Description	Indicative cost
--------	-------------	-----------------

St Mary's First School	Internal reconfiguration to create dedicated SEN unit for ASD and SEMH primary pupils.	£0.500m
Norham First School Capital costs if remain open	A small extension to increase capacity within early years/foundation stage classroom	£0.119m
Scremerston Capital costs if school were to remain open	Potential small extension	£0.220m
Tweedmouth West First School	One classroom, one group room, a Medical Inspection room and additional WC provision	£1.038m
Wooler First School	Remodel existing building to create primary facilities, a community hub.	£2.800m
Berwick Academy	New build Secondary school, with specialist SEN unit for pupils with ASD and SEMH	£35.400m
Total		£40.077m

Table 9 below sets out how the overall reorganisation would be funded if approval is given to implement the changes following the statutory process and Cabinets' final decision later in the year.

Table 9 – Funding breakdown to deliver Capital improvements above.

Funding Source	Value
NCC Capital (MTEP)	£39.750m
School Condition Allocation (SCIP)	£0.146m
High Needs Provision Capital Allocation	£0.181m
Total	£40.077m

As stated, capital funding £39.896 has already been allocated for the investment for the Berwick Partnership of schools. Whilst the plan includes a replacement/ refurbishment of the Berwick Academy buildings the final building solution would be the subject of a separate business case for approval by Cabinet, this process wouldn't begin until after the final decision following the outcome of the statutory consultation if approved. However, the extent of this project will depend on whether Cabinet approves the proposed reorganisation to the 2-tier structure, in which case the replacement buildings at Berwick Academy would need to accommodate Years 7 to 13.

There is sufficient capacity within the existing buildings at Berwick Academy for reorganisation to take place ahead of investment in new or refurbished school buildings.

91. Sport and Recreation

There would be no negative impact on the current sport and recreation facilities at the first schools proposed to become primaries under the proposed reorganisation to the 2-tier structure.

It is expected that the sport and recreation facilities at Berwick Academy will be enhanced through the provision of the new buildings, including enhanced provision for the local community.

In relation to the proposed closure of Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Community Middle Schools, should Cabinet approve the publication of the recommended statutory proposal and subsequently decide to implement it, under legislation the Council would need to have regard to The School Premises (England) Regulations 2012 and Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 in relation to any potential loss of playing fields.

Implications of the Proposal to increase specialist SEND Provision in the Berwick Partnership

92. Preferred proposed model

For the reason set out at para. 81, it is proposed that the model of provision with specialist units based at existing schools is preferred and, as the overall preferred school organisation model is for a 2-tier structure, St Mary's Church of England Primary School (as it would be) and Berwick Academy are proposed as the location for the units. The following model is proposed to be included in order to meet the needs of pupils with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD (moderate learning difficulties) and SLCN (speech, language and communication) specialist provision units on site at St Mary's and Berwick Academy would be created as follows:

- Berwick St Mary's Church of England First, in addition to the proposed age range change to also add an SEN unit with specialist provision for up to 30 places reserved for pupils aged 4 to 11 with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN.
- Berwick Academy in addition to the proposed age range change to also add an SEN unit with specialist provision for up to 40 places reserved for students aged 11 to 16 with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN. This element of the proposal would require the approval of the Trustees of Berwick Academy and final approval from the Regional DfE Director North East.

93. Timeline for Implementation

It is proposed that the establishment of the SEN units at St Mary's and at Berwick Academy would follow the same timeline as the proposed change in age ranges i.e. the SEN unit at St Mary's would be effective from 1 September 2025 and the SEN unit at Berwick Academy would be effective from 1 September 2026.

94. Implications for staff

It is envisaged that both St Mary's and Berwick Academy would need to develop a staffing structure for their respective SEN units suitable to meet the needs and number of pupils with SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN.

95. Transport

Students attending special schools in Northumberland are subject to the same eligibility criteria for Home to School Transport as mainstream students. It is anticipated that the provision of local specialist provision within the Berwick Partnership area would reduce the need for many students with the relevant SEND primary needs to travel outside of their local area, and therefore this would have a positive impact on the Council's Home to School Transport budget.

96. Building Implications

The indicative costs for provision of SEN units at St Mary's and at Berwick Academy are included in Table 9 at para. 90.

97. Sport and Recreation

Pupils on roll in the SEN units at St Mary's and Berwick Academy would be able to have timetabled access to the playing fields and recreational facilities on the respective school sites as part of their curriculum.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	This report directly links to the Council's Corporate aim 'Living, Learning - We will ensure the best education standards for our children and young people.'
Finance and value for money	Capital investment of £39.9m has been allocated by the Council in the Medium-Term Plan. Part of the rationale for informal consultation is to provide assurance to Cabinet that investment would be made within a sustainable and viable school structure for the medium to long-term. A detailed Business Case for investment would be brought forward to Cabinet once the structure of schools has been decided. There would be a small saving to the home to school transport budget as a result of the Berwick town middle school closures which is currently estimated to be in the region of £14k; this would be as a result of Year 5&6 pupils remaining in their primary schools.
Legal	Consultation carried out on proposals has complied with The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 and updated guidance January 2023
Procurement	An outline business case (OBC) will be developed and submitted to cabinet with the outcomes of the statutory consultation which will also set on the procurement options and recommendations to deliver best value for the councils investment.
Human Resources:	There would be a need to support staff placed at risk of redundancy a result of the proposed reorganisation with redeployment opportunities. A draft staffing protocol would be developed to manage this process within the partnership of schools.
Property	Refer to 'Finance and value for money' above
Equalities	Impact assessment is contained as Appendix 5 of this report

(Impact Assessment attached) Yes X	
Risk Assessment	A full project risk assessment will be presented as part of the OBC, following the statutory consultation.
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 a desire to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families in Northumberland
Carbon Reduction	It is not envisaged that these proposals would have a significant positive or negative impact on carbon reduction
Consultation	This report has been considered by the Executive Director Children's Services and the Member for Children's Services
Wards	Berwick East; Berwick North; Berwick West with Ord; Norham and Islandshires; Wooler

Background Papers

Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, 12 April 2022 – Berwick Partnership Organisation

Report of the Joint Interim Director of Children's Services, 11 October 2022 - The Outcomes of Consultation on Berwick Partnership Organisation,

Feedback from Phase 2 Consultation

Report Sign Off

Executive Director of Resources and Transformation (S151 Officer)	JW
Interim Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer	SB
Chief Executive	HP
Executive Director	AK
Portfolio Holder	GR-T

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Consultation About Education in the Berwick Partnership

Appendix 2 - Consultation Register

Appendix 3 - Maps showing proposed changes to school catchment areas

Appendix 4 - Option C – An Inclusive Model

Appendix 5 - Equalities Impact Assessment

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Northumberland
County Council

CONSULTATION ABOUT EDUCATION IN THE BERWICK PARTNERSHIP

An opportunity to give us your views



**PHASE 2 - 31 OCTOBER 2022 UNTIL MIDNIGHT ON
3 MARCH 2023**

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	2
BACKGROUND.....	4
SCHOOL CAPACITY, SURPLUS PLACES AND FALLING NUMBERS	7
EDUCATION OUTCOMES	15
FINANCIAL CHALLENGES.....	20
POTENTIAL MODELS	23
POTENTIAL TIMELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION.....	29
IMPACT OF PROPOSALS ON ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS INTO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS.....	33
IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED MODELS FOR STAFF.....	37
IMPACT OF PROPOSALS ON SCHOOL CATCHMENT AND TRANSPORT ELIGIBILITY AREAS.	39
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	40
POTENTIAL MODELS – POST-16 AND POST-18	44
SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND ESTATES.....	45
OTHER FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION	47
EARLY YEARS.....	47
TRANSPORT	48
SPORT AND RECREATION	49
HOW WILL VIEWS FROM CONSULTATION BE GATHERED?.....	50

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Phase 2 Consultation on the future of schools in the Berwick Partnership.

Phase 1 Consultation asked parents, staff and the wider community in Berwick whether they believed a reorganised 3-tier structure (the current structure) or a reorganisation to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure would be better able to secure a viable, sustainable and successful education system across all phases from nursery to sixth form. While many of the consultees who responded, including many schools in the Berwick Partnership, had very strong views about which system schools should be organised within, there was no majority view for either system.

As a result, this Phase 2 Consultation sets out possible models of school organisation within both the current 3-tier system and within a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system. This consultation document sets out the issues facing schools in the Berwick Partnership and why there have to be changes to the way schools are organised in the area, including possible school closures, in whatever system it is decided should be in place.

Before you continue to read this Phase 2 consultation document, it is important to understand that Northumberland County Council does not have any powers to make changes to academies – within the Berwick Partnership, this applies to Berwick Academy and St Cuthbert's Catholic First School. However, the Council is carrying out this consultation on their behalf also so that everyone's views can be collected and analysed in a consistent way. The Diocese of Newcastle and the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle also have a significant role to play in this consultation process.

The following table summarises the roles and powers of the various organisations with responsibilities for schools and academies.

Organisation	Role/Responsibility	Powers
Local Authority: Northumberland County Council	Northumberland County Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient good school places for the parents and children who live in Northumberland. They must ensure sensible place planning. They must hold maintained schools to account for their educational and financial performance (but not academies).	The Local Authority can hold consultations. Elected members of the Council Cabinet are the 'decision making' body and can merge, close, or extend age ranges of maintained schools (but not academies). They cannot establish solely run academy trusts but can be stakeholders.
Regional Schools Commissioner/ Department for Education	The RSC brokers the academy conversion of failing schools and through its Advisory Board, approves or declines requests of maintained schools to become converter academies. They hold Academy trusts to account for both their financial and educational performance	The RSC has powers to instruct the Local Authority to close (discontinue) schools. The RSC is the 'decision-making' body for any changes to Academies, including closure or age range extensions.
Academy Trusts (e.g. Berwick Academy; Bishop Bewick Trust	Academy Trusts are accountable for the financial and educational performance of the academy schools within its trust.	Trusts can carry out consultation on proposed changes including age range, but permission to make such changes is given by the RSC.
Governing Bodies of maintained schools (community/com munity; voluntary; foundation)	Accountable to the Local Authority for financial and educational performance.	Maintained schools have some powers to make changes to schools depending on the type of change; typically, the type of change and thresholds within which voluntary and foundation schools can make changes are more extensive than for community schools.
Dioceses	The Dioceses provides support and advice to their schools through consultation. They can hold consultations. They should be consulted and provide a strategic view on behalf of their schools. They hold their schools to account for their educational and financial performance.	The Diocese can provide capital investment for maintained faith schools. They can support or oppose closures or changes and have the right to appeal decisions made by the Local Authority with regard to changes to maintained schools to the Schools Adjudicator. They can establish multi-academy trusts.

BACKGROUND

The Berwick Partnership is currently organised mainly within the 3-tier (first/middle/high) school structure. There are 11 first schools, 1 first academy, 1 primary school, 3 middle schools, 1 age 13-18 academy and 1 special school:

The 18 schools within the partnership are:

- **Belford Primary School – age 2-11**
- **Berwick St Mary's CE First School – age 3-9**
- **Berwick Holy Trinity CE First School – age 3-9**
- **Holy Island CE First School - age 4-9**
- **Hugh Joicey CE First School – age 4-9**
- **Lowick CE First School – age 2-9**
- **Norham St Coelwulf's CE First School – age 3-9**
- **Scremerston First School – age 4-9**
- **Spittal First School – age 4-9**
- **St Cuthbert's Catholic First School – age 3-9**
- **Tweedmouth Prior Park First School – age 3-9**
- **Tweedmouth West First School – age 4-9**
- **Wooler First School – age 2-9**
- **Berwick Middle School – age 9-13**
- **Glendale Community Middle School – age 9-13**
- **Tweedmouth Community Middle School – age 9-13**
- **Berwick Academy –age 13-18**
- **The Grove Special School – age 2-19**

Some first schools also have provision for children from age 2 or 3 which are run separately from the school, but based on the school site e.g. Tweedmouth Prior Park First and Spittal First Schools.

In the 3-tier structure educational pathway, pupils in first schools leave at the end of Year 4 and transfer into Year 5 at middle school, where they remain until the end of Year 8. From middle school, pupils then transfer into Year 9 until the end of Year 11 or the end of Year 13 depending on their choices.

While the educational standards achieved by many of the schools and academies in the Berwick Partnership are good, the medium to long-term future of schools in the area remains uncertain due to a number of factors beyond the direct control of Northumberland County Council.

It has been well-publicised during Phase 1 Consultation that the Council has committed £39.9m towards the replacement and refurbishment of school buildings in the Berwick Partnership. The reason for carrying out Phase 1 Consultation and Phase 2 Consultation on the structure of schools in the Berwick area is to ensure that this investment is made in a school structure that can deliver consistently good outcomes for all children and young people within a viable and sustainable educational pathway, now and for the future generations to come. These objectives are articulated in the 'Vision for Change for Berwick Partnership', agreed by the schools and academies in the partnership as follows:

'Vision for Change for Berwick Partnership'

- **Improving Education Outcomes** at each phase to ensure every child meets their potential.
- **Sustainability of Education** across the whole of the Berwick Partnership for the long term.
- **Improving and extending SEND offer** for children and young people in Berwick Partnership so that their needs are met locally and travel times are reduced significantly.
- **Engaging the Berwick Community** in the review process to build an understanding of all the issues and to grow support for any proposed changes within schools in order that the community engages, supports and thrives.
- Ensure **schools work together** to further develop the partnership and create a sustainable model for the future.
- Underpinning **best value for NCC capital Investment** as well as any wider investment opportunities that may arise.

As for Phase 1 Consultation, while everyone's view is welcome in this next phase and will form part of the overall feedback to the 'decision-makers', again it is not a referendum and any decision about the structure of schools will be based on the quality of the educational rationale rather than 'votes' for one system or another.

The factors facing schools in the Berwick Partnership highlighted during Phase 1 Consultation remain the same:-

External Factors

- The need to ensure investment in school buildings in the Berwick Partnership;
- The need to provide appropriate specialist provision for a growing number of children and young people living in the Berwick area with Special Educational Needs as close their home communities as possible;
- The need to reduce the over-provision of school places in the light of falling school rolls to support viable and sustainable schools in the Berwick area for decades to come.

Opportunities

- Investment of millions of pounds into school buildings in the partnership;
- Opportunity for all parties who have an interest in education in the Berwick area to shape a school system that will be in place for decades to come;
- Opportunity for a wide-ranging view of education to be taken that includes mainstream, specialist and Post-16 and Post-18 provision;
- Opportunity for alternative proposals for school organisation to be put forward and considered.



SCHOOL CAPACITY, SURPLUS PLACES AND FALLING NUMBERS

The 'capacity' of a school building is based on a calculation that works out the appropriate number of pupils that can be educated within it. The calculation is slightly different depending on whether a school is a primary or secondary school, as pupils of different ages have differing educational and space requirements. For middle schools in Northumberland which are 'deemed secondary', their capacities are worked out from a mixture of primary and secondary needs.

The number of 'Surplus places' in a school is the difference between the number of children on the school roll and its capacity – e.g. a first school with a capacity for 150 pupils which has 135 pupils on roll has 15 surplus places, or about 10% spare capacity. A small amount of capacity in a school is a good thing as the school will generally be viable and sustainable, as it allows for some fluctuation over the school year if some children leave and some joining without impacting the school staffing or finance arrangements. It also allows for some parental preference with regard to school choice.

However, the number of pupils being born in the Berwick Partnership has been falling for a number of years and according to the latest data available to the Council, this is set to continue for the foreseeable future.

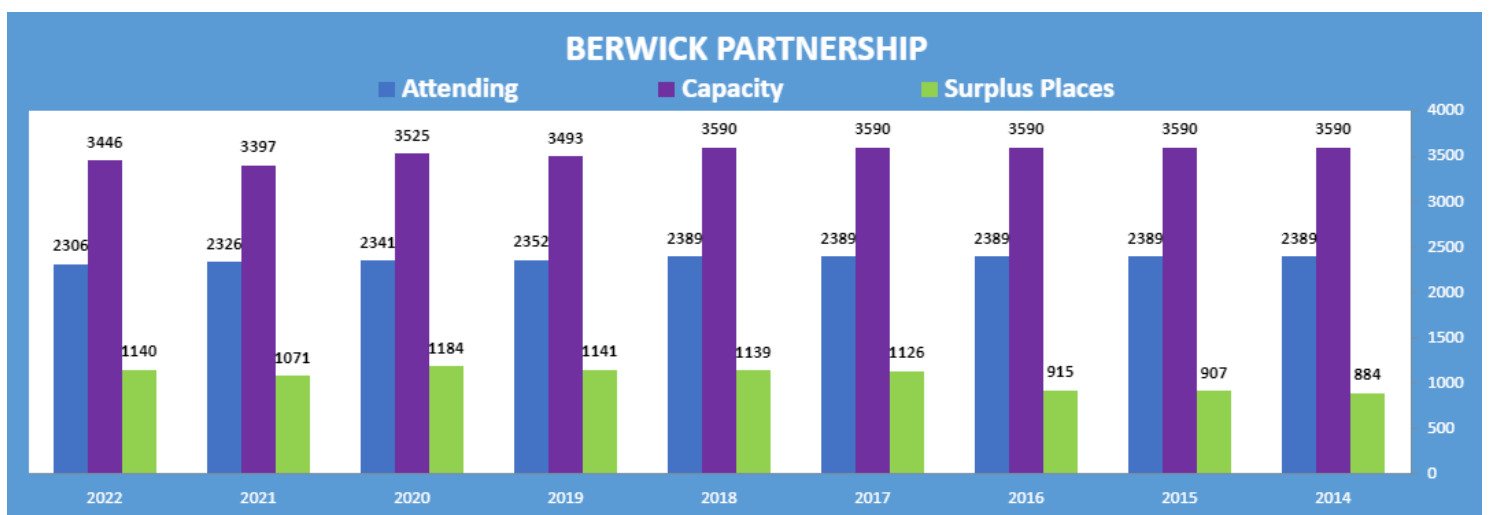
At first school level, there are currently 1,435 places in the Berwick Partnership. As at October 2022, there are 950 pupils on roll in these schools. This means there are currently 485 unfilled places in these schools. This is the equivalent number of places that would fill 3 schools the same size as Belford, Holy Trinity and Wooler First Schools. In last year's cohort, there were 978 pupils on roll in Berwick first schools and in the previous year there were 1,058, demonstrating the yearly decline in numbers.

Excessive surplus places due to falling pupil numbers can be seen as beneficial for parents, as they are more than likely to secure a place for their child in the school of their choice, whether it is their local catchment school or another school. However, this is a short-term benefit as schools begin competing with each other to attract pupils from a reducing pool of pupils year on year and all schools' finances are affected. Some schools

gain pupils from outside of their own catchment area which supports their own viability, while other schools that are less popular at a given point in time with parents have their finances severely impacted.

Without intervention to better match schools with their populations, this situation could result in schools competing for pupils, with the potential for some schools closing that have larger pupil populations than the surviving schools, resulting in longer journeys to schools.

The following graph shows the total number of pupils attending schools in the Berwick Partnership (blue bar), the total number of places available in schools (purple bar) and the number of those places that are unfilled (green bar).



As can be seen, there has been an upward trend in the number of surplus places since 2014 and this trend will continue as the number of pupils living in the Berwick area continues to fall.

The location of schools in rural areas is also particularly important, as there is a limit to the length of journey that is acceptable for children in these areas to undertake daily. This inevitably means that in rural areas of Northumberland, there has to be an acceptance there will always be a level of surplus places in certain rural schools, providing they are able to remain viable.

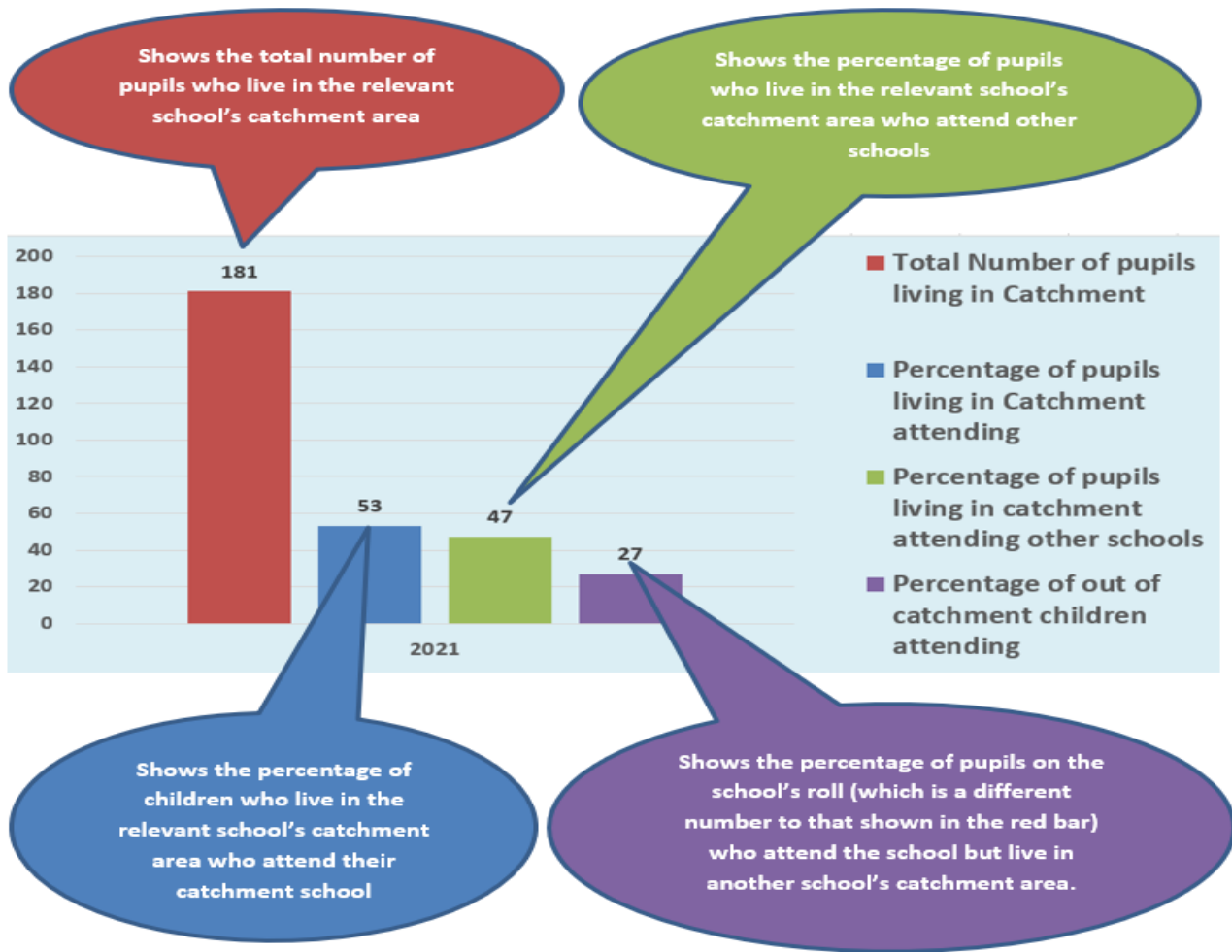
Linked to this, the distance travelled by pupils daily to school is a key factor in their educational experience. It is an objective of the Council that children and young people of statutory school age have access to good schools as close to their home communities as possible.

At the same time, the Council is committed to reducing the carbon footprint of residents and businesses across the county through the implementation of its Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23. Reducing unnecessary car journeys, including the daily transportation of pupils passing local schools to schools outside of their home communities, is a key plank of this strategy and is supported by the Council's School Organisation Plan 2021-24.

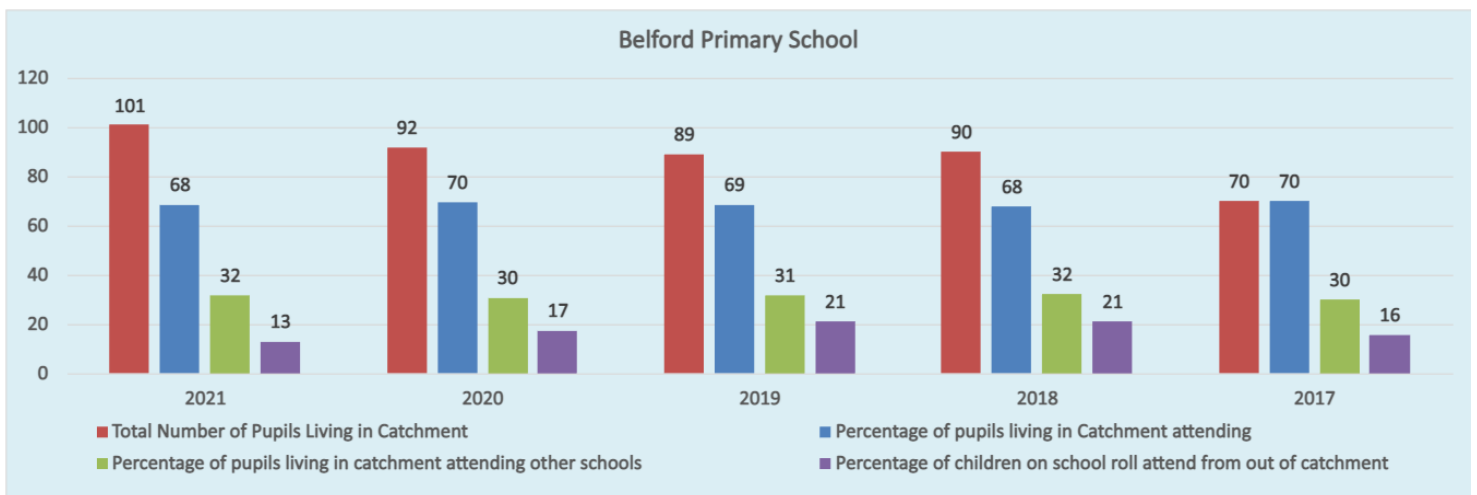
The following graphs show the pattern of pupils attending schools in the Berwick Partnership for each of the last 5 years. These show the number of children that live in the school's catchment area (as at January 2022), the percentage of children who attend their own catchment school and the percentage of the school's catchment children who attend other schools. It also shows as a percentage how many children who are on the school's roll actually live in other school's catchment areas.¹

¹ Note that St Cuthbert's RC First School does not have an allocated catchment area, therefore all pupils who attend reside in other school's catchment areas.

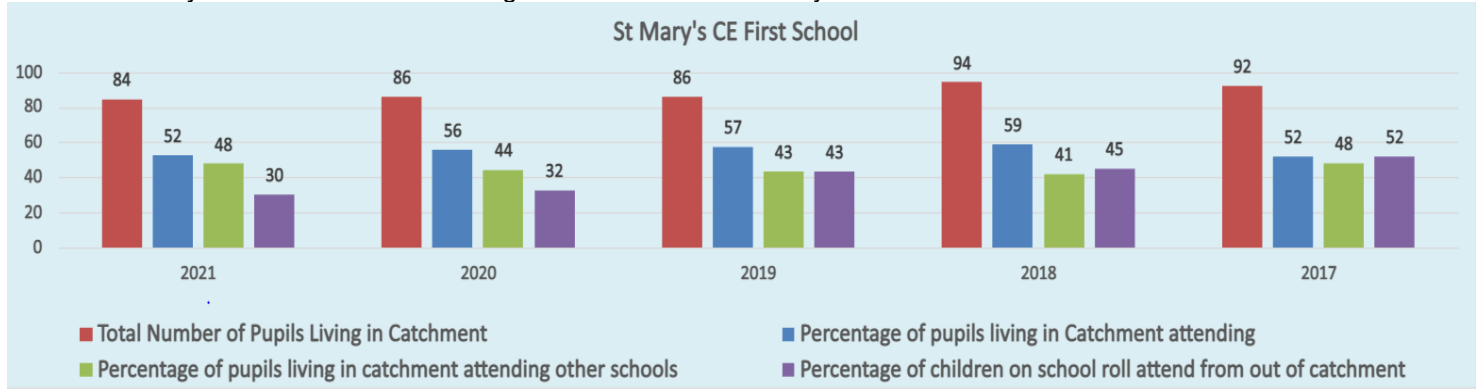
Key For Graphs:



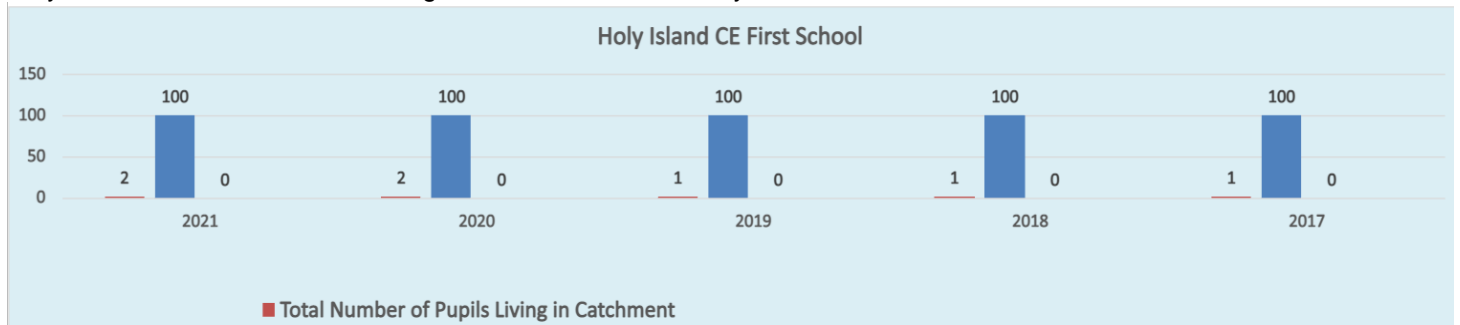
Belford Primary School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



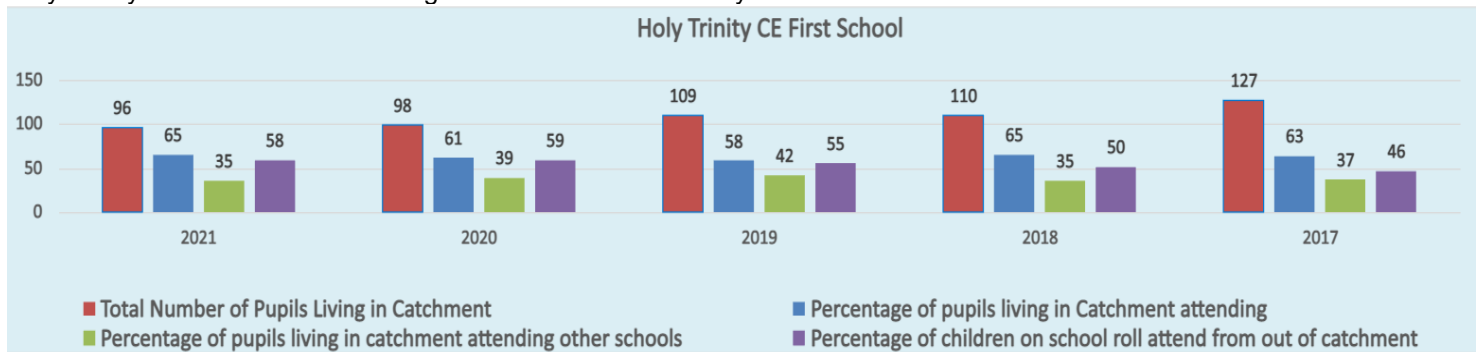
Berwick St Mary's CE First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



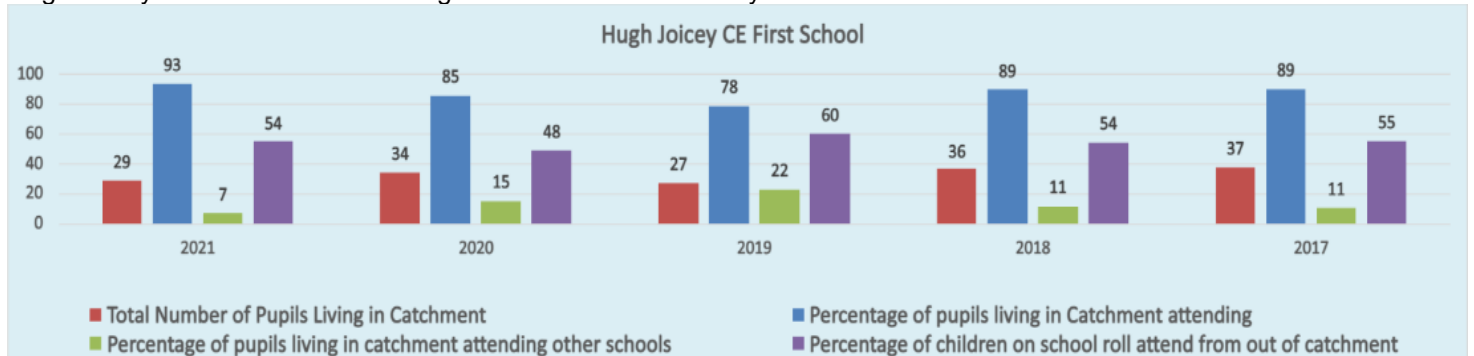
Holy Island CE First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



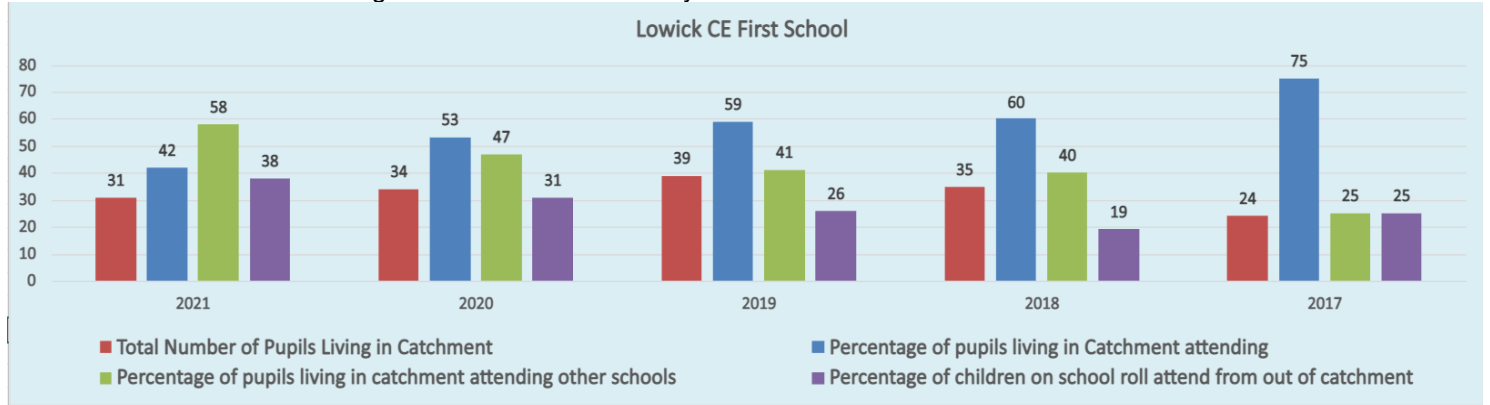
Holy Trinity CE First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



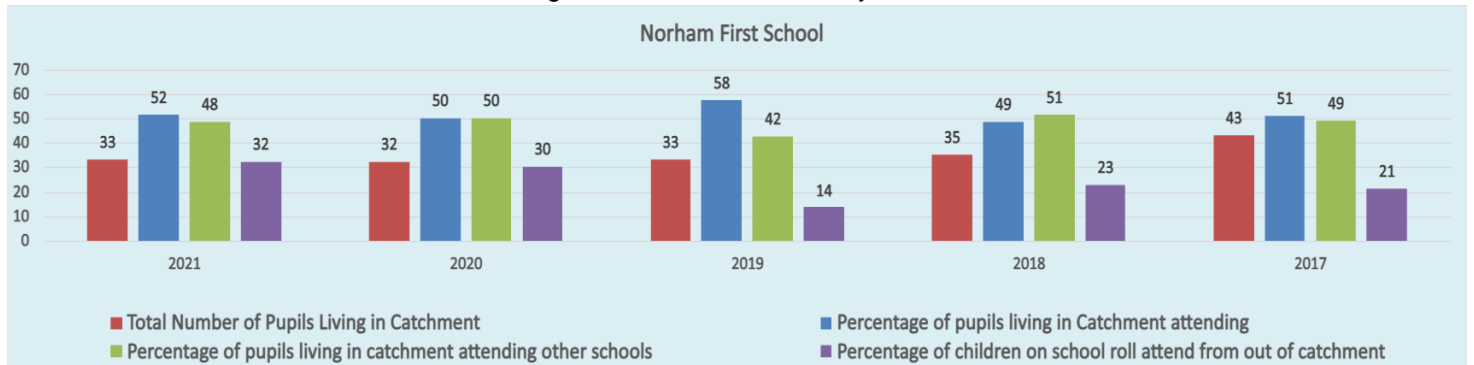
Hugh Joicey CE First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



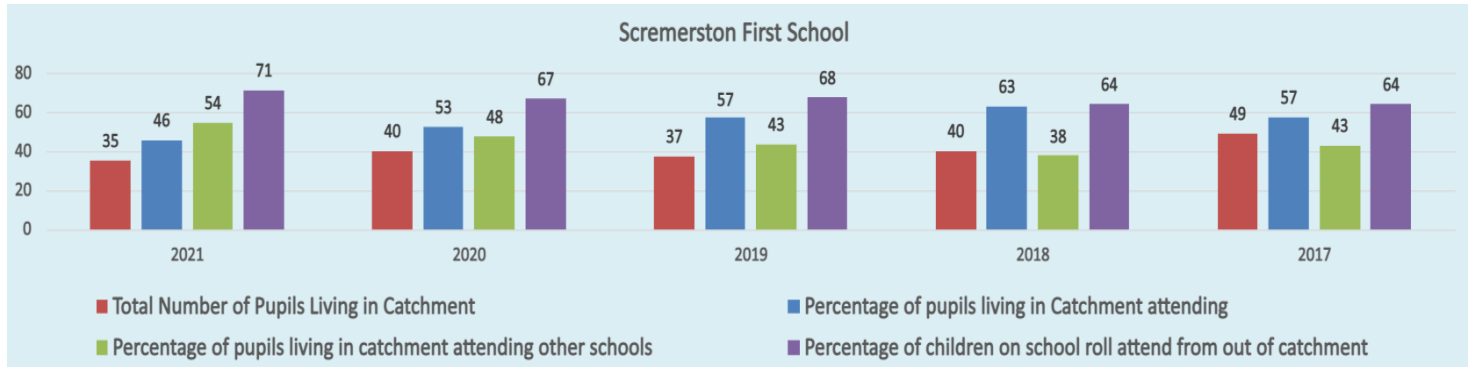
Lowick CE First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



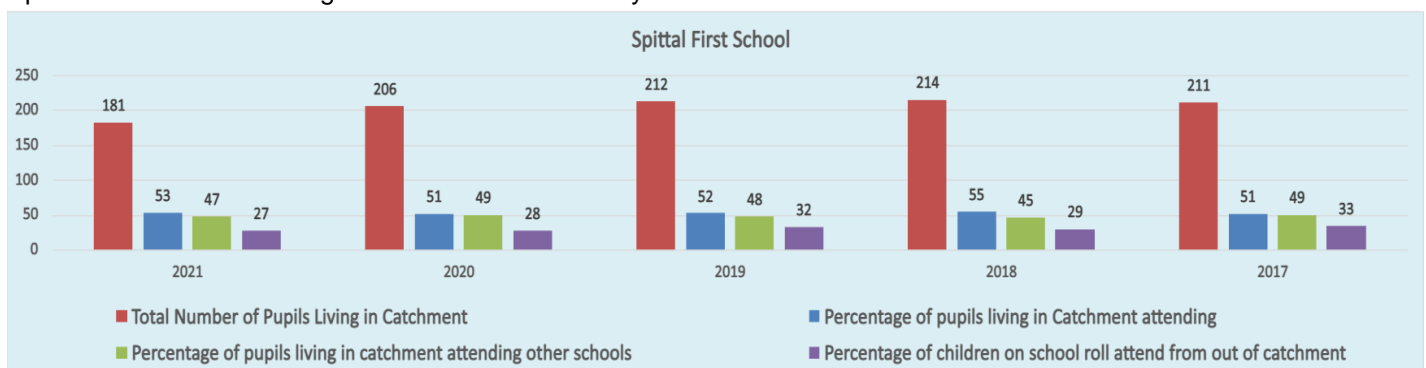
Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



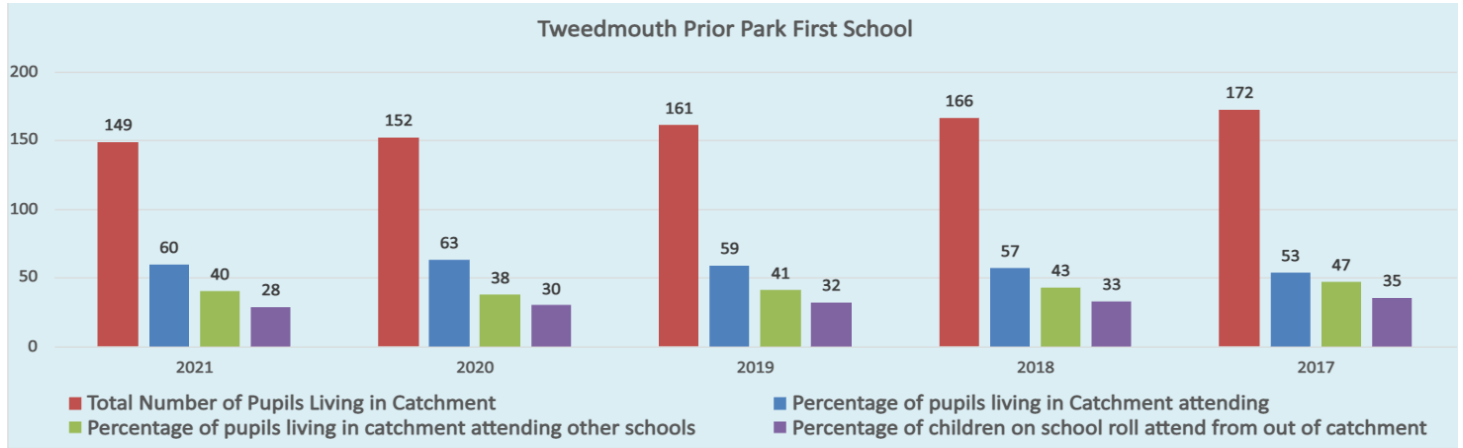
Scremerston First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



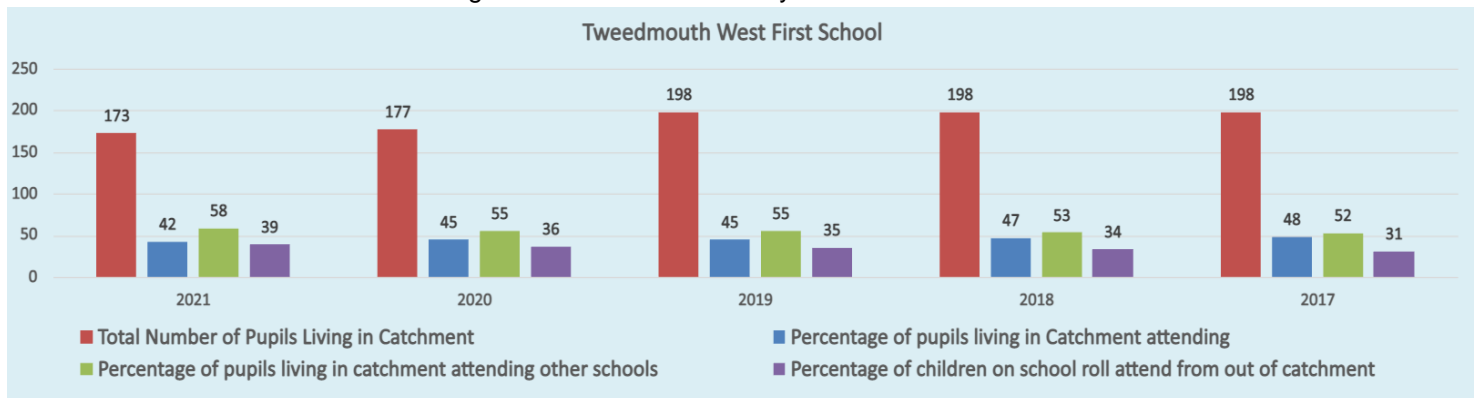
Spittal First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



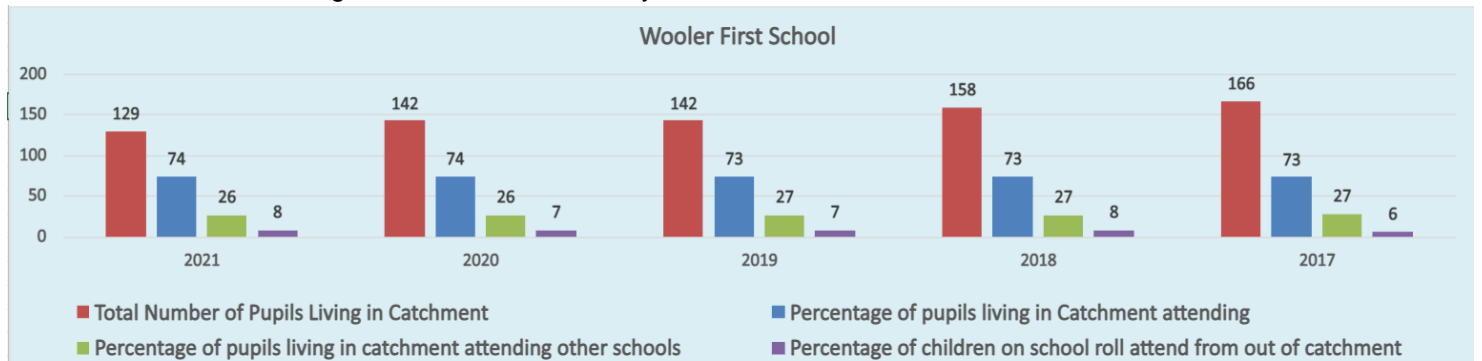
Tweedmouth Prior Park First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



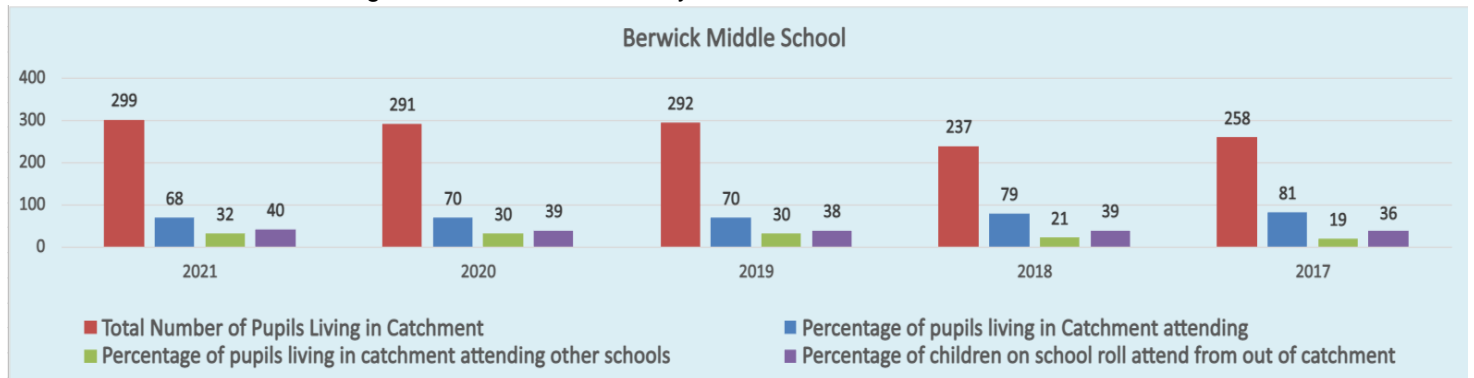
Tweedmouth West First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



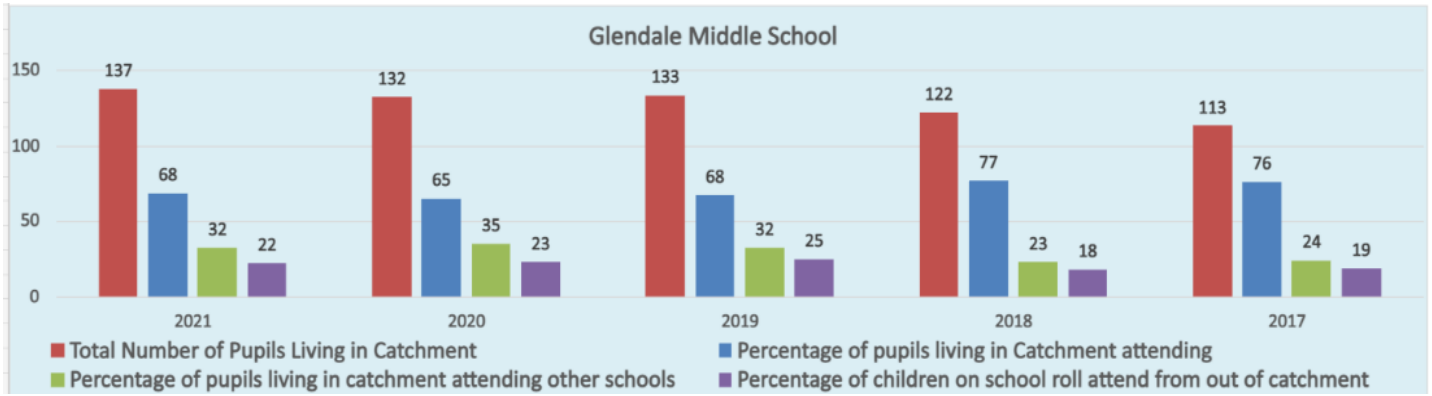
Wooler First School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



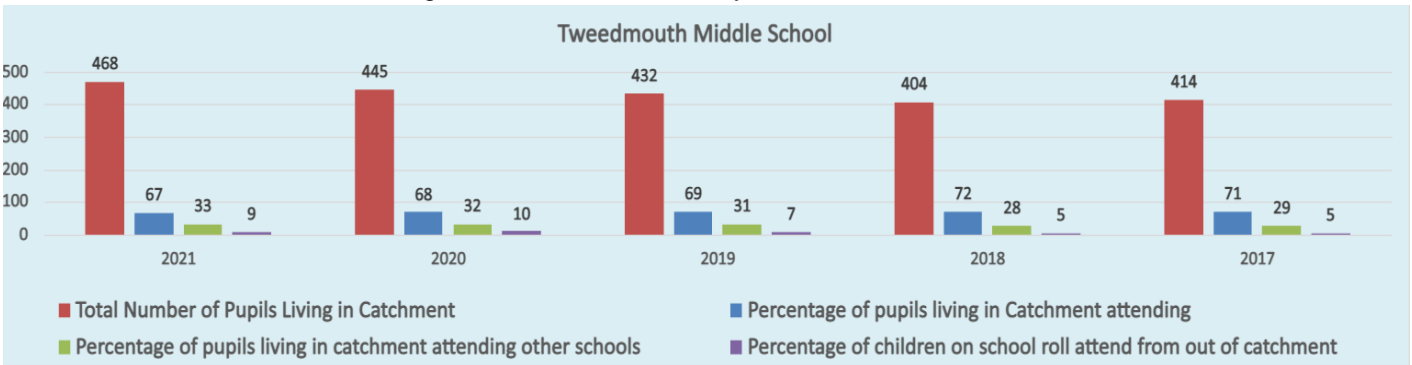
Berwick Middle School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



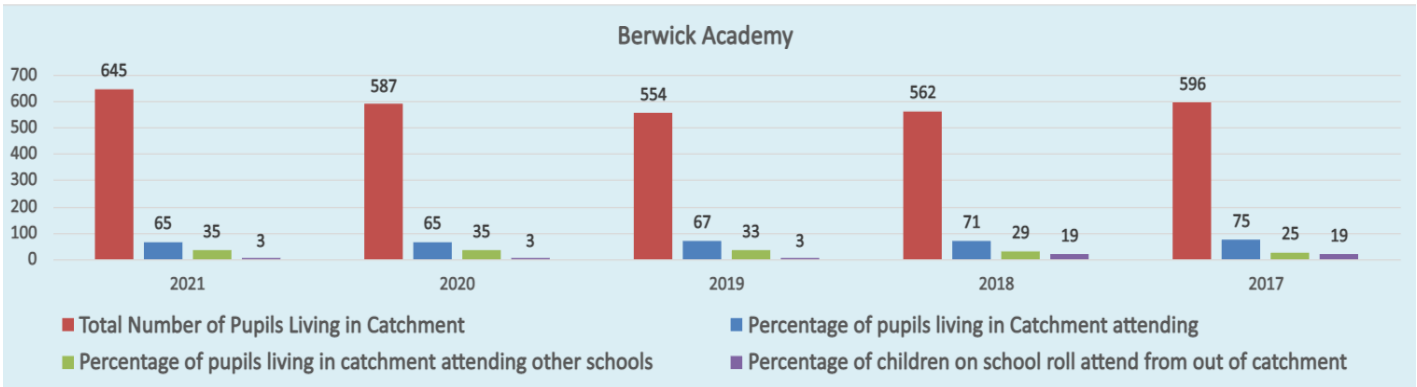
Glendale Middle School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



Tweedmouth Middle School showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



Berwick Academy showing attendance in academic years 2017/18 to 2021/22



EDUCATION OUTCOMES

All parents want their children to have the best opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability when they are at school. This desire is shared by the Council for every pupil within Northumberland, with the additional objective that we want pupils to be able to access a good education within or as close to their home community as possible.

As we stated in Phase 1 consultation, achievement can cover a number of different factors that measure the quality of a pupil's educational experience, with academic achievement being just one. Whichever model of school structure is finally approved for the Berwick Partnership, it would need to demonstrate that it has the potential to not just improve academic achievement, but the whole educational experience of pupils throughout their educational journey.

Educational outcomes were included in Phase 1 consultation in the Summer Term, but as the outcomes for 2022 of the tests and examinations that pupils sat in the Summer Term for 2022 are not yet available, they are repeated here again for your information.

Key Stage 1:

Children in first schools and primary schools are assessed at the end of Key Stage 1 (KS1) assessments, which are taken by children at the end of Year 2 when they are aged 7 or almost 7. These assessments are not published as their purpose is mainly to assist schools with developing the next learning steps for individual children, although they are shared with parents.

Key Stage 2:

Children in primary schools and middle schools are assessed at the end of Year 6 when they are aged 11 or almost 11. Key Stage 2 (KS2) assessments did not take place in 2020 and 2021, therefore the last available data for Berwick Partnership is from 2019 as results from summer 2022 will not be available until this coming December.

Children are assessed against a number of measures, but one of the key measures is the percentage of children who meet the expected standard for Reading, Writing and Maths. The results for 2019 for children in Year 6 in schools in the Berwick Partnership were provided in the Phase 1 Consultation and they are repeated here again for your information, together with the Northumberland and England averages that year.

Percentage of students achieving KS2 expected standard in Berwick Partnership 2019

	% Children who met expected standard
Belford Primary School	88%
Berwick Middle School	72%
Glendale Middle School	63%
Tweedmouth Middle School	75%
Northumberland average	66%
England average	65%

From the previous table, you can see that the highest percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths was at Belford Primary School, with the two Berwick town middles also achieving above average scores, while Glendale Middle achieved just below the county and national average.

Key Stage 4 – GCSE Results

The last verified outcomes at GCSE (Key Stage 4) for Berwick Academy were in Summer 2019, as set out in the following table – we are expecting the verified outcomes from Summer 2022 in late Autumn. However, the DfE has stated that the Covid pandemic has had an uneven impact on 2021/22 performance data and therefore when the data is made available, it is not recommended to make direct comparisons of a school’s outcome data

for this year with results from previous years (such as 2019) when examination conditions were the same. In the same way, it is not recommended to make comparisons of a school's 2022 GCSE data with that of other schools.

In Phase 1 consultation, we also reported that the DfE had stated that the GCSE results from 2020 and 2021 could not be meaningfully compared to previous years' results as a way of measuring pupil performance due to the way they were assessed and awarded in those years.

However, the key measures of pupil performance at GCSE in 2019, 2020 and 2021 for Berwick Academy were included in Phase 1 Consultation and so they are included here again in the following table for information purposes. For the reasons explained it is not possible to produce a Northumberland or England average.

GCSE results, Berwick Academy

		GCSE 2019	GCSE 2020	GCSE 2021
Progress 8 (measures how much value a school has added to pupil progress compared to other schools. 0 = Expected Progress)	Berwick Academy	-0.55	-0.26	Not available, but expected to make progress on 2020 results
	Northumberland average	-0.12	N/A	N/A
	England average	-0.03	N/A	N/A
% Students Achieving Grade 4 or more in English and Maths (equivalent to low C pass in previous grading system)	Berwick Academy	47%	62%	63%
	Northumberland Average	65%	N/A	N/A
	England Average	65%	N/A	N/A
% Students Achieving Grade 5 or more in English and Maths (equivalent to high C pass in previous grading system)	Berwick Academy	21%	35%	36%
	Northumberland average	43%	N/A	N/A
	England average	43%	N/A	N/A
Attainment 8 (measures how well pupils perform against 8 qualifications - higher figure is best)	Berwick Academy	38.9	43.8	41.8
	Northumberland average	46.5	N/A	N/A
	England average	46.7	N/A	N/A

Key Stage 5 - 'A' Levels Results

As for GCSE results, 'A' level grades achieved by students in 2020 and 2021 cannot be directly compared to the last verified results in 2019, again as a result of the alternative grade awarding methods, but results for Berwick Academy in the last 3 years are included in the following table for information.

'A' level results, Berwick Academy

	2019	2020	2021
Average result – Berwick Academy	D+, 22.5 points	C-, 27 points	B-, 35 points
Average result – Northumberland	C+, 32.5 points	N/A	N/A
Average result – England	C+, 34.01	N/A	N/A
Progress Score (0 = expected standard)	-0.18 (Average for England)	N/A	N/A

Berwick Academy has reported that all university applicants in the 2020/21 year group gained a place at one of their chosen **universities, with 95% being placed at their first choice. Students seeking routes into employment and training were supported by staff throughout the lockdown period and most secured their next step.**

FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

There are 16 local authority-maintained schools in the Berwick Partnership (including The Grove Special School) and 2 academies.

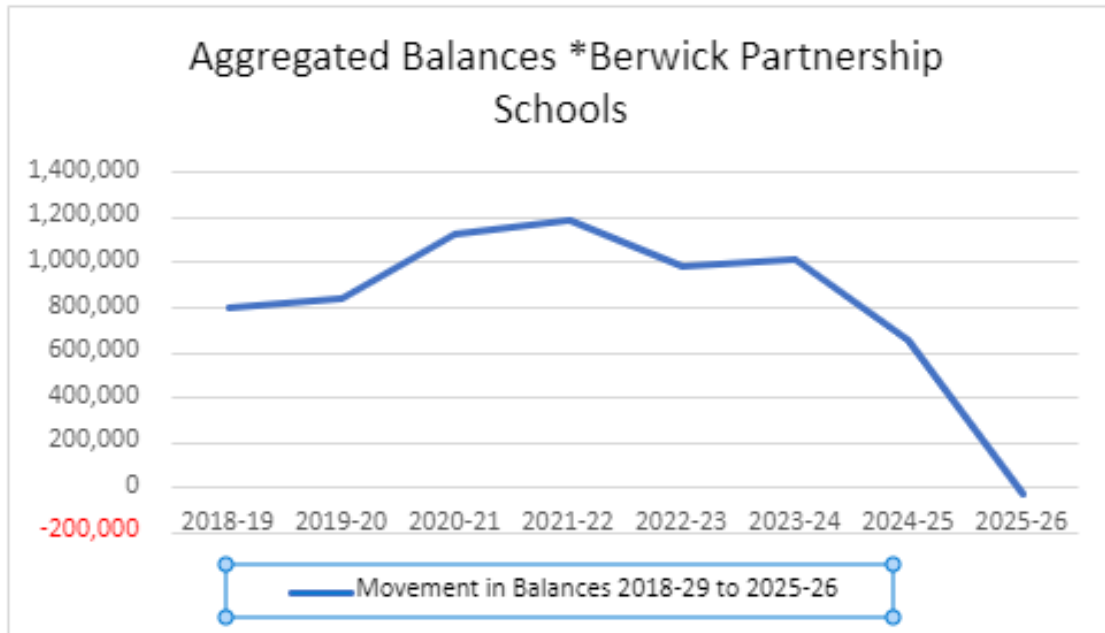
Currently 1 school is forecast to be in budget deficit at the end of the 2023/24 academic year, 4 schools are forecast to be in budget deficit by the end of 2024/25 and 8 schools forecast to be in deficit by 2025/26². Therefore by 2025/26, there is predicted to be a deficit of circa £839,000 across the partnership, not including academies (the Council does not hold the financial responsibility for academies and therefore Berwick Academy and St Cuthbert's Catholic First School forecasts are not included in this information).

Furthermore, these forecasts do not take into account the impact on school budgets of the forthcoming planned salary increases for school staff, while there is also evidence that some schools have over-predicted the number of pupils they would have on roll when forecasting their future budget position. This may impact some schools currently forecasting deficits even more negatively, while some schools currently not predicting deficits may in fact end up in deficit within the 3-year forecasting period.

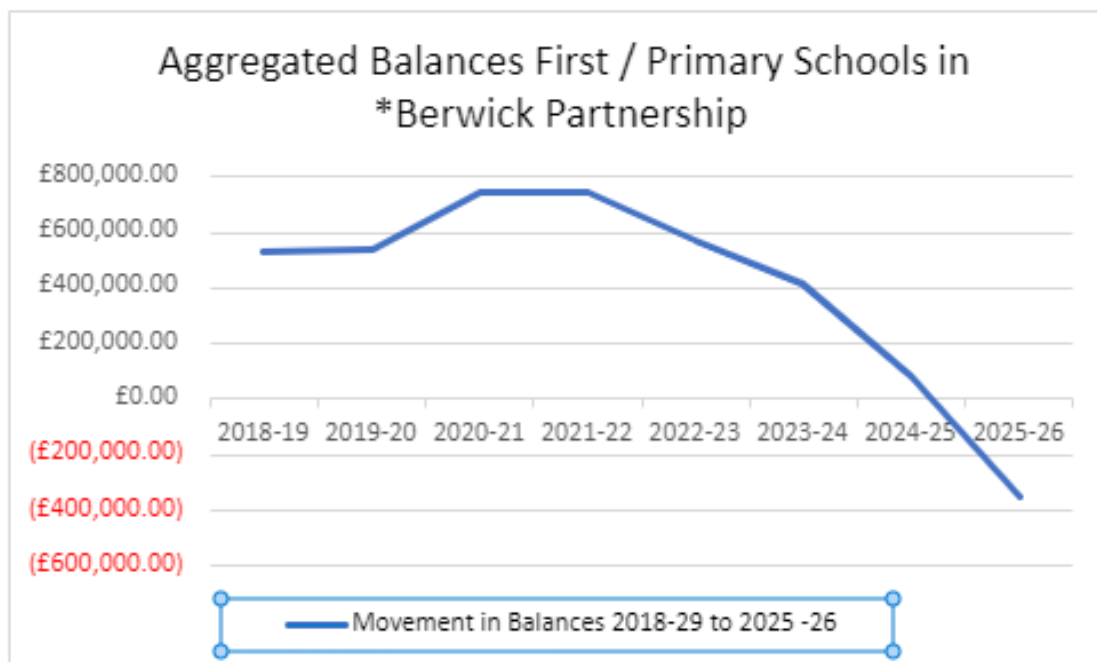
The following charts shows the current forecast predictions for the Berwick Partnership overall, at first/primary school phase and at middle school phase, bearing in mind that they do not include the financial positions of the two academies in the partnership:

² The Grove Special School is not included in these financial forecasts as specialist provision is funded differently compared to mainstream schools

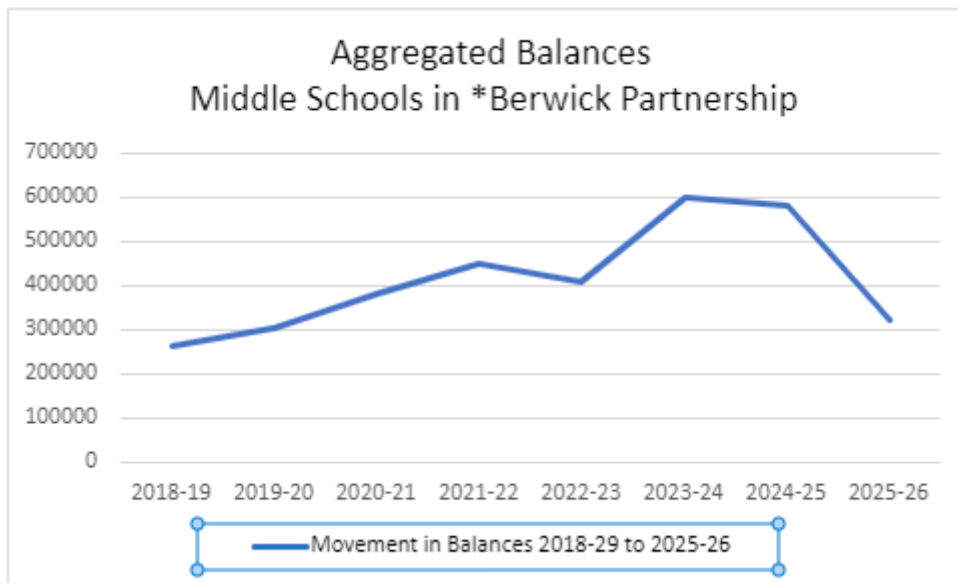
Berwick Partnership - current Total Predicted budget position by 2025-26



First/Primary schools in Berwick Partnership - current Total Predicted budget position by 2025-26



Middle schools in Berwick Partnership - current Total Predicted budget position by 2025-26



POTENTIAL MODELS

Model A (Revised 3-tier System of Schools in Berwick)

In this model Berwick Academy would remain as 13 to 18 high school but with a reduced PAN of 180 (6 Forms of Entry).

Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Middle Schools would operate as they do currently on their existing sites, within their existing capacity. It is proposed that Glendale Middle School, within this model, would close and pupils in Years 7 and 8 would transfer to Duchess High School in Alnwick.

Under this model it is proposed that three first schools would either close or amalgamate.

Belford Primary – The school is already a primary school; the proposal under this model is that it moves into the Alnwick Partnership. As part of the move, the catchment area for Belford Primary would be reduced.

Berwick St Mary's CE First – The school would remain a first school on its current site but would have a reduced PAN of 15 (0.5 Form of Entry). It is also proposed that on-site specialist SEN provision would be created at the school.

Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First – The proposal is that the school would close, and its catchment area would be split between Tweedmouth Prior Park, Tweedmouth West First and Hugh Joicey CE First.

Scremerston First – The proposal is that the school would close, and its catchment area split between Tweedmouth Prior Park First, Tweedmouth West First and Spittal First Schools.

Spittal First - The school would remain a first school on its current site but would have a reduced PAN of 30 (1 Form of Entry).

Tweedmouth Prior Park First – The school would amalgamate with Tweedmouth West First School on the Tweedmouth Prior Park site. The school would take on Tweedmouth West’s DfE number and URN.

Tweedmouth West First – The school would amalgamate with Tweedmouth Prior Park First school on the Tweedmouth Prior Park site. The school would retain its DfE number and URN.

Wooler First – The proposal is the school would change its age range and become a primary school on its current site and become part of the Alnwick Partnership. If approved the greater catchment area for Alnwick would be expanded.

The following table for Model A, provides further detail

Model A – Revised 3-tier system of schools in Berwick

School	Current Situation				Possible Model			
	No. on Roll in Sept. 2022 *	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN)	Latest Ofsted	Capacity	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN)	Distance in miles to nearest school
Belford Primary	84	1	30	Good	Moves into Alnwick Partnership and catchment area reduced			
					187	1	30	8.5
Berwick St Mary's CE First	64	1	30	Good	Reduces PAN and opens on-site specialist SEN provision			
					75	0.5	15	0.9m
Holy Island CE First	3	0.2	5	Outstanding	25	0.2	5	8.4m
Holy Trinity CE First	141	1	30	Good	150	1	30	0.9m
Hugh Joicey CE First	47	0.5	15	Good	73	0.5	15	4.8m
Lowick CE First	16	0.3	10	Good	50	0.3	10	4.8m
Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First	28	0.3	10	Outstanding	Closes and catchment split between amalgamated Tweedmouth West/Tweedmouth Prior Park and Hugh Joicey First Schools			7.5
Scremerston First	54	0.6	18	Good	Closes and catchment split between amalgamated Tweedmouth West/Tweedmouth Prior Park and Spittal First Schools			1.7
Spittal First	122	1.3	40	Good	Reduces PAN			
					171	1	30	1.1
St Cuthbert's Catholic First	72	0.5	15	n/a	75	0.5	15	n/a
Tweedmouth Prior Park First	114	1	30	Requires Improvement	School amalgamates with Tweedmouth West First School on Tweedmouth Prior Park site and retains Tweedmouth West First School's DfE Number and URN			
Tweedmouth West First	114	1	30	Good	1.2m			
					300	2	60	1.1
Wooler First	91	1	30	Good	Converts to become a primary and moves into Alnwick Partnership			
					210	1	30	8.7
Berwick Middle	338	3.8	114	Good	Opens on-site specialist SEN provision			
					456	3.8	114	
Glendale Middle	104	1.4	42	Good	School Closes			
Tweedmouth Middle	362	3.1	93	Good	440	3.1	93	
Berwick Academy	552	7.5	225	Requires Improvement	Reduces PAN and opens on-site specialist SEN provision			
					740	6	180	

***Note number on roll is an estimate as October Census not yet available**

Model B (2-tier (Primary/Secondary System) of Schools in Berwick)

In this model Berwick Academy would change its age range to become an 11-18 secondary school but with a reduced PAN of 180 (6 Forms of Entry).

The three middle schools (Berwick Middle, Tweedmouth Middle and Glendale Middle Schools) in the partnership would close on 31 August 2026. Children in Years 7 and 8 would be educated at Berwick Academy and children in Years 5 and 6 educated in the new primary schools.

Under this model it is proposed that the 11 first schools (Berwick St Mary's CE, Holy Trinity CE, Holy Island CE, Hugh Joicey CE, Lowick CE, Norham St Ceolwulf's CE, Spittal, Tweedmouth Prior Park, Tweedmouth West and Wooler) change their age range to become primary schools. One first school (Scremerston First) could close.

Belford Primary – The school is already a primary school, and the proposal is that it remains a primary school and moves into the Alnwick Partnership. As part of the move the catchment area for Belford Primary would be reduced.

Berwick St Mary's CE First – The school would become a primary school on its current site but would have a reduced PAN of 15 (0.5 Form of Entry). It is also proposed that on-site specialist SEN provision would be created at the school.

Scremerston First – The proposal is that the school would close, and its catchment area split between Tweedmouth Prior Park First, Tweedmouth West First and Spittal First Schools.

Spittal First - The school would become a primary school on its current site but would have a reduced PAN of 30 (1 Form of Entry).

Wooler First – The proposal is the school would change its age range and become a primary school on its current site and remain in the Berwick partnership.

The table, for Model B, provides further detail. As stated previously these are only proposals and are the subject of this consultation. We welcome your views and any alternative suggestions you might have.



Model B – Proposed model for a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system of schools

School	Current Situation				Possible Model			
	No. on Roll in Sept. 2022*	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN)	Latest Ofsted	Capacity	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN)	Distance in miles to nearest school
Belford Primary	84	1	30	Good	Moves into Alnwick Partnership and catchment area reduced			
					187	1	30	8.5
Berwick St Mary's CE First	64	1	30	Good	Becomes primary, reduces PAN			
					105	0.5	15	0.9m
Holy Island CE First	3	0.2	5	Outstanding	Becomes primary			
					35	0.2	5	8.4m
Holy Trinity CE First	141	1	30	Good	Becomes primary			
					210	1	30	0.9
Hugh Joicey CE First	47	0.5	15	Good	Becomes primary			
					105	0.5	15	4.8
Lowick CE First	16	0.3	10	Good	Becomes primary			
					70	0.3	10	4.8
Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First	28	0.3	10	Outstanding	Becomes primary			
					70	0.3	10	7.5
Scremerston First	54	0.6	18	Good	Closes and catchment split between Tweedmouth Prior Park and Spittal First Schools			
								1.7
Spittal First	122	1.3	40	Good	Becomes primary and reduces PAN			
					210	1	30	1.1
St Cuthbert's Catholic First	72	0.5	15	n/a	Becomes primary			
					75	0.5	15	n/a
Tweedmouth Prior Park First	114	1	30	Requires Improvement	Becomes primary			
					210	1	30	1.2m
Tweedmouth West First	114	1	30	Good	Becomes primary			
					210	1	30	1.1m
Wooler First	91	1	30	Good	Converts to become a primary and remains in the Berwick Partnership			
					210	1	30	8.7
Berwick Middle	338	3.8	114	Good	School Closes			
Glendale Middle	104	1.4	42	Good	School Closes			
Tweedmouth Middle	362	3.1	93	Good	School Closes			
Berwick Academy	552	7.5	225	Requires Improvement	1100	6	180	

*Note number on roll is an estimate as October Census not yet available

POTENTIAL TIMELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION



Potential timeline for implementation of revisions to 3-tier Structure of Schools in Berwick Partnership and additional SEND Provision

1 September 2024

- Wooler First School extends its age range to become a primary school and retains pupils on roll in Year 4 on 31 August 2024 as they become Year 5;
- Glendale Middle School operates with Years 6, 7 and 8 only.
- Parents of pupils in Years 6 of Belford Primary and Years 6 at Glendale Middle School are able to apply for places in Year 7 at Alnwick The Duchess High School for 1 September 2025 as catchment students.
- Parents of pupils in Year 8 in Glendale apply as usual in Autumn 2024 for a place in Year 9 at Alnwick The Duchess High School for 1 September 2025 as catchment students (in-year applications), or to another school according to parental preference.
- Parents of pupils in Year 8 in Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools apply as usual in Autumn 2024 for a place in Year 9 at Berwick Academy or another school according to parental preference for 1 September 2025.

31 August 2025

- First schools approved for closure/amalgamation would close on 31 August 2025.
- Glendale Middle School would close on 31 August 2025.
- Pupils in Years 7 of Glendale Middle School on 31 August 2025 are guaranteed a place in Years 8 at Alnwick The Duchess High School for 1 September 2025 due to the discontinuance of Glendale Middle School from 31 August 2025.

1 September 2025

- Pupils in Reception to Year 3 on 31 August 2025 in first schools approved for amalgamation/closure would transfer to their new catchment school or other school according to parental preference into Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 for 1 September 2025.
- Pupils in Year 4 on 31 August 2025 in first schools approved for amalgamation/closure would transfer into Year 5 as usual at their catchment middle school or other school according to parental preference for 1 September 2024.
- Wooler First retains pupils on roll in Year 5 on 31 August 2025 as they become Year 6 and its catchment area becomes part of the Alnwick Partnership;
- Pupils on roll in Glendale Middle School in Years 6, 7 and 8 on 31 August 2025 transfer to Alnwick The Duchess High School or other school according to parental preference as Years 7, 8 and 9. Alnwick The Duchess High School operates with bulge Years in Years 8 and 9 if necessary to accommodate the displaced pupils transferring from Glendale Middle School only.
- Pupils on roll in Year 8 at Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Middle Schools on 31 August 2025 transfer as usual into Year 9 at Berwick Academy or another school according to parental preference.
- Alnwick The Duchess High School extends its catchment area to include Wooler Primary (as it would be) and Belford Primary Schools catchment areas – Belford's catchment would be slightly reduced.
- Berwick St Mary's CE First School, Berwick Middle School and Berwick Academy open their specialist provision for students with ASD, SEMH and SLCN.
- Berwick St Mary's CE and Spittal First Schools reduces their PANs (see model) for children joining in Reception.
- Berwick Academy reduces its PAN for students joining in Year 9 from 225 to 180.

Potential timeline for implementation of 2-tier Structure of Schools in Berwick Partnership and additional SEND Provision

September 2024

- No applications accepted for Reception places for September 2025 in first schools planned to close in August 2025;
- No applications accepted for Year 5 places for September 2025 in middle schools.

31 August 2025

- First schools approved for closure/amalgamation would close on 31 August 2025.

1 September 2025

- Pupils in Reception to Year 4 on 31 August 2025 in first schools approved for amalgamation/closure would transfer to their new catchment school or other school according to parental preference into Years 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for 1 September 2025.
- First schools remaining open would extend their age ranges to become primary schools and retain pupils on roll in Year 4 on 31 August 2025 as they become Year 5;
- Pupils in Reception classes join their new primary schools, with Berwick St Mary's CE and Spittal Primary Schools reducing their PANs (see model).
- Middle schools operate with Years 6, 7 and 8 only.

31 August 2026

- Glendale, Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools close.

1 September 2026

- Pupils on roll in middle schools in Years 6, 7 and 8 on 31 August 2026 transfer to Berwick Academy or other school according to parental preference as Years 7,8 and 9;
- Berwick Academy reduces its PAN from 225 to 180 for students joining in year 7;
- First schools would extend their age ranges to become primary schools and retain pupils on roll in Year 5 on 31 August 2025 as they become Year 6;
- Belford Primary School amended catchment area becomes part of the Alnwick Partnership.

- The Grove Special School transfers site to the former Tweedmouth Middle School and extends its provision to include places for SEMH students across all age groups.



IMPACT OF PROPOSALS ON ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS INTO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Changes to Admissions Arrangements if planned revisions to the 3-tier Structure of Schools in Berwick Partnership are implemented

Scremerston, Norham St Ceolwulf's CE, Tweedmouth Prior Park and Tweedmouth West First Schools

Under the revised 3-tier proposal, Scremerston and Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First Schools would close and their catchment areas would be joined with the amalgamated catchments of Tweedmouth West and Tweedmouth Prior Park. The Tweedmouth West DfE number would continue to be used and it would become a 2-form Entry school (2 classes of 30 pupils per year group) on the Tweedmouth Prior Park site. The new Governing Body of the amalgamated schools may decide to change the name of the school.

As these changes are proposed to begin in September 2025, only two of the current year groups in these schools (Reception and Year 1) would still be in the first school phase when the new arrangements would begin and these would be Years 3 and 4 at that time. The current number of pupils on roll in these year groups at the 4 schools indicates they would all be able to be accommodated within Tweedmouth West, which would be a 2-form entry school from that date. The number of children that would be in the Year 1 and 2 classes at that point is currently unknown but given the falling pupil numbers in the area, it is assumed they would also be able to be accommodated in the school. Children who would join Reception in the larger Tweedmouth West in September 2025 would apply in the Autumn of 2024 as usual.

Wooler First School, Glendale Middle School and Belford Primary School

The Wooler Primary (as it would become) and Belford Primary Schools catchments and Transport Eligibility Areas would become part of the Alnwick Partnership from 1 September 2025.

Applications from students in Year 6 at Glendale Middle School and in Year 6 at Belford Primary School in Autumn 2024 would apply for places in Year 7 at Alnwick The Duchess High School for September 2025 and would be treated as catchment applications for places and transport where eligible.

To support the transition, students in Years 7 and 8 on roll at Glendale Middle School on 31 August 2025 would be guaranteed places in Years 7 and 9 at Alnwick The Duchess High School as it becomes their catchment school and would not have to apply for places. Parents of students who did not wish their child to take up a place in Year 8 or 9 at Alnwick The Duchess High School would need to apply for a place at another age-appropriate school.

Berwick St Mary's CE and Spittal First Schools

From 1 September 2025, the Planned Admission Number (PAN) of Berwick St Mary's CE First School would reduce from 30 to 15, while the PAN of Spittal First School would reduce from 40 to 30. This would impact the number of children joining their Reception class in that year.

Other first schools and middle schools

There would be no changes to the process for applications into Reception classes at the other first schools remaining open or into Year 5 at the middle schools remaining open in the Berwick Partnership for September 2025.

Berwick Academy

Subject to the agreement of the Berwick Academy Trustees and the subsequent approval of the Regional Schools Commissioner, the PAN of Berwick Academy would reduce from 225 to 180 for students joining Year 9 in September 2025.

Changes to Admissions Arrangements if 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure of schools in Berwick Partnership implemented

Scremerston and Tweedmouth Prior Park First Schools

Under the proposed 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure, Scremerston First School would close and pupils on roll at the school in Reception to Year 4 on 31 August 2025 would be allocated places at Tweedmouth Prior Park Primary (as it would be) in Years 1 to 5. The catchment area of Scremerston would be joined with that of Tweedmouth Prior Park Primary, save for a small area that would be allocated to Spittal Primary (as it would be) in a tidying up process.

As these changes are proposed to begin in September 2025, three of the current year groups in these schools (Reception, Year 1 and Year 2) would be impacted by the new arrangements and these would be Years 3, 4 and 5 at that time. The current number of pupils on roll in these year groups at the 2 schools indicates that Years 3 and 4 would be able to be easily accommodated within Tweedmouth Prior Park, but that the Year 5 year group may be a 'bulge' year with more than 30 pupils; this would be factored into the accommodation and staffing arrangements as they moved through the school. The number of children that would be in the Year 1 and 2 classes at that point is currently unknown but given the falling pupil numbers in the area, it is assumed they would also be able to be accommodated in the school. Children who would join Reception in the larger Tweedmouth Prior Park Primary in September 2025 would apply in the Autumn of 2024 as usual.

Berwick St Mary's CE and Spittal First Schools

From 1 September 2025, the Planned Admission Number (PAN) of Berwick St Mary's CE First School would reduce from 30 to 15, while the PAN of Spittal First School would reduce from 40 to 30. This would impact the number of children joining their Reception class in that year.

Belford Primary School

The Belford Primary School catchment and Transport Eligibility Area would become part of the Alnwick Partnership from 1 September 2026 and therefore applications from students in Year 6 at the school in Autumn 2025 for places in Year 7 at Alnwick The Duchess High

School in September 2026 would be treated as catchment applications for places and transport where eligible.

Other first schools becoming Primaries

There would be no changes to the process for applications into Reception classes at the other first schools in the Berwick Partnership as they become primary schools in September 2025.

Berwick Academy

Subject to the agreement of the Berwick Academy Trustees and the subsequent approval of the Regional Schools Commissioner, on 1 September 2026, Berwick Academy would have an intake of students into Year 7, 8 and 9, while in subsequent years admissions would be into Year 7 only. Students applying for places in Year 7 and Year 9 for September 2026 in Berwick Academy would apply through the Admissions Portal in Autumn 2025.

Students in Year 7 at the middle schools on 31 August 2026 would be guaranteed a place at Berwick Academy in Year 8 on 1 September 2026 as a result of the closure of the middle schools and would not need to apply for a place. However, if parents of students in this year group did not wish their child to take up a place at Berwick Academy in Year 8 in September 2026, they would need to apply for a Year 8 place for them at other schools.

The PAN of Berwick Academy would reduce from 225 to 180 for students joining Year 7 in September 2026 and in subsequent years.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED MODELS FOR STAFF



There would be implications for staff working in the schools in the Berwick Partnership under both proposed models of school organisation.

It is likely that as a result of the proposed closure and/or amalgamation of some schools in the Berwick Partnership under both models, there would be a number of staff placed at risk of redundancy.

In relation to the proposed 2-tier (primary/secondary) model, the continuing first schools becoming primary schools would need to redesign their curriculum and staffing structures to incorporate appropriate teaching and learning for pupils in Years 5 and 6, and this would be likely to include the recruitment of additional staff. Likewise, the Trustees of Berwick Academy would need to accommodate an additional two year groups at Years 7 and 8 and therefore would also need to redesign its staffing structures, with the likelihood that additional staff would be required.

In order to ensure that as many staff as possible would be retained within the Berwick Partnership if either a revised 3-tier structure or 2-tier structure is approved, Council HR Officers will work with schools and staff representatives (Trade Unions) during this consultation period to develop a 'Staffing Protocol' agreement that hopefully all schools and academies would sign up to. This protocol would ensure that staff at risk of

redundancy would be guaranteed interviews for any vacancies they choose to apply for that are identified within the Berwick schools over the transition period of the relevant model of organisation. This would ensure that the appointment process across the schools is fair for all staff and hopefully would retain staff within the Berwick system.

IMPACT OF PROPOSALS ON SCHOOL CATCHMENT AND TRANSPORT ELIGIBILITY AREAS

Northumberland County Council holds the responsibility for setting and implementing the Home to School Transport Policy in the county. The Council therefore sets the Transport Eligibility Areas for every area of the county. The Council also sets the school catchment areas for community and voluntary controlled schools for managing admissions when places are oversubscribed, and these match their Transport Eligibility Areas.

The Governing Bodies of voluntary aided and foundation schools and academies set their own school catchment areas to manage admissions into their schools (although some academies do not have catchments and use distance from home to school as a criterion instead). Historically, in Northumberland the catchment areas of these types of school match the Council's Transport Eligibility Areas, but this is not always the case. For example, the Council does not have Transport Eligibility Areas at all for Roman Catholic schools or for some foundation schools and academies e.g. St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary in Berwick does not have a catchment area, but some pupils may meet the eligibility criteria to qualify for transport there on the basis of religious preference.

Within the proposals for both the revised 3-tier structure and for the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure for the Berwick Partnership, some school closures or amalgamations are proposed. If implemented, this would mean that the Council would need to amend the school catchment and Transport Eligibility Areas of the schools that would continue and this is indicated in the proposed Model A and Model B set out previously. Revised proposed catchment/Transport Eligibility Area maps will be displayed at all of the public events that will take place during the consultation period so that you can express your views on these as well as the proposals generally. The revised proposed catchment/Transport Eligibility Area maps will also be taken to each of the staff and Governing Body meetings that will take place throughout the consultation period.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS



During Phase 1 consultation, we informed you of the increasing number of children and young people living in the Berwick area who are being diagnosed with primary special educational needs in Autism (ASD) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH). A small but significant number of children in the Berwick Partnership are also diagnosed with Speech, Learning and Communication needs particularly in the primary years, which often leads to a diagnosis of ASD in the secondary years.

The increase in vulnerable students with these types of primary need is not limited to Berwick, but can also be seen across Northumberland and the country. While many pupils with a special educational need (SEN) are able to remain in mainstream education, a significant number need more specialist help. The Grove School in Berwick provides specialist education to around 36 pupils who live in the Berwick Partnership area (although pupils also attend from outside the area as there are 48 on roll). However, there are a further 58 children living in the Berwick Partnership area with special educational needs on roll at 6 specialist provisions outside of the area, some of them travelling a considerable distance to and from school daily.

The Council's forecasts for the number of students with ASD and SEMH needs were included in the Phase 1 document and are repeated below for your information:

Forecast for number of pupils with ASD as a primary need living in Berwick area

Forecasts by year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sep-22	1	1	4	1	6	6	8	4	16	5	9	3
Sep-23	3	2	1	6	2	7	8	7	8	15	7	8
Sep-24	3	4	2	2	7	2	9	7	15	8	22	6
Sep-25	3	4	4	2	2	8	2	8	15	15	11	20
Sep-26	2	4	4	5	3	2	10	2	18	15	22	10
Sep-27	3	3	4	5	6	3	3	9	5	17	22	20
Sep-28	3	3	3	5	6	7	4	3	20	5	26	20
Sep-29	3	3	3	4	6	7	9	4	6	20	7	23

Forecast for number of pupils with SEMH as a primary need living in Berwick area

Forecasts by year Group	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sep-22	0	3	2	9	16	18	8	13	8	9	13	7
Sep-23	0	0	5	3	11	20	15	10	12	9	9	10
Sep-24	0	0	0	8	4	14	16	17	9	13	9	6
Sep-25	0	0	0	1	9	4	11	19	16	10	13	7
Sep-26	1	0	0	0	1	11	4	13	18	17	10	10
Sep-27	0	1	0	0	1	1	9	4	12	19	17	7
Sep-28	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	11	4	13	19	13
Sep-29	0	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	10	4	13	14

As for all forecasts, the data in the previous tables is an educated prediction of what could happen in the future and various factors could occur that mean the actual number varies from the forecast number. Also, not all students would need to attend a Special school. However, the forecasts clearly show the increasing numbers of children and young people with these primary years is set to continue.

The discussions that have taken place on the structure of schools in the Berwick Partnership over the last 28 months have also presented the opportunity to have a 'joined-up' approach to reviewing the current specialist provision within the area. Headteachers in the Berwick Partnership, including The Grove Special School have met in the last few months to discuss what, where and how provision could be put in place to address this

growing need. Council Officers and some schools have also had informal meetings with representatives from some groups who support children with special educational needs and their families to find out if they had any suggestions that could be consulted on with the wider community of the Berwick area.

The initial feedback received in relation to ideas for additional specialist provision are set out here. The potential models for specialist provision would need to work within either the current (revised) 3-tier system of school organisation or within a 2-tier(primary/secondary) structure and therefore 2 models have been put forward for you to consider and submit your views as part of this consultation as follows:

Proposed Model of Specialist Provision in revised 3-tier structure	Proposed Model of Specialist Provision in 2-tier(primary/secondary) structure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Grove Special School continues with its existing provision on its current site with specialism, particularly in Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Profound Learning Difficulties (PMLD); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Grove Special School relocates to the site of Tweedmouth Middle School, increases its planned student numbers to 70 across all year groups and amends its SEND designation to include SEMH. • Shared site with Berwick Academy would enable opportunities for older students to access mainstream education and study for qualifications where appropriate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First School phase - Specialist provision for primary-age students with ASD or SEMH primary needs to be established at St Mary's CE First School with between 10 and 12 planned places. This provision would be separate to the school's mainstream provision, but with opportunities for pupils to access mainstream education where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary phase – St Mary's CE First School would continue to operate as a Primary Support Base (nurturing unit) for pupils in line with the Council's Inclusion Strategy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle School phase - Specialist provision for middle school-age students with ASD or SEMH primary needs to be established at Berwick Middle School with between 10 and 15 planned places. This provision would be separate to the school's mainstream provision, but with opportunities for students to access mainstream education where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options to be identified for ways in which all schools across the Berwick Partnership, particularly small, rural schools, could pool funding in order to support specialist SEND provision on site through a peripatetic approach, with the aim of enabling those students for whom it is appropriate within their mainstream school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School phase - Specialist provision for high school-age students with ASD or SEMH primary needs to be established at Berwick Academy with 15 to 20 planned places. This provision would be separate to the school's mainstream provision, but with opportunities for students to access mainstream education and study for qualifications where appropriate. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Options to be identified for ways in which all schools across the Berwick Partnership, particularly small, rural schools, could pool funding in order to support specialist SEND provision on site through a peripatetic approach, with the aim of enabling those students for whom it is appropriate within their mainstream school. 	

POTENTIAL MODELS – POST-16 AND POST-18

In the same way as the consultation on school structure is providing a broader opportunity to review and improve special educational needs provision in the Berwick area, there is a desire to also consider how the investment in the partnership could provide opportunities to extend and improve Post-16 and Post-18 provision for students and the wider community with links to business, apprenticeships and further education.

The vision agreed by the schools in the Berwick Partnership and shared by Northumberland County Council (set out in the Background of this document) sets out the ambition for young people and the wider community to be able to gain the skills and/or qualifications to equip them for employment or further education and enable them to contribute positively to the local and wider community.

Discussions have already begun between Berwick Academy and Northumberland County Council to see how this vision can become a reality through the development of achievable plans linked to the capital investment in the Berwick Partnership, which will lead to young people being able to access the right vocational, academic or mix of studies that will equip them for the world of work. These discussions also include proposals on how this offer could be broadened and extended over time to the wider community to offer Post-18 skills, learning or qualifications, therefore creating a community learning hub.

Again, as part of this consultation we are seeking your views on what opportunities you would like to see being offered at Post-16 and Post-18 for young people and the wider community of the Berwick area.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND ESTATES

As for many areas in the county, school buildings in Berwick Partnership are in need of significant capital investment.

£39.9m has been identified in the Council's Medium Term Plan and as already stated, a key element of the rationale for carrying out this consultation is to ensure that this investment is made in a school structure in the Berwick area that secures viable and sustainable schools for decades to come.

The Council's information on the combined backlog maintenance (capital works required to the fabric of school buildings) for schools in the Berwick Partnership amounts to approximately £7.2m. This figure does not include backlog maintenance for Berwick Academy and St Cuthbert's RC Catholic First School, since as they are funded by the Department for Education (DfE), requests for capital funding for maintenance are managed directly through them. However the Council is aware that Berwick Academy currently has approximately £10.9m backlog maintenance. The DfE also allocates around £7m to Northumberland County Council towards backlog maintenance for community and voluntary controlled schools and therefore the council has to operate a priority list for capital works, with school buildings that are in the greatest need of repair or maintenance at the top of the list.

If either of the models set out in this document were implemented, there would be a need to carry out some building works, especially in relation to Berwick Academy. While investment would be primarily to enable schools to operate within the revised 3-tier or reorganisation to 2-tier, it may provide opportunities to address some of the other maintenance issues within a school building, for instance if a school wished to 'piggy-back' on works being carried out at their school through the addition of their own maintenance funding. If any schools are approved to be closed or amalgamated, the future of the relevant school buildings would be reviewed for need. In general, buildings owned by the Council are assessed in the first instance to see whether it could be used by any other educational or social care service; it would then be assessed whether there was an opportunity for the building to be taken on by the community to provide a local service and so on.

Detailed buildings costs for each model will be worked up during this consultation process and presented to the Council together with the feedback from consultation. Your views on how any capital investment made available to Berwick Partnership should be invested are also welcomed as part of this consultation. Particularly how any investment in schools could also have a positive impact on the wider Berwick community, through enhanced community use.

OTHER FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION



EARLY YEARS

During Phase 1 Consultation we asked schools, parents, Council Officers in the Early Years team and other stakeholders for the views on the amount and quality of Early Years provision in the Berwick area.

Feedback indicated that while there is sufficient Early Years provision in the Berwick area, there may be some issues in relation to the viability of some Early Years Providers. As the issue of viability may be addressed through the implementation of the changes proposed as part of the revised 3-tier structure or a reorganisation to 2-tier (primary/secondary, no specific proposed changes to Early Years provision within the Berwick Area are being put forward as part of this consultation. However, in responding to consultation on the proposals, you may also wish to comment on Early Years provision if you believe there may be a positive or negative impact as a consequence of the implementation of either model.

TRANSPORT

Eligibility for home to school transport for pupils in Northumberland is assessed in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

In relation to journey length, some pupils on roll in schools proposed to close under either model would potentially have longer journeys to school, but all would be far below the DfE's suggested best practice of primary pupils undertaking journeys of no more than 45 minutes each way.

However, should the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure be implemented, pupils would stay in the primary schools (as they would become) for an additional 2 years and would therefore have shorter journeys to school for that period. As the middle schools in Berwick and Berwick Academy are within a short distance of each other, there would be a negligible impact on the length of journey pupils would have to take to Berwick Academy in Years 7 and 8.

As the area covered by the schools in the Berwick Partnership is one of the largest in Northumberland and mostly rural in nature, many pupils are eligible for home to school transport and therefore the costs are high. The current approximate total cost for transporting eligible pupils who live in the Berwick Partnership to school every day over an academic year (excluding pupils travelling to specialist provision) is just over £1m. This includes transporting pupils to schools in Scotland or other neighbouring partnerships such as Alnwick as a result of those schools being closer to the pupil's home address or on religious preference grounds. However, in relation to the impact of the revised 3-tier structure or the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure on home to school transport, there is likely to be very little difference in relation to cost.

SPORT AND RECREATION

There would be no impact on the current sport and recreation facilities at the first schools proposed to continue under either the revised 3-tier or the 2-tier(primary/secondary) models. If any schools were approved to close or amalgamate, the Council would need to have regard to the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 and Section 77 of the School Standard and Framework Act 1998 in relation to any potential loss of playing fields. It would be hoped under these circumstances that there would be an opportunity for community groups to put forward proposals to take on playing fields for continuing use by the local community – any ideas or proposals in relation to the use of playing fields are welcomed as part of this consultation.

With the re-provision and enhancement of the buildings at Berwick Academy, there is an expectation that this will provide an opportunity for improved sport and recreation facilities at the site under either model and include wider use for the local community.



HOW WILL VIEWS FROM CONSULTATION BE GATHERED?

Alternative Proposals

While this consultation has presented Model A (Revised 3-tier system of schools in Berwick) and Model B (Proposed model for a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system of schools) you may have an alternative suggestion for addressing the issues set out in this document. If you have an alternative suggestion, please set this out in the questionnaire and response form that accompanies this document.

How can I find out more about these proposal?

Public drop-in events have been arranged during the consultation period for you to find out further information about any aspect of these proposals.

Public Drop-in events

Date: Thursday 12th January 2023, 7.30 to 9.30 p.m.

Venue: Wooler First School, 15 Brewery Lane, Wooler, NE71 6QF

Date: Wednesday 18th January 2023, 6.30 to 8.30 p.m.

Venue: Belford Primary School, West Street, Belford, NE70 7QD

Date: Saturday 21st January 2023, 10.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.

Venue: Berwick Academy, Adams Drive, Spittal, Berwick, TD15 2JF

Date: Thursday 9th February 2023, 6.30 to 8.30 p.m.

Venue: Berwick Berwick Middle School, Lovaine Terrace, Berwick, TD15 1LA

(please note change to venue from that previously advertised)

All interested parties are welcome to drop-in at any time within the above hours.

There will also be separate meetings held in schools with staff working in schools in the Berwick Partnership and their representatives, and with Governing Bodies during the consultation period. Staff and Governors will be contacted directly with the date and time of these meetings.

An online Padlet dedicated to the consultation on school structure is also available by following this link <https://padlet.com/Northumberland/Berwick>. Additional information is posted on the padlet, including Frequently Asked questions that may assist you in your response to the consultation.

How can I submit my views about this proposal?

A 15-week consultation (school weeks) on the proposals set out in this consultation document began on Monday 31st October 2022 **and will end at midnight on Friday 3rd March 2023.**

The Council is very keen to hear your views on the models of school organisation set out in this consultation document and also to learn if you have any alternative proposals.

A link to a questionnaire is here: <https://haveyoursay.northumberland.gov.uk/education-skills/berwick-consultation-phase-2/consultation/edit> (*copy and paste link into browser*) please complete the electronic questionnaire if you can. However, if you or someone you know would prefer to send a hard copy, please request a printed form by contacting educationconsultation@northumberland.gov.uk stating that you require a printed survey form for the Consultation on Education in the Berwick Partnership.

To return your completed hard copy form, please send to:

**School Organisation and Resources Team
Children's Services,
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF**

What happens to feedback and next steps?

At the end of this consultation, all feedback received will be considered by the Council's Cabinet before deciding on whether or not to move to the next steps in the process.

Thank you for participating in this consultation

Education in the Berwick Partnership - Phase 2 Consultation

Overview

Welcome to Phase 2 Consultation on the future of schools in the Berwick Partnership.

During Phase 1 Consultation we asked parents, staff and the wider community in Berwick whether they believed a reorganised 3-tier structure (the current structure) or a reorganisation to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure would be better able to secure a viable, sustainable and successful education system across all phases from nursery to sixth form.

This Phase 2 Consultation sets out possible models of school organisation within both the current 3-tier system and within a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system. The consultation document sets out the issues facing schools in the Berwick Partnership and why there have to be changes to the way schools are organised in the area, including possible school closures, in whatever system it is decided to be in place.

Please note that while this consultation is not a referendum, all views submitted will be carefully considered by the Council's Cabinet before deciding on next steps.

You

1 What is your name? (Optional)

Name

2 What is your email address? (Optional)

Email

3 What is your postcode?

Post Code (eg. TD15 2JF) *(Required)*

4 In what capacity are you responding to the consultation?

Please select option from the dropdown list **(Required)**

Please select only one item

- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Berwick Academy
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Berwick Middle
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Glendale Middle
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Tweedmouth Middle
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Belford Primary
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Holy Trinity CE First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Hugh Joicey CE First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Lowick First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Holy Island First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Norham St Caelwulf's CE First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Scremerston First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Spittal First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending St Cuthbert's RC First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending St Mary's CE First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Tweedmouth Prior Park First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Tweedmouth West First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending Wooler First
- Parent/Carer of a pupil currently attending The Grove
- Staff Member of Berwick Academy
- Staff Member of Berwick Middle
- Staff Member of Tweedmouth Middle
- Staff Member of Belford Primary
- Staff Member of Holy Trinity CE First
- Staff Member of Hugh Joicey CE First
- Staff Member of Lowick First
- Staff Member of Holy Island CE First
- Staff Member of Norham St Caelwulf's CE First
- Staff Member of Scremerston First
- Staff Member of Spittal First
- Staff Member of St Cuthbert's RC First
- Staff Member of St Mary's CE First
- Staff Member of Tweedmouth Prior Park First
- Staff Member of Tweedmouth West First
- Staff Member of Wooler First
- Staff Member of Glendale Middle
- Staff Member of The Grove
- Governor of Berwick Academy
- Governor of Berwick Middle
- Governor of Glendale Middle
- Governor of Tweedmouth Middle
- Governor of Belford Primary
- Governor of Holy Trinity CE First
- Governor of Hugh Joicey CE First
- Governor of Lowick First
- Governor of Holy Island First
- Governor of Norham St Caelwulf's CE First
- Governor of Scremerston First
- Governor of Spittal First
- Governor of St Cuthbert's RC First
- Governor of St Mary's CE First
- Governor of Tweedmouth Prior Park First
- Governor of Tweedmouth West First

—

- Governor of Wooler First
- Governor of The Grove
- Student/Pupil of Berwick Academy
- Student/Pupil of Berwick Middle
- Student/Pupil of Gendale Middle
- Student/Pupil of Tweedmouth Middle
- Student/Pupil of Belford Primary
- Student/Pupil of Holy Trinity CE First
- Student/Pupil of Hugh Joicey CE First
- Student/Pupil of Lowick
- Student/Pupil of Holy Island First
- Student/Pupil of Norham St Cuthbert's CE First
- Student/Pupil of Scremerston First
- Student/Pupil of Spital First
- Student/Pupil of St Cuthbert's RC First
- Student/Pupil of St Mary's CE First
- Student/Pupil of Tweedmouth Prior Park First
- Student/Pupil of Tweedmouth West First
- Student/Pupil of Wooler First
- Student/Pupil of The Grove
- Parent/Carer of pupil/student in another school in Northumberland
- Staff Member in another School in Northumberland
- Governor in another School in Northumberland
- Pupil/Student in another School in Northumberland
- Councillor on Berwick Town Council
- Councillor of Adderstone with Lucker Parish Council
- Councillor of Ancroft Parish Council
- Councillor of Beadnell Parish Council
- Councillor of Belford with Middleton Parish Council
- Councillor of Berwick Parish Council
- Councillor of Bowden Parish Council
- Councillor of Brampton Parish Council
- Councillor of Chalton Parish Council
- Councillor of Carham Parish Council
- Councillor of Chillingham Parish Council
- Councillor of Cornhill on Tweed Parish Council
- Councillor of Doddington Parish Council
- Councillor of Duddo Parish Council
- Councillor of Ford Parish Council
- Councillor of Holy Island Parish Council
- Councillor of Horncliffe Parish Council
- Councillor of Ingram Parish Council
- Councillor of Kirknewton Parish Council
- Councillor of Kylee Parish Council
- Councillor of Lowick Parish Council
- Councillor of Milfield Parish Council
- Councillor of Norham Parish Council
- Councillor of Ord Parish Council
- Councillor of Shoreswood Parish Council
- Councillor of Wooler Parish Council
- Resident/member of the community living in the Berwick Partnership
- Resident/member of the community living outside of the Berwick Partnership
- Resident/member of the community living in the Wooler/Glendale catchment area
- Resident/member of the community living in the Belford catchment area

- Representative of a Group or Forum e.g. – please state
 Other – please state

5 If you selected 'Representative of a Group or Forum' or 'Other' above, please state

Please state

Consultation Document

6 Copy of Consultation Document

More information



Consultation Questions

7 Having read the consultation document thoroughly, I believe that the revised 3-tier structure (Model A) represents the best option for securing sustainable and viable education across the Berwick Partnership of schools and for achieving the objectives of the 'Vision for Berwick' (refer to page 5 of Consultation Document). This model includes the following proposals: • Closure of Scremerston First School • Closure of Norham St Ceolwulf's CE First School • Amalgamation of Tweedmouth West and Tweedmouth Prior Park First Schools • Closure of Glendale Middle School

Please select option (Required)
Please select only one item

- Yes
 No
 Don't Know

8 Please give the reasons for your answer below or state 'None'.

Comment *(Required)*

9 If you answered 'Yes' to Q.6, but you believe there are changes to some aspects of the Model, such as the proposals for certain schools or changes that would improve it, please outline them below

Please outline changes here or state 'None'. *(Required)*

10 As part of the proposal for a revised 3-tier structure, I support the extension of the age range of Wooler First School to become a primary and for the Wooler and Belford Primaries to join the Alnwick Partnership, with pupils feeding to Alnwick The Duchess High School.

Please select option *(Required)*

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Don't Know

11 Please give the reasons for your answer or state 'None'.

Comment *(Required)*

12 As part of the proposal for a revised 3-tier structure, I support the proposed changes to school catchment areas arising from the closure of Scremerston and Norham St Ceolwulf's First Schools, the amalgamation of Tweedmouth West and Tweedmouth Prior Park First Schools, and the move of Belford Primary to the Alnwick Partnership.

Please select option *(Required)*

Please select only one item

Yes

No

Don't Know

13 Please give the reasons for your answer or state 'None'.

Comment *(Required)*

14 Having read the consultation document thoroughly, I believe that the reorganisation of the Berwick Partnership to a 2-tier(primary/secondary) structure represents the best option for securing sustainable and viable education across the Berwick Partnership of schools and for achieving the objectives of the 'Vision for Berwick' (refer to page 5 of Consultation Document). This model includes the following proposals: • Closure of Scremerston First School • Closure of Glendale Middle School • Closure of Berwick Middle School • Closure of Tweedmouth Middle School

Please select option *(Required)*

Please select only one item

- Yes
 No
 Don't Know

15 Please give the reasons for your answer or state 'None'.

Comment *(Required)*

16 If you answered 'Yes' to Q.13, but you believe there are changes to some aspects of the Model, such as the proposals for certain schools or changes that would improve it, please outline them below:

Please outline changes here or state 'None'.

17 As part of the proposal for a 2-tier (primary/secondary structure), I support the inclusion of Belford Primary in the Alnwick Partnership, with pupils feeding to Alnwick The Duchess High School.

Please select option *(Required)*

Please select only one item

- Yes
 No
 Don't Know

18 Please give the reasons for your answer or state 'None'.

Comment *(Required)*

19 As part of the proposal for a reorganisation to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure, I support the proposed changes to school catchment areas arising from the closure of Scremerston First School and the move of Belford Primary to the Alnwick Partnership

Please select option *(Required)*

Please select only one item

- Yes
 No
 Don't Know

20 Please give the reasons for your answer or state 'None'.

Comment (Required)

21 If you have any alternative suggestions to either model for a proposed revised 3-tier structure or reorganisation to a 2-tier (primary/secondary) model, or you have an idea that would combine elements of both models, then please set out your views below:

Please provide your alternative option(s) here or state 'None'.

22 Having read the consultation document thoroughly, I support the proposed model for additional Special Educational Needs provision within the revised 3-tier structure of schools in the Berwick Partnership through the addition of specialist provision within St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle School and Berwick Academy, with The Grove Special School continuing with its current provision at its current site. This model includes a proposal for all schools in the partnership to have additional SEND support through a peripatetic service to be explored.

Please select option (Required)

Please select only one item

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

23 Please give the reasons for your answer or state 'None'.

Comment (Required)

24 Having read the consultation document thoroughly, I support the proposed model for additional Special Educational Needs provision within the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure of schools in the Berwick Partnership through the extension of The Grove's specialist provision to include SEMH and its relocation to the current Tweedmouth Middle School site, and for a proposal for all schools in the partnership to have additional SEND support through a peripatetic service to be explored.

Please select option (Required)

Please select only one item

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

25 Please give the reasons for your answer or state 'None'.

Comment (Required)

26 As part of this consultation we would like to take this opportunity to ask you if you have any thoughts or ideas on how to improve the Post-16 and Post-18 provision in the Berwick area? Please provide any ideas you have or state 'None'.

Please provide comments or state 'None'.

27 The Council believes that currently there is sufficient quantity of Early Years provision in the Berwick area. If you have any comments on the quantity or quality of Early Years provision in schools or other providers, please provide them here or state 'None'.

Please provide comments here or state 'None'.

28 Finally, do you have any further comments you would like to express in relation to this Phase 2 Consultation?

Please provide comments or state 'None'.

**Phase 2 - Consultation about Education in the Berwick Partnership
31 October 2022 until Midnight on 3 March 2023**

Consultation Register – NCC

Consultees
<p>Schools in Berwick Partnership directly affected by proposals – Staff, Governors and Parents/Carers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berwick Academy • Berwick Middle • Glendale Middle • Tweedmouth Middle • Belford Primary • St Mary's CE First • Holy Trinity CE First • Hugh Joicey CE First • Lowick CE First • Holy Island CE First • Norham St Ceolwulfs CE First • Scremerston First • Spittal First • St Cuthbert's Catholic First • Tweedmouth Prior Park First • Tweedmouth West First • Wooler First • The Grove • Alnwick Duchess High
<p>Other Northumberland Schools in local area possibly affected – Staff, Governors and Parents/Carers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branton Community Primary • Ellingham C of E Aided Primary • Embleton Vincent Edwards C of E Primary • Felton C of E Primary • Hipsburn Primary • Longhoughton C of E Primary • Seahouses Primary • Shilbottle Primary • St Michaels C of E Primary • St. Paul's RC Voluntary Aided Primary • Swansfield Park Primary

- Swarland Primary
- The Duchess's Community High
- Whittingham C of E Primary

Early Years Providers

- Berwick Rascals Day Care
- Ford Preschool
- Kiln Hill Preschool
- Lucky Ducks Preschool
- Red Balloon
- Hadston Children's Centre

Public

- NCC Website
- Libraries – Berwick and Wooler

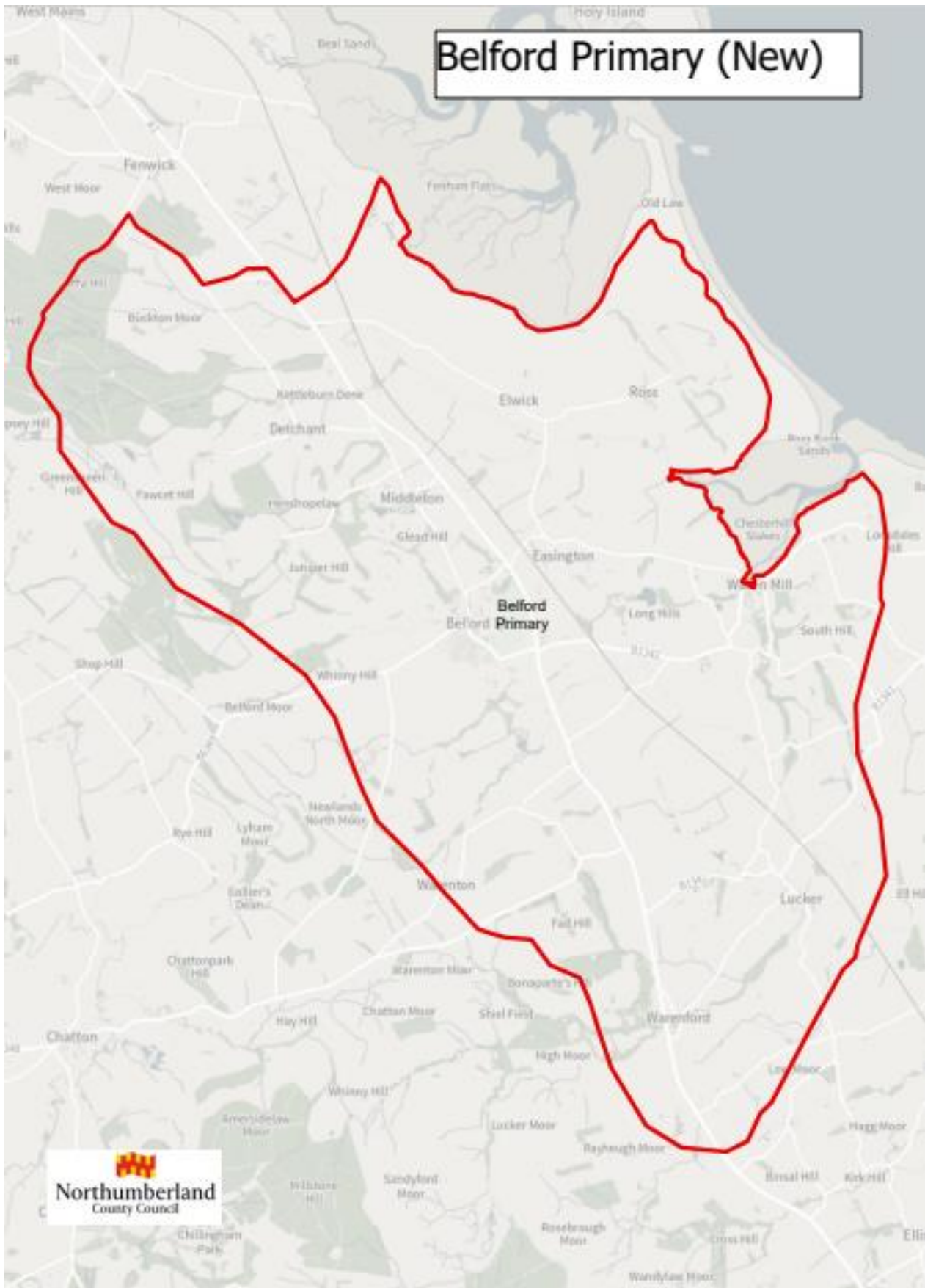
Diocesan representatives

- CE, Paul Rickeard
- RC, Deborah Fox

Town & Parish Councils

- Berwick Town Council
- Adderstone with Lucker
- Ancroft
- Beadnell
- Belford with Middleton
- Berwick
- Bowsden
- Branxton
- Carham
- Cornhill on Tweed
- Doddington
- Duddo
- Ford
- Holy Island
- Horncliffe
- Ingram
- Kirknewton
- Kyloe
- Lowick
- Milfield
- Norham
- Ord
- Shoreswood
- Tillside

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooler
<p>Local MP (for information/response)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annemarie Trevelyan MP
<p>Local Members (for information/response)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooler ED (split) Alnwick (<i>Cllr. Mark Mather</i>) • Norham and Islandshires ED (<i>Cllr. Colin Hardy</i>) • Berwick North ED (<i>Cllr. Catherine Seymour</i>) • Berwick West with Ord ED (<i>Cllr. Isabel Hunter</i>) • Berwick East ED (<i>Cllr. Georgina Hill</i>) • Bamburgh ED (split) Alnwick (<i>Cllr. Guy Renner-Thompson</i>)
<p>Neighbouring Local Authorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scottish Borders Council
<p>Other Organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Carer Forum • NAS North Northumberland Branch
<p>Unions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEU • NASUWT • Unison • ASCL • NAHT • GMB



Alnwick Duchess's High V4 - incl Belford



POTENTIAL MODELS

Option C (as part of Model A – revised 3-tier System of Schools in Berwick)

Creation of one large Middle School on the current Tweedmouth Community Middle School / Campus site.

A summary of this proposal is reproduced below. The presentation which was delivered to Audrey Kingham and Sue Aviston on 9th February by Gien Bird (Headteacher, Berwick Middle) and Ben Hulbert (Headteacher, Tweedmouth Community Middle School) is attached as slides in Appendix 1.

An inclusive model



An inclusive and transformative model to support all schools and all pupils locally

Berwick Middle School and Tweedmouth Community Middle School will undergo a major restructure and will merge to form a single Middle School.

Analysis of post school improvement partner visits to both schools demonstrate that leaders are already moving each school towards Ofsted 'outstanding' ratings, with an emerging picture that there are already areas of outstanding (Personal development/behaviour and attitudes) in both schools.

We will continue this impetus in the short-medium term to create one Middle School in the Berwick Partnership, and achieve Ofsted 'outstanding', while Berwick Academy continues to grow and their outcomes improve.

Furthermore, we will seek Teaching School status to potentially support all North Northumberland schools.

"With the creation of one large Middle School comes significant responsibility"...

With the significant savings that restructuring all departments will bring, we will act as a Teaching/Learning and Support Hub for other Partnership schools:

- An all inclusive site/Campus will host a new/refurbished Academy and merged Middle School on the current TMS site and potentially a newly built Grove School to allow partial-integration within all phases.
- Middle School will adopt a peripatetic approach, providing specialist teacher provision to all First Schools in Art, Computing, Languages, Technology, Science, Music and P.E. allowing all schools to broaden curriculum, access specialist support and enable them to focus on their own specialisms without employing extra staff.
- Middle School will retain capacity in our financial management team to be available to support all First Schools with managing their budgets and cost saving.
- Middle School will retain leadership and have capacity to support First Schools when and where necessary - absence, illness, job moves.
- Local specialised services for the whole community to access - parent support hub, officers office (Community Connector), adult learning classes - a significant opportunity for up-skilling and community education.
- All stakeholders represented on the multi agency board which oversee the running of the campus.



An inclusive model



Engaging the Community

Use the trusted reputation of the Middle schools to engage the community in the process and drive forward the change in Berwick. There has been a concerted push from the community for Middle Schools to come up with a solution.

More new specialist buildings for the town - alongside Sports Centre and new Hospital. Berwick a 'jewel in the crown' for Northumberland in terms of public facilities and upgrades.

Significant interest already after preliminary conversations from large local employers around offering additional vocational options and even sponsored funding for degrees etc and further education.

Sustainability long term

A strong model which will retain pupil numbers across all key stages.

Model in place for long term planning potentially around acadatisation with other excellent 3-tier trusts in Northumberland or a purpose created Berwick MAT.

Ensure schools work together

A real chance to move things forward and progress. A prime opportunity to create long lasting working relationships at close quarters and hold a vast array of expert knowledge - in a campus environment but to be utilised in individual settings.

Multi-agency board will be able to hold schools to account to ensure they are working together for the best interests of all pupils.

Underpin best value for capital investment

3 new school buildings instead of 3 - ensuring these school buildings for many years to come.

A new IA maintained Grove School - a primary need for the Berwick partnership.

A new Academy building - much needed.

A new IA maintained Middle school building - much needed.

Specialist SLMH provision - a significant County & local need and especially in Berwick due to travel.



POTENTIAL MODELS

Option C (as part of Model A – revised 3-tier System of Schools in Berwick)

SCHOOL INFORMATION

Berwick Academy remains as an age 13 – 18 High School with a reduced PAN of 180 with 6 forms of entry (FE).

Grove Special School receives a new build and opens with increased capacity. Site tbc. Partnership SEMH provision offered by St. Marys First, new large Middle and Berwick Academy.

Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Middle Schools restructure to form a single large Middle School on the Tweedmouth Campus with Berwick Academy.

Glendale Middle School remains on current site with a reduced PAN of 30 (1FE)

Belford Primary already exists as a Primary School. It would move to the Alnwick Partnership.

Berwick St. Mary's CofE First school remains on current site with a reduced PAN of 15 (0.5 FE). Specialist SEMH provision on-site to support all First Schools in Partnership.

Holy Island First School unchanged.

Holy Trinity CofE First School unchanged

Hugh Joicey CofE First School unchanged.

Lowick CofE First School unchanged.

Norham St Ceowulf's CE First School would close and its catchment areas shared with Scremerston First School.

Scremerston First School remains open sharing a catchment area with Norham First. Remains 0.6FE.

Spittal Community First School unchanged.

St Cuthbert's RC First unchanged

Tweedmouth Prior Park First School will remain on current site with a reduced PAN of 15 (0.5 FE)

Tweedmouth West First School unchanged

Wooler First School unchanged

POTENTIAL MODELS

Option C (as part of Model A – revised 3-tier System of Schools in Berwick)

School	Current				Model A – Option C		
	Sept '22 roll	FE	PAN	Ofsted grade	Capacity	FE	PAN
Berwick Academy	552	7.5	225	Requires improvement	740	6	180
Grove Special School	49	n/a	50	Outstanding	70	n/a	n/a
Berwick Middle School	338	3.8	114	Good	600	5 – with capacity to increase	150
Tweedmouth Community Middle School	362	3.1	93	Good			
Glendale Middle School	104	1.4	42	Good	256	1	30
Belford Primary	84	1	30	Good	187	1	30
Berwick St Mary's CofE First	64	1	30	Good	75	0.5	15
Holy Island CofE First	3	0.2	5	Outstanding	Unchanged		
Holy Trinity CofE First	141	1	30	Good	Unchanged		
Hugh Joicey CofE First	47	0.5	15	Good	Unchanged		
Lowick CofE First	16	0.3	10	Good	Unchanged		
Norham St Coswulf's CofE First	28	0.3	10	Requires improvement	School closes and catchment shared with Scremerston First School		
Scremerston First	54	0.6	18	Good	Unchanged, but with increased catchment		
Spittal Community First	122	1.3	40	Good	Unchanged		
St Cuthbert's RC First	72	0.5	15	Good (pre Academisation)	Unchanged		
Tweedmouth Prior Park First	114	1	30	Requires improvement	75	0.5	15
Tweedmouth West First	114	1	30	Good	Unchanged		
Wooler First	91	1	30	Good	Unchanged		

APPENDIX – Local Authority presentation 9th February 2023

An inclusive model

An inclusive and transformative model to support all schools and all pupils locally

The Big Picture

Barnack Middle School and Tweedmouth Community Middle School will undergo a major restructuring and will merge to form a single 9-form entry Middle School on the current Tweedmouth Middle School site.

Analysis of post school improvement partner visits to both schools demonstrates that leaders are already moving each school towards Ofsted 'outstanding' ratings, with an emerging picture that there are already areas of outstanding (Personal development/Behaviour and ethos) in both schools.

We will continue this impetus in the short-medium term to create the largest school in the Barnack Partnership, and achieve Ofsted 'outstanding', while Barnack Academy continues to grow and the outcomes improve.

Furthermore, we will seek Teaching School status to potentially support all North Northumberland schools.

"With the creation of one large Middle School comes significant responsibility"

The Big Picture (continued)

With the significant savings that restructuring all departments will bring, we will act as a Teaching, Learning and Support Hub for other Partnership schools:

- As an inclusive school campus within a reformed/extended Academy and merged 9-form entry Middle School and potentially a newly built 6-form school to allow partial integration within all phases.
- Middle School will adopt a specialist approach, providing specialist teacher provision to all First Schools in Art, Computing, Languages, Technology, Drama, Music and P.E., allowing all schools to broaden curriculum, access specialist support and enable them to focus on their own specialisms without employing extra staff.
- Middle School will have capacity to use financial management team to be available to support all First Schools with managing their budgets and cost-cutting.
- Middle School will have Leadership capacity to support First Schools where and where necessary - shared, shared, all involve.

The vision for change

When Partnership Heads met to contribute to the agreement a set of criteria to underpin the process. These are the 'Vision for change' principles:

- Supporting educational outcomes in each school to become truly outstanding (not just 'outstanding')
- Sustainability of education across the whole of the Barnack Partnership beyond 2025
- Supporting and extending 16-19 offer to enhance our opportunities - 'reach as far as we can')
- Engaging the broader community in the wider vision to attract & engage a supported workforce through the long term
- Schools work together to create, enhance and create sustainability
- Real value for RSC capital investment - creating a wide investment opportunity

There is a notable wide consensus among stakeholders that both Phase 1 options (2-6 or 3-6) fall short of meeting some or all of these criteria.

Therefore, we have selected the Option 1 solution as our first port of call.

Improving Educational Outcomes

Specialist teachers available across entire Partnership

Depot for and success in KS2 mastery tests guaranteed by retaining Middle Schools

Partnership approach to curriculum allows First Schools to play to their strengths whilst benefiting from Specialist Teacher provision in the Middle School.

Middle School will adopt a specialist approach, providing specialist teacher provision to all schools in Art, Computing, Languages, Technology, Drama, Music and P.E., allowing all schools in the Partnership to broaden curriculum, access specialist support and enable all schools to focus on their own specialisms without employing extra staff.

Focus on improving school curriculum for all schools.

Engaging the Community

Considerable time for support in the last round of consultation - over 3000 members of the local and Middle Schools SCMG Facebook group and over 180 members of the community attending the Barnack SCMG event 2021 signified an exceptional support of the Middle School system.

Use the focused expertise of the Middle School to engage the community in the process and drive forward the change in Barnack. There has been a considerable flow from the community for Middle Schools to come up with a solution.

Maximize specialist buildings for the town - alongside Sports Centre and local Hospital. Develop a 'level in the cover' for North Northumbria in terms of public facilities and services.

Local government provider for the whole community to access - shared support hub. Citizens Advice (Counselling/Complaints), adult learning classes - a significant opportunity for up-skilling and community education.

Significant interest already after preliminary consultations from local employers around offering additional work placements and even sponsored funding for degrees and further education.

All stakeholders appreciate the multi-agency approach which covers the running of the system.

Sustainability long term

A strong model which will deliver pupil numbers to rise all key stages.

Incorporate the values of the other Headteachers - no conflicts of interest. For example First Park (PMA) school, St Barns and St Mary's to be able to be dissolved and closed at Partnership Heads by the 3 Headteachers involved and a new Great School building built off site without GMAH provision to get the values of that school.

Successful to remain open with staffing support from the Middle school and the Partnership.

One Middle School ensuring substantial cost savings across staffing which could be used elsewhere to employ broader support staff for all schools to secure broader budget situations led by N&P and SPS.

Model in place for long term planning potentially around collaboration with other relevant 9-form trusts in Northumberland or a purpose created Barnack MAH.

Ensure schools work together

No conflicts of interest, arguments or obstacles with a real chance to move things forward and progress.

No saving schools for saving overheads sake - sustainability is key.

Considerable school transport savings.

A prime opportunity to create long lasting working relationships at close quarters and hold a vast array of expert knowledge - in a campus environment but to be utilised in individual settings.

Multi-agency board will be able to hold schools to account to ensure they are working together for the best interests of all pupils.

Underpin best value for capital investment

Significant materials, labour and land savings to using the campus model - a proven model used throughout Northumberland and beyond.

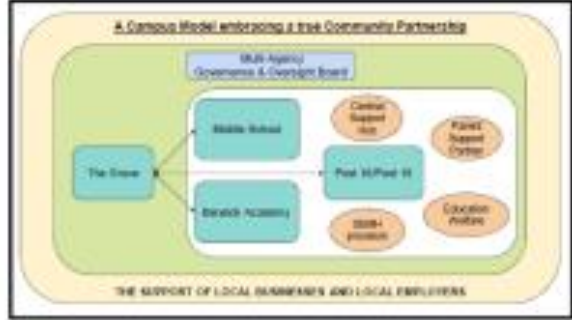
3 new school buildings instead of 2 - securing three schools buildings for many years to come.

A new LA maintained Great School - a primary need for the Barnack partnership.

A new Academy building - much needed.

A new LA maintained Middle school building - much needed.

Specialist 16-19 provision - a significant County & local need and especially in Barnack due to travel.



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:

Consultation on Proposals for the Berwick Partnership – 2) Brief description of the change, decision or proposal:

Consultation (pre-statutory) on proposals for schools and academies in the Berwick Partnership has taken place on proposals for a revised 3-tier structure and a 2-tier (primary/secondary) which would require school reorganisation. The consultation included all relevant stakeholders, including parents and pupils on roll at schools in the partnership, staff of those schools, Governors of the schools, relevant parish/town council and members of the wider community.

Although all schools in the Berwick Partnership were consulted, including The Grove Special School, the following schools that would be impacted by any proposals approved for implementation should they be approved at a later date would be:

- Belford Primary School
- Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School
- Holy Trinity Church of England First School
- Holy Island C of E First School
- Hugh Joicey Church of England First School
- Lowick C of E First School
- Norham St Ceolwulfs C of E First School
- Scremerston First School
- Spittal First School
- St Cuthbert's Catholic First School
- Tweedmouth Prior Park First School
- Tweedmouth West First School
- Wooler First School
- Berwick Middle School
- Glendale Middle School
- Tweedmouth Community Middle School

- Berwick Academy

Both the revised 3-tier model and the 2-tier model also included proposals for school closures in light of the falling pupil numbers in the Berwick area in order to support sustainable and viable schools in the future.

Consultation with these stakeholders has also taken place on two proposals to provide additional specialist SEND places to meet the growing need for places for children and young people diagnosed with a primary need of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH) within the Berwick Partnership area, as well as seeking views on current Early Years and Post-16 and Post-18 provision.

Cabinet approved consultation in the light of the need to ensure that the proposed capital investment of £39.9m in school buildings in the Berwick Partnership set out in the Council's medium term plan would be invested in an educational system that would improve outcomes for children and young people in the Berwick area across all phases and that would support sustainable and viable schools for the foreseeable future.

Regulations require that some of the proposed prescribed alterations for some schools would fall to be required to be published in a statutory proposal, while some are non-statutory. The proposals in relation to the two academies in the partnership would require approval from their respective Trustees, with final approval being required from the Regional DfE Director North East. Cabinet would need to make a final decision on the proposals set out within the statutory notice within two months of the end of the representation period.

3) 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 Age ~~Race~~ Religion Sexual orientation

~~People who have changed gender~~ Women who are pregnant or have babies

Employees who are married/in civil partnerships

4) The characteristics checked above are not relevant because:

In the medium to long-term and in relation to both the reorganisation of the mainstream schools within the statutory and non-statutory proposals including proposed specialist provision units at St Mary's Church of England Primary School (as it would be) and Berwick Academy for pupils with primary needs of SEMH, ASD, MLD and SLCN, there is no reason to believe that these proposals would affect more positively or negatively than their peers any group of children, parents or staff linked with these schools defined by their religion, race or gender-reassignment status. Should the Council decide to implement the proposed statutory and non-statutory proposals in relation to schools for which it is the Decision Maker, and should the Trustees of St Mary's and Berwick Academy and the Regional Director DfE North East decide to approve the proposal for those academies at a future date, during the immediate process of transition, families would be invited to inform the Council and/or the relevant Trustees that 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. Reasonable adjustments would be made to support individual students where appropriate.

The statutory and non-statutory proposals include school closure proposals and therefore staff in schools proposed for closure would be placed at risk of redundancy. Existing HR policies covering organisational change and redundancy would apply to staff employed at any of the maintained schools affected. These are designed to ensure that the equalities duties of the Council and the schools are fully met.

Reasonable adjustments would be made for disabled members of staff. The Council operates a guaranteed interview scheme for disabled members of staff.

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.*

5) 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 are 29 pupils on roll at the first schools with an EHCP, 12 students on roll in middle schools with an EHCP and 13 students on roll in Berwick Academy with an EHCP (partnership total 54). It is therefore expected that a number of these students will still be on roll at these schools, by the time the proposal is planned to be implemented from September 2025. Should the proposals be approved, individual transition plans would be developed to ensure that any impact on pupils with EHCPs that are displaced by school is minimal and planned for effectively.

Any students who were offered a place at the proposed SEN units at St Mary’s and Berwick Academy would similarly have suitable transition plans in place in accordance with their needs.

Any member of staff, or parent or a carer of a student at one of the schools or academies in the Berwick Partnership who has a disability would not be affected disproportionately by the proposal as any reasonable adjustments or arrangements would be put in place at buildings where required and in any new buildings (e.g. for Berwick Academy) as part of the design process.

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

Refer to para. 5

7) 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.)

No evidence has arisen during Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation that the implementation of the proposed statutory and non-statutory proposals would affect any current arrangements for disabled people to participate in public life. However, in relation to residents living in the areas around the location of the school sites in particular, should any impact in this regard come to light, ameliorating and proportionate measures would be investigated to address any negative impact.

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

No evidence has arisen during Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation to suggest that the implementation of the proposed statutory proposals would affect public attitudes to disabled people. However, should any impact in this regard come to light, ameliorating and proportionate measures would be investigated to address any negative impact.

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

No evidence has arisen during Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation to suggest that the implementation of the proposed statutory and non-statutory proposals would affect public attitudes to disabled people. However, should any impact in this regard come to light, ameliorating and proportionate measures would be investigated to address any negative impact.

10) 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?

The premise of these proposals in relation to the reorganisation of the mainstream schools and academies is that educational outcomes for all students in their schools would improve across all phases of education and that schools and academies would be sustainable and viable for the medium to long term. Therefore, it is envisaged there would be disproportionate advantage of the proposal to all students on roll at the relevant mainstream schools within the partnership.

In relation to the development of a SEN units at St Mary's and Berwick Academy, while it is also envisaged that their educational outcomes would improve, they would also be able to receive their education closer to their home communities thus reducing travelling times to school and also enabling them to develop friendships with pupils in their local area. It is therefore envisaged that these students would be disproportionately advantaged both educationally and socially.

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

Should this proposal be implemented, there would potentially be opportunities for positive impacts for disabled people within the design of the new buildings that are not currently in place in existing buildings. See also para. 10.

Sex (Gender)

12) What do you know about usage of the services affected by this change, decision or proposal in relation to people of a certain gender, about their experiences of it, and about any current barriers to access?

Schools and academies in the Berwick Partnership are co-educational.

13) Could people of a certain gender be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

No evidence has arisen during Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation to suggest that either boys or girls would be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the statutory and non-statutory proposals. However, should these proposals be approved to go to statutory consultation, this EIA would be updated with any evidence where it suggested that there could be any gender based disproportionate advantage or disadvantage.

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

There is currently no evidence from Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation to suggest that the ability of people of a certain gender to participate in public life would be affected by the implementation of the statutory and non-statutory proposals. However, should any impact in this regard come to light, ameliorating and proportionate measures would be investigated to address any negative impact.

15) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people of a certain gender (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

To date, there has been no evidence to suggest that public attitudes to people with people of a certain gender. However, ameliorating actions would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

16) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people of a certain gender will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Should the statutory and non-statutory proposals be implemented, the risk of harassment or victimisation of people of a certain gender, such as bullying, would be monitored. Should evidence be identified that risk of harassment had increased, relevant actions stated would be undertaken to address the reasons for harassment or victimisation, including awareness programmes.

17) If there are risks that people of a certain gender could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

No evidence has so far been identified during Phase 1 or Phase 2 to suggest that people of a certain gender could be disproportionately disadvantaged through the

implementation of the proposal. However, ameliorating actions would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

18) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people with different sexual orientations linked to this change, decision or proposal?

It is envisaged that the positive impacts of the statutory and non-statutory proposals would affect a people of different sexual orientations equally. However, while none have been so far identified, any opportunities to create positive impacts for people with different genders would be identified.

Age

19) 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?

First schools in the Berwick Partnership provide education to young people from the age of 2,3 or 4 to age 9, the middle schools provide education to young people aged 9 to 13, and Berwick Academy provides education to young people between the ages of 13 and 18. Students on roll at these schools at the proposed date of implementation would be impacted. It is proposed that the new SEN unit at St Mary's would provide education for pupils aged 4 to 11, while the SEN unit at Berwick Academy would educate children and young people aged 11 to 18.

Staff at the schools proposed for closure within the proposed statutory proposal are employed equitably in accordance with the relevant school and council's employment policies. All appropriate HR processes and procedures would be adhered to throughout any staff consultation and redundancy process (if any were necessary) in line with NCC policies.

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

While the premise of the proposal is that pupils would be advantaged educationally, there may be other impacts such as shorter journeys to school e.g. for children attending first schools, if the schools are approved to become primaries, they would receive their Year 5 and 6 education at their local school, while children who may be allocated a place at either the St Mary's or Berwick Academy SEN Units would be likely to have a shorter journey to school than may have been the case if they attended an alternative specialist provision. Therefore, shorter journeys would be seen as advantageous to those pupils.

21) 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 from Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation that the proposed statutory and non-statutory proposals would have any effect on the ability of different age groups to participate in public life.

22) 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 from Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation that the proposed statutory proposals would affect public attitudes to different age groups.

24) 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?

Should the proposals be approved to go to statutory consultation and evidence come to light that there are risks that people of different age groups could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the proposal, this EIA would be updated and reasonable steps approved to be implemented to address such risk.

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

The premise of the proposal is to create a positive impact for all students on roll in schools in the Berwick Partnership and for those students who would be allocated a place at the St Mary's and Berwick Academy SEN units in relation to improved educational outcomes.

Pregnancy and Maternity

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

26) 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?

There is no evidence to suggest that the proposal would create any barriers to students accessing at any of the schools that would be included in the statutory proposals as all students eligible for Home to School Transport would receive it.

In relation to the proposed reorganisation of the Berwick Partnership mainstream schools, any parent of a student in a school in the partnership who may be pregnant or who has other children under 26 weeks old would not be disadvantaged as children in the first schools would stay at their school as it became primary up to the end of Year 6. This could therefore be advantageous to this protected group.

Any staff of schools named in the statutory or non-statutory proposals who may be pregnant would have the same rights extended to them under reorganisation, or in the case of the proposed primary and secondary SEN units, if such staff took up a post at the proposed SEN units.

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

See para.26.

28) 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 statutory and non-statutory proposals would have any effect on the ability of pregnant women or those with children under 26 weeks participate in public life under the proposals.

29) 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 statutory and non-statutory proposals would have any effect on public attitudes to this protected group under the proposals.

30) 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?

No evidence has arisen during Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation to suggest that the statutory and non-statutory proposals would make it more or less likely that this protected group would be at risk of harassment or victimisation under the proposals.

31) 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?

No, for the reasons set out at para. 26.

32) 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. 26.

Sexual Orientation

Note: The Act protects bisexual, gay, heterosexual and lesbian people.

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

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any student on roll in a school named in the statutory and non-statutory proposals or a member of staff who identifies as LGBT employed by these schools would be disproportionately impacted positively or negatively should approval be given to implement the proposals at a later date.

However, should any pupil or member of staff who identifies with this group be identified as requiring support, the authority would encourage staff of schools and academies named in the statutory and non-statutory proposals to use the Stonewall Education champion's resources and to increase awareness of any potential issues such as increased risk of bullying.

Should a member of staff identifying as LGBT in a school in the schools named in the statutory and non-statutory proposals feel that their support networks have been disrupted, staff would be made aware of the support available through the Council's LGBT staff group and managers will be made aware of the guide to supporting LGBT staff on the Council Equality and Diversity webpage. HR policies aim to promote equality and inclusion. Staff working in the academies within the partnership would also be able to access these support groups.

34) Could people with different sexual orientations be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal?

There is currently no evidence from Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation to suggest that different sexual orientations would be disproportionately advantaged or disadvantaged by the implementation of the statutory and non-statutory proposals. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

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

There is currently no evidence from Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation to suggest that the ability of people with different sexual orientations to participate in public life would be affected by the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

36) Could the change, decision or proposal affect public attitudes towards people with different sexual orientations? (e.g. by increasing or reducing their presence in the community)

To date, there has been no evidence to suggest that public attitudes to people with different sexual orientations would be affected by the proposed statutory and non-statutory proposals. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

37) Could the change, decision or proposal make it more or less likely that people with different sexual orientations will be at risk of harassment or victimisation?

Should the proposals be approved for implementation at a later date, the risk of harassment or victimisation of people with different sexual orientations would be monitored. Should evidence be identified that risk of harassment had increased, the relevant actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented.

There is currently no evidence to suggest that any member of the public, pupil in one of the schools or academies named in the statutory and non-statutory proposals, parent of a pupils on roll in the schools or academies named in the statutory and non-statutory proposals or member of staff employed in one of the schools or academies named in the statutory and non-statutory proposals who identifies as LGBT would be more or less likely to be at risk of harassment or victimisation. should the approval be given to implement the proposals at a later date. However, should any of this group of

people who identifies within this protected group be identified as at risk as a result of the implementation of this proposal, the authority and trustees of the academies would encourage the staff of the relevant schools to use the Stonewall Education champion's resources and to increase awareness of any potential issues such as increased risk of bullying.

38) If there are risks that people with different sexual orientations could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the change, decision or proposal, are there reasonable steps or adjustments that could be taken to reduce these risks?

No evidence has so far been identified from Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation to suggest that people with different sexual orientations could be disproportionately disadvantaged through the implementation of the statutory proposal. However, ameliorating actions stated in para. 33 would be implemented in the event that issues were identified.

39) Are there opportunities to create *positive* impacts for people with different sexual orientations linked to this change, decision or proposal?

While none have been so far identified, any opportunities to create positive impacts for people with different sexual orientations would be implemented, possibly through the implementation of the actions set out in para. 33.

Human Rights

40) 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)

While there is no specific evidence to suggest that the implementation of the statutory and non-statutory proposals would impact positively on human rights, the rationale for this proposal as originally consulted on is to provide improved educational outcomes for all students on roll in schools in the Berwick Partnership and to support the sustainability and viability of schools and academies. For all pupils, including those who would be allocated places at the proposed SEN units at St Mary's and Berwick Academy, the aim would be to improve their life chances.

PART 3 - Course of Action

Based on a consideration of all the potential impacts, indicate one of the following as an overall 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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	The equality analysis has identified risks or opportunities to promote better equality; the change, decision or proposal would be adjusted to avoid risks and ensure that opportunities are taken should they be required.
	The equality analysis has identified risks to equality which will not be eliminated, and/or opportunities to promote better equality which will not be taken. Acceptance of these is reasonable and proportionate, given the objectives of the change, decision or proposal, and its overall financial and policy context.
	The equality analysis shows that the change, decision or proposal would lead to actual or potential unlawful discrimination, or would conflict with the Council's positive duties to an extent which is disproportionate to its objectives. It should not be adopted in its current form.

41) 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 impacts of the statutory and non-statutory proposals on the groups with protected characteristics, the premise of the proposal as originally consulted on suggests that pupils on roll at schools and academies in the Berwick Partnership and those who would be allocated a place the SEN units at St Mary's or Berwick Academy would be disproportionately advantaged. Should a decision be made by the Council's Cabinet to approve the publication of the statutory proposals, any evidence arising from the statutory consultations, including evidence linked to the non-statutory proposals that would be approved later by Cabinet and by the Bishop Bewick Trust in relation to St Cuthbert's Catholic First School and Trustees of Berwick Academy in relation to those academy which suggests that there could be possible negative impacts, identified 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

42) 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 assessed in the light of feedback from the Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation periods set out earlier in this report. Should the proposals be approved by the relevant bodies (and in the case of the Council's Cabinet, approve the publication of the statutory proposals), the EIA would be further updated at the end of the statutory period when being brought forward for final

approval. Appropriate action would be identified in the light of the statutory consultation and where necessary, an action plan with timescales developed.

PART 5 - Authorisation

Name of Head of Service and Date Approved

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



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

09 MAY 2023

LGSCO Public Interest Report – Case ID 21 004 235

Report of Cabinet Member Guy Renner Thompson, Lead Member for Children’s Services
Executive Director of Children, Young People and Education, Audrey Kingham

Purpose of report

A Public Interest Report has been issued by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to a complaint raised by a Northumberland County Council resident in relation to the Post 16 Transport Policy.

In accordance with Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974, “*The report shall be laid before the authority concerned and it shall be the duty of that authority to consider the report and, within the period of three months beginning with the date on which they received the report, or such longer period as the Local Commissioner may agree in writing, to notify the Local Commissioner of the action which the authority have taken or propose to take.*” Cabinet are asked to consider recommendations made to rectify council policy relating to the Post-16 Transport Policy and address any subsequent injustice to service users.

In an email dated 14/03/23, the LGSCO confirmed “we are satisfied the Council has completed the remedy action, but we cannot confirm compliance until the Council has formally considered the report.”

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended:

1. To receive the LGSCO’s Public Interest report at Appendix A. The LGSCO has confirmed that it is satisfied that the Council has completed all remedy actions as set out in 2, 3 and 4 below.
2. To note that officers have acted on recommendations in the report in that:
 - a. Miss X has been sent a letter of apology and been paid the remedy of £200 for time and trouble and £100 to “*recognise the avoidable uncertainty caused by the failure to keep her properly updated and informed through the application and appeals process*”;
 - b. have reviewed the young person’s application;
 - c. have reviewed all other applications refused, at that time, under the “flawed” policy;

- d. have reviewed and proposed amendments to the Council's Post 16 Transport policy in view of the LGSCO recommendations;
 - e. reminded staff working on appeals of the need for timely and clear communications
3. To note revisions to the Council's policy as set out at Appendix B
 4. To note that in line with the requirements of Section 30 of the Local Government Act 1974 the Council have "placed two public notices" in the News Post Leader dated 11/11/2022 and the Northumberland Gazette dated 10/11/2022; and also made copies of the report available free of charge at County Hall, Morpeth.
 5. To consider whether any further internal scrutiny is required in relation to the handling of LGSCO findings.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the "living" priority in the Corporate Plan

Key issues

The LGSCO identified the following key issues with how the Council considered the young person's application for Post 16 Transport and the following appeal process:

1. The Council did not discuss within the young person's EHCP review how the young person's college choice would affect transport provision before deciding on this and it was not explained to them. This caused an injustice as it meant they lost the opportunity to make an informed decision on which college, or course, the young person should be moving onto.
2. The Council's policy explains it calculates distances using a system called QGIS but it does not explain what this is, or how parents can use it for themselves. The Council is entitled to define which measurement system will be used but it should inform parents they can contact the Council to check and compare school distances.
3. The Council's policy does not make it clear to parents or young people how they can establish which level courses are at. It references progression through levels but does not give any indication as to which courses are at each level. This makes it difficult for applicants to know with any certainty if their chosen course is at a higher level even if they are moving onto further education. The Council should inform parents they can contact the Council about how to check suitability of the course level.
4. The Council's policy recommends applicants check their eligibility carefully before applying for a course or transport. However, the policy wording makes it difficult for applicants to do this. For these reasons, we find the Council's policy flawed.
5. The Council did not keep Miss X properly informed throughout the appeals process or stick to the timeframe set out in its published policy. This is fault and meant Miss X experienced uncertainty while awaiting answers.
6. The Council failed to provide information to Miss X about the outcomes at each stage. The Council's responses were vague and informal, and they lacked consistency in the eligibility criteria that was being relied on. They did not give full details about the outcome of the reviews, how they were conducted, what was considered, or the

rationale for the decisions. The responses also failed to explain how Miss X's appeal points were considered or why they were deemed not to apply.

With regard to point 1, changes have been made in relation to the EHCP review process to account for this and ensure that when discussions are held regarding progression to further education, the learner and their representatives have a clear understanding of how their decisions regarding college placement may impact on any Post-16 transport provision.

With regard to points 2, 3 and 4, the Post-16 Transport policy has been revised to make explicitly clear how to self-assess measurements of distance to providers and that applicants can contact the Council about course levels and to check or compare measures of school distances. Policy attached at Appendix B.

With regard to points 5 and 6, staff dealing with transport applications and appeals have been closely involved in analysing the events that led to the scenario in question occurring and the cause of it escalating to the point of appeal and complaint. As part of this analysis, it was acknowledged that staff had indeed fallen short of their own standards but also that it was an unfortunate and isolated scenario at the peak demand period for staff at the beginning of the academic year, where DfE guidance on actions to be taken around COVID 19 had also been released requiring implementation, and a route review of home to school transport which had been deferred due to COVID 19 was also recommencing. This convergence of conflicting pressures explaining in part, if not excusing, the lapse in timely, clear, consistent, and well-reasoned decisions and failure to meet the Council's own standards.

Being involved in this analysis has directly reinforced with staff the need for timely, clear, consistent, and well-reasoned decisions.

Council systems and process having also been considered; the administration system now requires the user to select from a range of reasons when transport is not offered before a response can be issued to the applicant which assists in ensuring consistency when recording decisions.

Background

A complaint was received from Miss X in relation to how the Council had considered her child's application for Post 16 Transport and issues with the statutory appeals process. This was considered via the Council's 2-stage Corporate Complaint process. Miss X then escalated the matter to the LGSCO for independent consideration.

The LGSCO initially offered a draft finding in relation to this complaint in February 2022, where they identified fault with the Council decision making and were likely to recommend "*it apologises, makes a payment to Miss X to recognise the poor complaint and application handling, reassess Y's application, and reword its policy*". However, in June 2022, the LGSCO notified the Council that after reconsideration they were to issue a public interest report due to the case being considered a "*significant topical issue and represents systemic problems and wider lessons*". Copy of the Public Report is attached at appendix A.

The public interest report was published on 17 August 2022.

The LGSCO asked that their recommendations be implemented within one to three months of the decision being published. The timescale for remedy action was adhered to, however, the requirement for this to be formally considered by the Local Authority within 3 months was not. This was due to the issue becoming entrenched in a wider policy review, which in hindsight should not have occurred.

Communications have been held directly with the LGSCO to explain this delay and advise what process is being put in place to ensure there is no such re-occurrence. This includes the introduction of a new casework management system for complaints; I-Casework.

In an email dated 14/03/23, the LGSCO confirmed “we are satisfied the Council has completed the remedy action, but we cannot confirm compliance until the Council has formally considered the report.”

A copy of this report and the subsequent Cabinet minutes will be provided to the LGSCO as evidence to conclude this matter.

Implications

Policy	Change of Post 16 Transport policy undertaken.
Finance and value for money	Payment of £300 in financial to individual complainant.
Legal	Cabinet is asked to formally receive the Public Interest Report in accordance with Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974. All other legal implications have been addressed within the body of the report.
Procurement	There are no direct implications
Human Resources	There are no direct implications
Property	There are no direct implications
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	There are no direct implications

Risk Assessment	
Crime & Disorder	There are no direct implications
Customer Consideration	Complaints are one of a range of methods by which the Local Authority receive feedback on the quality and consistency of our services. They are also invaluable for learning lessons and quality improvements.
Carbon reduction	There are no direct implications.
Health and Wellbeing	There are no direct implications.
Wards	All

Background papers:

Appendix A - LGSCO Public Report – Case ID 21 004 235
Appendix B - Post-16 Transport policy

Report sign off.

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

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Lynsey Denyer / Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Audrey Kingham
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Renner-Thompson

Author and Contact Details

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**Report by the Local Government and Social Care
Ombudsman**

**Investigation into a complaint about
Northumberland County Council
(reference number: 21 004 235)**

17 August 2022

The Ombudsman's role

For more than 40 years the Ombudsman has independently and impartially investigated complaints. We effectively resolve disputes about councils and other bodies in our jurisdiction by recommending redress which is proportionate, appropriate and reasonable based on all the facts of the complaint. Our service is free of charge.

Each case which comes to the Ombudsman is different and we take the individual needs and circumstances of the person complaining to us into account when we make recommendations to remedy injustice caused by fault.

We have no legal power to force councils to follow our recommendations, but they almost always do. Some of the things we might ask a council to do are:

- > apologise
- > pay a financial remedy
- > improve its procedures so similar problems don't happen again.

Section 30 of the 1974 Local Government Act says that a report should not normally name or identify any person. The people involved in this complaint are referred to by a letter or job role.

Key to names used

Miss X	The complainant
Y	Her son

Report summary

School transport

Miss X complained about the Council's decision not to provide her son, Y, with transport to college. Miss X said the Council failed to properly consider Y's circumstances and her appeal, and its communication was poor.

Finding

Fault found causing injustice and recommendations made.

Recommendations

To remedy the injustice caused, we recommend within one month of the date of this report the Council should:

- apologise in writing to Miss X for the identified fault;
- pay Miss X £200 to recognise the time and trouble caused to her by the failings in dealing with her complaint;
- pay Miss X £100 to recognise the avoidable uncertainty she was caused by the failure to keep her properly updated throughout the application and appeals process;
- remind staff dealing with transport applications and appeals of the importance of providing timely, clear, consistent, and well-reasoned decisions and ensuring decision reasons are recorded; and
- re-assess Y's transport application and if refused, ensure the decision explains the calculation of school distances and course levels to allow Miss X to then submit an informed appeal. If the Council decides to provide transport it should also reimburse Miss X for the costs she has incurred to date.

Within three months of the date of this report, the Council should:

- revise its post-16 transport policy to make it clear to applicants they can contact the Council about course levels and to check or compare measures of school distances; and
- review decisions issued for the school year September 2021 where it has refused transport to children with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) under its post 16-transport policy based on distance or course level. It should ensure no transport applications were declined based on exclusions relating to school distance and course levels without any explanation given. If any applications are found, these should be reassessed and if transport agreed, parents should be offered a remedy for the missed provision. If transport is not agreed, parents should be offered the option to appeal.

The Council has accepted our recommendations.

The complaint

1. Miss X complained about the Council's decision to decline her application for transport provision for Y. Miss X feels the Council failed to consider all the relevant information when deciding on her application and communicated poorly throughout.

Legal and administrative background

Ombudsman's role and powers

2. We investigate complaints about 'maladministration' and 'service failure'. In this report, we have used the word 'fault' to refer to these. We must also consider whether any fault has had an adverse impact on the person making the complaint. We refer to this as 'injustice'. If there has been fault which has caused an injustice, we may suggest a remedy. (*Local Government Act 1974, sections 26(1) and 26A(1), as amended*)
3. We cannot question whether a council's decision is right or wrong simply because the complainant disagrees with it. We must consider whether there was fault in the way the decision was reached. (*Local Government Act 1974, section 34(3), as amended*)
4. Under the information sharing agreement between the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), we will share this decision with Ofsted.

Legislation and guidance

5. The Education Act 1996 explains councils have a duty to publish a transport policy statement. This should set out the transport arrangements they consider necessary for attendance at education or training and the financial help available for:
 - learners of sixth form age (aged 16-19 if they started the course before their 19th birthday); and
 - learners with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) up to the age of 25 who started their programme of learning before their 19th birthday.
6. There is no entitlement to transport to and from an educational setting. Transport should only be named in an EHCP in exceptional circumstances.
7. The SEND Code of Practice says councils should ensure parents are made aware they will consider transport in line with their published policy during EHCP discussions.

Transport appeals

8. Councils should have an appeals process in place for parents who wish to appeal about their child's eligibility for travel support. (*Home to School transport guidance July 2014 paragraphs 54-55*)
9. The guidance recommends councils adopt the following appeals process:
 - Stage 1: review by a senior officer. Within 20 working days of receiving a parent's written request to appeal the decision, a senior officer reviews the original decision. They send the parent a detailed written notification of the outcome of the review. This sets out the nature of the decision, how they conducted the review, what they took into account, the rationale for the decision reached, and how to escalate their case to Stage 2; and

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- Stage 2: Within 40 working days of receipt of the parent's request for an independent appeal panel to consider written and verbal representations, a detailed decision is sent. This should set out the decision reached, how the review was conducted, what was considered, the rationale for the decision, and information about appealing to us. (*Annex 2 of the guidance*)
10. Appeals can challenge the council's assessment of a child's eligibility, its measurement of distance to school, and its assessment of route safety. Parents can also ask the council to consider any personal and/or family circumstances.

The Council's post-16 transport policy

11. The Council's post-16 transport policy statement recognises that some students may not be able to travel to school independently. It explains parents may apply for travel assistance and its SEND panel will consider if it can give additional support.
12. The Council's policy sets out the criteria it applies to assess eligibility for post-16 transport funding. Students must meet all the criteria and the policy recommends applicants check their eligibility carefully before applying for a course or for transport.
13. The criteria says courses attended must be at the nearest suitable learning provider with the distance measured by the Council's approved system. The policy explains this system is QGIS and it applies measurements strictly.
14. The policy does not direct parents on how to access this system to compare distances for themselves.
15. The criteria also says students must be starting a course at a higher level than their previous achievements. It explains, for example, this means progressing on from a Level Two to a Level Three course. For SEND students, the Council may consult a 'Curriculum Expert' to define the progression criteria.
16. The policy does not give information on how parents can establish course levels for themselves.
17. The policy also sets out the appeals process where a parent wishes to challenge the Council's decision.
18. The Council's policy explains service users can base appeals on the student's or family's personal circumstances, or how the Council applies its policy, but not about the policy itself. It does not give applicants the opportunity to give verbal submissions to the panel at Stage 2.

Principles of Good Administrative Practice

19. In 2018, we published a [document](#) setting out principles of good administrative practice and what we expect to see from councils.
20. This document recommends councils:
 - are open and clear about policies and procedures;
 - ensure any information and advice provided is clear, accurate and complete; and
 - clearly explain the rationale for decisions it makes.
21. The document also explains councils should operate an effective complaints procedure.

The Council's complaints procedure

22. The Council's published complaints procedure explains it uses a two-stage process for dealing with complaints.
23. At Stage 1, the Council will acknowledge formal complaints within three working days of receipt. It will review the complaint on its individual merit and respond to it within 15 working days. For complex or serious complaints, the Council may need more time but will discuss that with the complainant if needed.
24. If a complainant is unhappy, they can ask the Council to move the complaint to Stage 2. At Stage 2, the Council will appoint a senior officer who was not previously involved in the complaint, and they will aim to provide a response within 20 working days.
25. If a complainant remains unhappy after they receive a Stage 2 response, they can complain to us.

How we considered this complaint

26. We produced this report after examining relevant documents and interviewing the complainant and relevant employees of the Council.
27. We gave the complainant and the Council a confidential draft of this report and invited their comments. The comments received were taken into account before the report was finalised.
28. We considered:
 - the Council's School Transport policy;
 - the guidance set out in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice; and
 - the government's guidance on Transport to education and training for people aged 16 and over.

What we found

What happened

29. Y was issued with a new EHCP on 3 January 2020, ahead of starting at a new college. This named Y's college but did not contain any provision for transport and the Council did not talk to Miss X about how its transport policy fitted with Y's choice of course or college.
30. Miss X applied for school transport for Y in July 2020. The Council declined Miss X's application as it felt there was another college nearer to her home providing a similar course to the one Y was about to start.
31. On 14 July, Miss X emailed the Council to appeal against its decision to refuse transport for Y. She argued the time it took to get to Y's college, compared with the one the Council judged to be closest, differed depending on the route mapping service used. One route showed Y's college to be two minutes closer, where one showed it to be two minutes further away. Miss X asked the Council to consider her appeal with this in mind.
32. On 23 July, the Council sent its Stage 1 review response to Miss X. The Council explained its policy was to only provide transport to students who attended their closest learning provider for their chosen course. As the Council had decided

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- there was a closer college offering Y's course, it said it could not offer travel assistance.
33. The email the Council sent Miss X did not address her comments on calculating the distances or provide any clarification on how it worked out which college was closest.
 34. On 9 August, Miss X submitted her Stage 2 appeal for panel consideration. Miss X explained Y could not use public transport due to his special educational needs. Miss X said the Council agreed with Y's chosen college but never said this might affect his chances of receiving transport provision. Miss X argued the difference in distance between Y's college and the one the Council said was closer was negligible so there would be little difference in transport costs.
 35. The Council acknowledged Miss X's appeal request. It wrote to her on 23 August to say the panel was due to meet the following week.
 36. Miss X emailed the Council on 8 September to ask for the result of the appeal. The Council responded that day to explain it would notify Miss X of the result once the panel heard the appeal.
 37. The panel was presented with Miss X's appeal at a hearing on 21 September.
 38. On 24 September, Miss X emailed the Council once again to ask for the outcome of the appeal.
 39. On 1 October the Council wrote to Miss X to deliver the outcome of the Stage 2 panel hearing. The Council explained the panel had considered the post-16 transport policy as well as the information Miss X had provided. It explained the panel had found the post-16 transport policy required a student to be moving to a higher-level course than their previous achievements to qualify for funded transport. The panel said Y's course was a lower level than his previous studies and so he was not eligible for funded transport.
 40. The letter did not explain how the panel had worked out the level of Y's college course compared to his previous studies. It also did not mention the distance criteria the Council had relied on when declining Miss X's initial application or Stage 1 review.
 41. Miss X complained to the Council on 24 November. Miss X said she did not feel the Council had followed its published process. She said she never received written details of how the appeals process would work, and it missed the published deadlines for the Stage 2 appeal. Miss X said she was not kept informed about when the panel would hear her appeal.
 42. Miss X also said the Council did not make her aware of the implications of picking Y's chosen college over other local colleges. Miss X said she did not feel Y's circumstances had been properly considered and there was not sufficient public transport to get him to and from college.
 43. On 14 December, the Council responded to Miss X's complaint. It explained the panel hearing had taken place within 40 days of Miss X's appeal as it should have done but agreed she had not been informed of the date of this in advance. The Council also agreed it had failed to meet the five-day deadline to inform Miss X of the outcome of the hearing. The Council explained the panel had considered all the points and arguments Miss X had made in conjunction with the Council's policy.

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44. The Council accepted Miss X may not have been told specifically about its transport policy during the EHCP meeting but explained this information is available on its Local Offer. The Local Offer is published on the Council's website and sets out information about what support it offers children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities and their families.
 45. The Council apologised for the aspects of the process that had fallen below Miss X's expectations and agreed to review the way it offers information. However, it said there was no reason to review the decision about Y's transport as this had been made correctly.
 46. On 22 December, Miss X emailed the Council to disagree with its response and asked to discuss this further. There was a delay over the Christmas period, but the Council responded to Miss X on 5 January 2021 to let her know it would be in touch shortly. On 8 January, the Council agreed to consider Miss X's complaint jointly with another complaint she had raised about a separate issue.
 47. After a series of delays, Miss X contacted us on 23 June, and we wrote to the Council that day to ask if the complaint had exhausted its usual process.
 48. The Council responded to us and Miss X by issuing its Stage 2 response on 25 June. This dealt with the subject matter of this complaint, as well as a second complaint Miss X had raised about a different issue. The Council explained Y could have attended the closer college but opted not to and it was not for the Council to make that decision for him. It explained Miss X had used her rights of appeal and it now considered the matter closed.
 49. The Council apologised for the delay in responding to Miss X's complaints and offered her £50 to recognise the time and trouble she was caused by this.
 50. We asked the Council how it assessed the nearest college to Miss X and the level of Y's course and what information was available to Miss X to see this for herself. The Council pointed to the information contained within its policy. It explained Y's college was further than the nearest college offering his course based on its approved QGIS system. It also explained it believed a SEND manager rang the college to discuss the course level, but it did not have a written record to evidence this and the SEND manager has since retired.
 51. We also asked the Council for a chronology of its complaint handling which it provided. On reviewing the complaint process for Miss X, the Council agreed there were too many delays and its communication was not of an acceptable standard. The Council said it had flagged this with the appropriate officer to be reviewed and learned from. The Council apologised to Miss X and raised its previous offer of £50 to £300 to recognise the poor standard of handling her complaints. If the Council has already paid this £300 to Miss X, it can deduct it from the total amount recommended in paragraph 67 below.
 52. We also spoke to Miss X. Miss X said she did not understand why there was an issue with the course levels. Miss X said Y was moving from school to college, so she assumed the course was at a higher level and was not given any information to think otherwise.
 53. Miss X also said she could not understand why the Council had chosen to disregard her evidence in relation to the distances to each college. Miss X explained not knowing how the Council's policy would apply to Y's situation meant she was deprived of the ability to make an informed choice on which college he should attend.

Conclusions

54. The Ombudsman is not an appeal body. This means we do not take a second look at a decision to decide if it was right or wrong. Instead, we look at the processes a council followed to make its decision. If we consider it followed those processes correctly, we cannot question whether the decision was right or wrong, regardless of whether a complainant disagrees with it.
55. We have not considered whether Y is eligible for funded transport. We have simply considered whether the Council followed the right process when coming to that decision and when the appeal was considered.
56. Although the Council publishes its transport policy within its Local Offer, it did not discuss this with Miss X during the EHCP discussions. This is fault.
57. Miss X and Y were not aware of how Y's college choice would affect transport provision before deciding on this and it was not explained to them. This caused an injustice as it meant they lost the opportunity to make an informed decision on which college, or course, Y should be moving onto.
58. The Council's policy explains it calculates distances using a system called QGIS but it does not explain what this is, or how parents can use it for themselves. The Council is entitled to define which measurement system will be used but it should inform parents they can contact the Council to check and compare school distances.
59. The policy also does not make it clear to parents or young people how they can establish which level courses are at. It references progression through levels but does not give any indication as to which courses are at each level. This makes it difficult for applicants, like Miss X and Y, to know with any certainty if their chosen course is at a higher level even if they are moving onto further education. The Council should inform parents they can contact the Council about how to check suitability of the course level.
60. The Council's policy recommends applicants check their eligibility carefully before applying for a course or transport. However, the policy wording makes it difficult for applicants to do this. For these reasons, we find the Council's policy flawed. This amounts to fault.
61. Whilst the Council followed its own policy when considering Miss X's application and appeals, because its policy was flawed we cannot say the decision making was sound. Miss X has suffered an injustice as a result.
62. The Council did not keep Miss X properly informed throughout the appeals process or stick to the timeframe set out in its published policy. This is fault and meant Miss X experienced uncertainty while she awaited answers.
63. There is also fault in the way the Council provided information to Miss X about the outcomes at each stage. The Council's responses were vague and informal, and they lacked consistency in the eligibility criteria that was being relied on. They did not give full details about the outcome of the reviews, how they were conducted, what was considered, or the rationale for the decisions. The responses also failed to explain how Miss X's appeal points were considered or why they were deemed not to apply.
64. The Council has provided a chronology of complaint handling. This shows numerous avoidable delays in dealing with Miss X's complaint. The Council is at fault here and this would have created an extended period of uncertainty for Miss X.

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65. The Council issued its Stage 1 complaint response within the timeframe set out in its complaint handling procedure but took a further six months to complete its Stage 2 review. We appreciate it may take longer to investigate particularly complex complaints, but we cannot see any reason why this complaint could not have been answered within the Council's usual timeframe.
66. The Council's chronology shows Miss X had to do a considerable amount of chasing before she received a response. She was put to avoidable time and trouble and this added further to the uncertainty she was experiencing.

Recommendations

67. To remedy the injustice set out above, we recommend the Council within one month of the date of this report:
- apologise to Miss X in writing for the identified fault;
 - pay Miss X £200 to recognise the time and trouble caused to her by the failings in dealing with this complaint;
 - pay Miss X £100 to recognise the avoidable uncertainty she was caused by the failure to keep her properly updated and informed throughout the application and appeals process;
 - remind staff dealing with transport applications and appeals of the importance of providing timely, clear, consistent, and well-reasoned decisions and ensuring decision reasons are recorded; and
 - re-assess Y's transport application and if refused, ensure the decision explains the calculation of school distances and course levels to allow Miss X to then submit an informed appeal. If the Council decides to provide transport, it should also reimburse Miss X for the costs she has incurred to date.
68. Within three months of the date of this report, the Council should:
- revise its post-16 transport policy to make it clear to applicants that they can contact the Council about course levels and to check or compare measures of school distances.
 - review decisions issued for the school year September 2021 where it has refused transport to children with EHCPs under its post 16-transport policy based on distance or course level. It should ensure no transport applications were declined based on exclusions relating to school distance and course levels without any explanation given. If any applications are found, these should be reassessed and if transport then agreed, parents should be offered a remedy for the missed provision. If transport is not agreed, parents should be offered the option to appeal.
69. The Council must consider the report and confirm within three months the action it has taken or proposes to take. The Council should consider the report at its full Council, Cabinet or other appropriately delegated committee of elected members and we will require evidence of this. (*Local Government Act 1974, section 31(2), as amended*)
70. The Council has accepted our recommendations and agreed to take the action identified above to remedy the injustice.

Decision

71. We have completed our investigation into this complaint. There was fault by the Council which caused Miss X injustice.

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POST-16 TRANSPORT POLICY 2022-23

Name of Local Authority:
Northumberland County Council – 929
Updated May 2022

Contents:

Eligibility for the Student Travel Scheme	<i>Paras 1- 3</i>
Transport Provision	<i>Paras 4- 7</i>
Application Process	<i>Para 8-9</i>
Additional Information for Students with Special Needs	<i>Paras 10-13</i>
Appeal Procedure	<i>Para 14</i>
Complaints Procedure	<i>Para 14</i>
Student Support	<i>Para 15</i>
Useful Contacts	ANNEX 1
Council Contact	ANNEX 2
Eligibility Criteria	ANNEX 3

Eligibility for Post-16 Transport

1. What is Northumberland County Council's Post-16 Transport Scheme?

This scheme enables eligible young people to access relevant learning. There is a non-refundable £50 administration fee (not applicable for students with Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) or for students from low-income backgrounds who are in receipt of certain benefits, see section 8) which needs to accompany an application for transport so we strongly advise you to check your eligibility carefully (please see Annex 3) before applying for a course or for transport. You can check the availability of courses at your nearest appropriate learning provider by accessing the relevant prospectuses. The cost of the administration fee is non-refundable. There are a very small number of exceptions to this such as where a parent/carer is able to demonstrate that their child has been unable to take up their chosen course of study at their local high school due to their GCSE exam results or where a course is oversubscribed or withdrawn from the curriculum by a further education provider due to low enrolment.

2. What are the eligibility criteria for qualifying for free Post-16 Transport?

You may be eligible for free transport if **all** of the criteria as set out in Annex 3 are met by you. You must refer to Annex 3, however, in summary this includes:

- You are a Northumberland resident and
- You live more than three miles away as measured by the local authority using it's approved measuring tool (QGIS 2.12.0-Lyon) from your nearest appropriate learning provider (this measuring tool is not publicly available so we advise using Google Maps to measure the distance as that will (except in the most marginal of cases) provide an outcome consistent with distance measures undertaken via the GIS measuring tool. Where the difference in distance calculations to two or more different educational establishments is slight (within 1

- mile) please contact the Council using the contact details in Annex 2 for confirmation of your nearest educational establishment prior to submitting an application), and
- Your course is undertaken at your nearest appropriate learning provider (please see Annex 3 for further information on what we define as your nearest appropriate learning provider) and
 - You are 16 years old or over, but under 19 on 31 August 2022 and
 - You are starting the course in Y13 or earlier and
 - Your course is full time, which is a minimum of 540 guided learning hours within each academic year and
 - Your course is at a higher level than your previous achievements and equates to foundation learning Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3.
 - Your estimated journey time to your chosen educational establishment will be no more than 75 minutes (150 minutes daily travelling time) and
 - The cost to the Council of your proposed journey is, in the opinion of Northumberland County Council, an efficient use of public resources and
 - You make the appropriate contribution (if applicable), i.e., the standard non-refundable administration fee.

It is recognised that for students with EHCPs education is often delivered differently and therefore it is less likely that progress through mainstream academic levels can be so easily measured. In general, for such students transport assistance will be provided, if: (i) they are attending the nearest educational establishment that can meet their needs; (ii) the educational establishment is named in their EHCP; (iii) they live over the qualifying three-mile distance.

However, a more comprehensive statement regarding the travel support that is available for students with EHCPs can be found in para 10-13. If unsure about your eligibility owing to academic levels, we advise that you contact the Council for advice using the contact details provided in the Council Contact section, Annex 2.

You will not be eligible for any assistance with transport costs if any of the following apply:

- You choose to attend a particular learning provider which is **not** the closest to your home address as defined under Annex 3 of this policy.
- If you live less than 3 miles as measured by the local authority using its approved measuring tool (QGIS 2.12.0-Lyon) from your nearest appropriate learning provider (This measuring tool is not publicly available so we advise using Google Maps to measure the distance as that will (except in the most marginal of cases) provide an outcome consistent with distance measures undertaken via the GIS measuring tool. Where the difference in distance calculations to two or more different educational establishments is slight (within 1 mile) please contact the Council using the contact details in Annex 2 for confirmation of your nearest educational establishment prior to submitting an application).
- You are outside the age range for the scheme
- You are starting a course in Y14
- Your course is not full-time, ie at least 12 hours per week
- You are an Apprentice
- Your course is Level 4 or higher education, including foundation degree

3. Can I buy a concessionary Pass?

In some cases, it may be possible for you to buy a spare seat on existing County Council contracted transport that serves a school or college which is not your nearest learning provider to your home address as defined in Annex 3 to this policy. However, you should be aware that the first priority for the allocation of any spare seats is always for those students in pre-16 or post-16 education who are eligible for free transport. Concessionary fares will **not** be allocated until after the start of the school year (usually the end of September) and they can be withdrawn without notice at any time if the seat is subsequently required for students who are eligible for free travel.

The cost of a concessionary fare for a Post-16 Student from the start of the 2022/23 Academic Year is £360 per year. Further details of the Council's Concessionary Travel Scheme are provided in the "Your school transport questions answered" section of our School transport webpage.

Transport Provision

4. What kind of transport provision can I expect?

Transport is arranged by the local authority. Usually this will consist of allocating a qualifying student a place on a dedicated school bus or taxi but where it offers better value for money travel on public transport will be arranged. The issue of a free boarding pass to enable travel on dedicated school bus/taxi services, the purchase of a season ticket for travel on local bus or rail services or a travel grant such as payment of a mileage allowance is at the discretion of the local authority.

If successful with your application travel passes will be issued for 1 year at a time (for students with Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) or two years for other students (if using dedicated school bus/taxi services), assuming you continue with your chosen course of study as outlined in your transport application. Season tickets to access local bus and rail services are issued annually following confirmation from the learning provider that the student is continuing onto the second year of their course.

If we make provision through a school bus or taxi a dedicated school transport route will be allocated to the student and indicated on the Student Travel Pass. Travel will only be permitted on this route. This is in order to ensure there is sufficient capacity available for all passengers and will help to prevent overcrowding and passengers being left without a seat.

If you are assigned a pass to enable travel on a local bus or rail service operated by Arriva, Go North East, Stagecoach or Northern Rail for example, you are bound by their conditions of carriage as well as the terms of travel as laid out by Northumberland County Council. For example, the cost of purchasing a replacement travel pass from a bus company will vary to that charged by the Council.

Where appropriate a "feeder" service will be provided to enable transfer onto dedicated school bus services or, if appropriate, provide connections to local bus and rail services. Connections will be made at locations which are safe but are not likely to be under cover.

In all cases the local authority will consider costs and will decide on the appropriate type of transport to provide.

You may need to share transport with other students. You may need to wait for transport after your course of study has ended or arrive early at your learning provider to accommodate other students' different timetables. Where possible we will try to minimise waiting times.

You will be expected to make your own way to and from the nearest main pick-up/drop-off points, unless you have a disability or medical condition which makes this unreasonable.

5. How long can I expect to have transport to a learning provider?

You will normally be provided with transport for two years of further education study in Year 12 and Year 13.

You will not be provided with transport for a third year (Year 14) unless you have already started the first year of a two-year course in Year 13.

You will be allocated transport for three terms each academic year, providing you continue to attend, but the type of transport may change. Transport during your learning provider's holiday periods will not be provided. If you are required to attend your learning provider during such periods then you should approach the learning provider for assistance with travel costs.

6. What information will be on my *Student Travel Pass*?

For student travel on council contracted school bus and taxi services travel passes will normally contain the following features:

- Your photograph;
- Your name and student identity reference;
- The learning provider at which you are enrolled;
- Boarding and alighting point description;
- Route number of the school bus service.

You must show this travel pass when you board the vehicle for each journey on each day. If you fail to show your pass on a local authority operated contract service, you will be unable to travel.

7. What times during the day can I use my travel pass when travelling on council contracted school transport?

Passes only cover travel at the start and end of the main education day and do **not** include extra-curricular activities, access to extended services or travel on days which are not normal working days for that establishment. Transport will not operate during holiday periods.

Application Process

8. Will I have to pay for Post 16 Transport?

Notwithstanding payment of the non-refundable administration fee (which isn't applicable for students with EHCPs), Post 16 transport will be provided free for students who meet all the eligibility criteria as outlined in Annex 3 of this policy.

The one-off and non-refundable administration fee of £50 is required with each application. If your application form is accompanied with evidence that as the responsible parent/carer you are currently in receipt of any of the following benefits you will be exempted from paying the fee.

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

We will only proceed to assess eligibility and to put travel arrangements in place for a student if payment of the non-refundable administration fee has been made in full.

Assuming a student does not change course, payment of the non-refundable administration fee is only required once, at the point of application when a student embarks upon their Post-16 studies. However, if the student subsequently changes course, then a further payment of the administration fee will be due when submitting a new application for Post-16 transport.

We will process all applications within 15 working days of confirmation of payment of the non-

refundable administration fee so it is advisable to apply for transport as early as possible.

9. When do I need to apply for transport support?

You should check your eligibility for transport carefully by reading Annex 3 and only submit an application for transport if you meet all the criteria listed. If you are not sure whether you meet all the eligibility criteria then please contact the Council using the contact details provided in Annex 2.

Transport will only be arranged on receipt of an application assuming all the eligibility criteria outlined in Annex 3 are met.

We recommend that you apply before the exam results come out. If you do not have a valid pass for travel you will not be permitted to travel.

Application forms for Post 16 Transport will be available from 31 May 2022. If you are currently enrolled at a learning provider, you can apply online at the "Post-16 Transport" page through the local authority webpage

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/School-transport-1/Transport.aspx>

Payment of the non-refundable administration fee must be made at the time you submit your completed application form.

If you apply by **15 August** and are successful with your application, a travel pass or season ticket will be sent to you during the summer break for Year 12 and will, generally speaking, be valid for two years (exception being travel passes purchased through bus companies such as Arriva or Go North East which are valid for one school year at a time. If you submit an application after this date, it may not be possible to ensure your application can be processed and a travel pass issued in time for the start of Year 12, and you will be required to make and incur the cost of your own travel arrangements until such time as the travel pass is issued to you. In other words, any travel costs incurred in this way will not be reimbursed.

Students with Special Needs and/or Disabilities

10. Is transport provided for students with special needs and/or disabilities?

This scheme will support eligible young people with special educational needs and disabilities to access relevant learning. You should check your eligibility for free transport carefully before applying for a course.

All of the eligibility criteria outlined in Annex 3 to this policy will apply.

In other words, students with special educational needs and disabilities will have their application for transport assessed the same way as already described in this policy. However, if they live within three miles of their nearest appropriate learning provider, they may be provided with transport support if following an assessment, it is clear that the nature of their disability or special needs is such as to make it unreasonable for them to travel to school without such support.

11. Does the non-refundable administration fee apply to students with special needs and/or disabilities?

If your child is in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan), they are exempt from paying the fee. If your child has a special need or disability but is not in receipt of an EHC Plan then the non-refundable administration fee will apply unless evidence of low income can be provided with your application - see para 8 above.

12. What kind of transport will you provide for a student with special needs?

Where a student has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the Council will normally make

the arrangements for and meet the costs of the transport necessary to transport the student to the nearest learning provider which could meet the needs set out in their EHCP. In such circumstances, transport may be provided up to the age of 25 rather than the normal age of 19. This is determined through the annual review of an EHCP during which progression is reviewed. It is recognised that such progression for SEND learners cannot be measured simply through mainstream academic levels. If unsure about your eligibility owing to academic levels we advise that you contact the Council for advice using the contact details provided in the Council Contact section, Annex 2. Where a student is attending a Supported Internship programme it will be expected that the provider will have made an application for transport through "Access to Work" before an application for transport will be considered.

We will make appropriate travel arrangements, making best use of existing education and social care transport as well as community transport and local bus and rail services. We may also contract additional services if necessary, whilst always ensuring best use is made of public money. The transport provided will reflect the access and support needs of the individual student.

We will review taxi and minibus provision termly; this will be based on the development of independent travel skills.

You may be provided with a more personalised mode of transport if you have a specific transport requirement.

You will be allocated transport for three terms in each year for which transport is approved, providing you continue to attend, but the type of transport may change over time.

You may need to share transport with other students. You may also need to wait for transport or arrive early at your learning provider to accommodate different timetables. We will try to minimise waiting times.

13. Do you provide independent travel training for students to increase their confidence in using public transport?.

Northumberland County Council promotes independent travel to support young people in the transition from using a taxi to using public transport. In partnership with schools, colleges and training providers it works to support those young people who have the potential to gain personally from focused support to prepare and equip themselves in their everyday life, including how to get to and from college.

The provision of Independent Travel Training (ITT) will enable young people to travel independently between home and school or college utilising public transport when appropriate. ITT helps to provide young people with the skills they need to travel independently. Independent travel is a crucial life skill that helps to give a young person the freedom to fulfil their potential and live a full life. Travel training has been shown to have positive effects on the lives of young people who are trained as well as those around them. Successful travel training, for example can enable families to do more things, both as a family as well as providing more time for separate activities. Travel training is a very important skill for life. Being able to travel with less support allows the trainee to do more social and educational activities and helps them to maintain better relationships. Independent travel skills also help to open up employment opportunities after leaving school. This all contributes to a more fulfilled life.

During the review process for those young people who have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) who are making the transition from school to college, independent travel will be discussed. If appropriate, an individual travel support plan will be drawn up so that the young person can receive further support to prepare them for independent travel when they start their new school/college.

Appeal procedure

14. If I am refused transport, is there anything I can do about it?

If a parent/carer is refused transport assistance for their child following an application they will be advised via an auto-generated email of the reason for the refusal. The email will also inform them that they have the right to appeal this decision. The appeal process is a two-stage procedure.

Stage One Appeal – Request a Review by a County Council Officer

At Stage One, parents can challenge a decision about:

- Their child's eligibility
- The distance measurement in relation to statutory walking distances; or
- The safety of the route

In cases where the provision of travel support has been agreed by the County Council, parents also have the right to ask for a review of the transport arrangements offered.

Parents/carers must set out clearly, in writing, why they believe that the County Council should reconsider their decision, enclosing any relevant information that may support their case. They may only request a review based upon their child's or their family's personal circumstances or the application of the Post 16 Transport Policy but not about the policy itself. If a parent/carer wishes to contest the actual wording in the policy, they should follow the complaints process as outlined in para 21 below.

A review of a parent's/carer's case will not normally be triggered or undertaken over the phone. It should be submitted either by letter or email. However, exceptions will be made to take account of a parent's or carer's learning disability. For example, hearing an appeal over the phone may be appropriate in the case of a parent or carer who has dyslexia and doesn't feel confident to effectively articulate their appeal in writing. A parent/carer should write setting out their reasons to the Passenger Transport Manager, County Hall, Morpeth NE61 2EF within 20 working days of the date on the email advising them that they have been refused support or email:

schooltransportappeals@northumberland.gov.uk. A parent or carer will be advised of the outcome of the review in writing within 20 working days of the receipt of their correspondence. In responding to the appeal reference will be made to the Post 16 transport policy, information provided by the parent, carer or professionals in support of their appeal as well as additional information provided to the Council by school staff or other professionals. If the parent/carer wins their review, then their child will be allocated transport within 10 working days following the date on which they were informed of the decision. They will not be entitled to claim a refund on transport costs incurred before the date when their appeal was received. In the event of a decision being made to decline the appeal a reason(s) will be provided to explain why.

Stage Two - Appeal to a Panel

If a Stage One appeal is unsuccessful a parent/carer can seek a Stage Two appeal. Details of how this process will work will be enclosed with the decision letter if the Stage One appeal confirms the original decision. A parent's or carer's case will be put before a panel for their consideration. The panel members are independent and impartial, i.e. they will not have previously been involved in considering the matter. They will not consider your application without the submission of relevant supporting information.

A parent/carer should submit their appeal form within 20 working days of receipt of the Stage One

written decision notification. They will receive correspondence confirming that their appeal form has been received and advising them of the appeal date (which will be within 40 working days of receipt of a written request for a Stage Two appeal). Whilst a parent does not attend the hearing itself a parent can make verbal representation of their case to the chair of the Appeal Panel. A letter outlining the outcome of the Panel's decision will be sent to the parent/carer within 5 working days of the appeal. In responding to the appeal reference will be made to the Post transport policy, information provided by the parent, carer or professionals in support of their appeal as well as additional information provided to the Council by school staff or other professionals. If the parent wins their review, then their child will be allocated transport within 10 working days following the date of the panel hearing. They will not be entitled to claim a refund on transport costs incurred before the date when their request for a panel review was received. In the event of a decision being made to decline the appeal a reason(s) will be provided to explain why. They will not be able to appeal again. If there have been significant and material changes in their circumstances that require a new decision, then a parent/carer may make a separate application to the Council.

Further information and guidance in relation to the Council's school transport appeals process can be found via the [school transport webpage](#)

Complaints

A post-16 transport complaint is a complaint about how the local authority has carried out (or failed to carry out) its transport responsibilities in relation to post-16 students. It can be made by a person who is, or will be, 16-19 (or 16-25 in the case of students in receipt of an Education, Health & Care Plan) at the relevant time, or the person's parent /carer. Any such complaints should be submitted to the Council under our Complaints Procedure which can be accessed via [Compliments, Complaints & Suggestions](#) However, any complaint solely about the outcome of the review will not be considered under this procedure, i.e. you can only complain about how the appeal was handled. .

Complaints and appeals must first be taken up with the local authority and their appeals process and/or complaints process must be fully exhausted before you consider contacting either the Local Government Ombudsmen (LGO) or complaining to the Secretary of State for Education. The LGO is an independent organisation that looks into complaints against councils. Further information can be found at [Local Government Ombudsman: Home](#) To complain to the Secretary of State, the contact form on www.gov.uk [Contact the Department for Education](#) should be used. Any complaint should outline the case, set out the decision taken by the local authority and include any other relevant documentation, for example any advice or decisions from the LGO where appropriate.

Student support

15. Is there any further help available for students?

Residential Support

If you attend a further education institution which is beyond daily travelling time and you need to stay away, you may be eligible for residential support.

The Department for Education offers a residential support scheme. If you need to study away from home because the course you need isn't available locally, you may be able to get financial help with the cost of your term-time accommodation in 2022/23. More information on residential support is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/residential-support-scheme>

Help with Childcare costs

If you are studying and aged under 20 at the start of your course and have dependent children, Care to Learn can help pay for your childcare costs while you are learning.

More information on the Care to Learn scheme is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn>

16-19 Bursary

If you are 16 to 19 you might be able to get £1,200 from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund from your school, college or training provider if you are in one of the groups below.

- student in care or care leavers
- student claiming Income Support in your own name
- disabled students getting Employment and Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment

If you are not in one of these groups, you could still get a discretionary bursary depending on your own and your family's circumstances. Contact your learning provider to discuss whether you are eligible for a discretionary bursary which is designed to assist students with low incomes with items such as transport costs. More information on the 16-19 Bursary is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund>

You can also ring the Learner Support Helpline on 0800 121 8989 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm for further information.

Useful Contacts

The following provides useful contact information for a number of the key learning providers and providers of public transport within Northumberland only. The list is not meant to be exhaustive and you are advised to undertake your own research before enrolling on a course of Post-16 study.

Information on the availability of courses within Northumberland and Tyne & Wear can be found on the relevant prospectuses of each educational provider..

Ashington Academy

- Address: Ashington Academy, Green Lane, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8DH
- Telephone: 01670 812166
- Email: admin@ashingtonacademy.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.ashingtonacademy.co.uk>

Astley Community High School

- Address: Astley Community High School, Elsdon Avenue, Seaton Delaval, Whitley Bay, Northumberland, NE25 0BP
- Telephone: 0191 2371505
- Email: reception@svf.org.uk
- Website: <http://www.SVF.org.uk>

Bede Academy

- Address: Bede Academy North, Sixth Avenue, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 2SY
- Head Teacher: Mrs J Roberts
- Telephone: 01670 545111
- Email: enquiries@bedeacademy.org.uk
- Website: <http://www.bedeacademy.org.uk/>

Bedlington Academy

- Address: Site Of Former Bedlingtonshire High School, Palace Road, Bedlington, Northumberland
- Telephone: 01670 822625
- Email: info@bedlingtonacademy.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.bedlingtonacademy.co.uk>

Berwick Academy

- Address: Berwick Academy, Adams Drive, Spittal, Berwick-Upon-Tweed, Northumberland, TD15 2JF
- Telephone: 01289 305083
- Email: admin@berwickacademy.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.berwickacademy.co.uk>

Buzz Learning

- Address: Buzz Learning, 8 Esther Court, Wansbeck Business Park, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 8AP
- Telephone: 01670 852244
- Email: info@buzzlearning.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.buzzlearning.co.uk>

Cramlington Learning Village

- Address: Cramlington Learning Village, Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 6BN
- Telephone: 01670 712311
- Email: admin@cramlingtonlv.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.cramlingtonlv.co.uk>

Haydon Bridge High School

- Address: Haydon Bridge Community High School And Sports College, North Bank, Haydon Bridge, Hexham, Northumberland, NE47 6LR
- Telephone: 01434 684422
- Email: hbhs@hbhs.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.haydonbridgehigh.co.uk>

James Calvert Spence College - Acklington Road

- Address: James Calvert Spence College Upper School, Acklington Road, Amble, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 0NG
- Telephone: 01665 710636
- Email: enquiries@jcsc.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.jcsc.co.uk/>

NCEA Duke's Secondary School

- Address: NCEA Duke's Secondary School, Academy Road, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9FZ
- Telephone: 01670 816111
- Email: admin@dss.ncea.org.uk
- Website: <http://www.ncea.org.uk>

Ponteland High School

- Address: Ponteland High School, The Crescent, Callerton Lane, Ponteland, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Northumberland, NE20 9EG [Show map](#)
- Telephone: 01661 824711
- Email: psh@ponthigh.org.uk
- Website: <http://www.pchs.northumberland.sch.uk>

Prudhoe Community High School

- Address: Prudhoe Community High School, Moor Road, Prudhoe, Northumberland, NE42 5LJ
- Telephone: 01661 832486
- Email: enquiries@pchs.org.uk
- Website: <http://www.pchs.org.uk>

Queen Elizabeth High School

- Address: Queen Elizabeth High School, Whetstone Bridge Road, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3JB
- Telephone: 01434 610300
- Email: admin@gehs.net
- Website: <http://w1.gehs.net/>

St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy

- Address: St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy, Ridge Terrace, Bedlington, Northumberland, NE22 6ED
- Telephone: 01670 822795
- Email: admin@st-benetbiscop.org.uk
- Website: <http://www.st-benetbiscop.org.uk>

The Blyth Academy

- Address: Blyth Academy, Chase Farm Drive, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 4JP
- Telephone: 01670 798100
- Email: blyth.enquiries@northerneducationtrust.org
- Website: <https://www.theblythacademy.org/>

The Duchess's Community High School

- Address: Duchess Community High School, Taylor Drive, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 2DH
- Telephone: 01665 602166
- Email: Admin@dchs-alnwick.org
- Website: <http://www.dchs-alnwick.org>

The King Edward VI School

- Address: King Edward VI School, Cottingwood Lane, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 1DN
- Telephone: 01670 515415
- Email: kevi@the3rivers.net
- Website: <http://kevi.the3rivers.net>

Northumberland Skills (delivering on behalf of Northumberland County Council)

Northumberland Skills also run a variety of full-time courses at different locations across the county. The 2022/23 prospectus will be published very shortly and you will be able to locate it at:

<https://www.northumberlandskills.co.uk/school-leavers>

Northumberland College Tel 01670 841200 and choose option 1 or via the Website for a list of courses offered: <http://www.northumberland.ac.uk>

Northumberland College do commission a number of their own bus services serving their Ashington and Kirkley Hall campuses from various parts of Northumberland. Students who qualify for Post-16 transport assistance through Northumberland County Council will, where appropriate, be provided with a place on one of these services

Newcastle College Tel 0191 2004000 <https://www.ncl-coll.ac.uk/study-areas/16-18-college/>

Tyne Met College Tel 0191 2295000 <https://www.tynecoast.ac.uk/>

The Government's website provides wide ranging information on education and training for work. Please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/browse/education>

Information on bus routes, rail services and timetables is available from the Traveline website: www.travelinenortheast.info or via individual company websites

Arriva: www.arrivabus.co.uk

Go North East: www.simplygo.com

Stagecoach: www.stagecoachbus.com

East Coast: <https://www.lner.co.uk/>

Northern Rail: www.northernrailway.co.uk

COUNCIL CONTACT DETAILS

If you have a query regarding the **Post-16 Transport Scheme** or the application process, please contact the Transport Network Officer:

email post16.transport@northumberland.gov.uk

Telephone **0345 600 6400** or **01670 624839** (Direct Line)

Website <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk>

Asking to speak to a School/College Transport Network Officer.

If you have a query regarding **education and courses**, please contact the Northumberland Skills team:

Telephone **0345 600 6400** or **01670 622 799**

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Free transport will only be considered if you meet **all** of the following criteria:

- You are a Northumberland resident; and
- You are 16 years old or over, but under 19, on 31 August 2022. Arrangements will not normally be made for new courses that start in Year 14 (except possibly for students with special educational needs, see paragraph 10-13 above), but will be made for courses that start in Year 13 and continue into Year 14; and
- Your course is undertaken at your nearest appropriate learning provider, as defined below or, in the case of students with an EHCP, the educational establishment that is named in the EHCP; and
- Your course is full time as prescribed by the educational setting, which is normally a minimum of 540 guided learning hours within one academic year; and
- Your course is at a higher level than your previous achievements (i.e. embarking, for example, onto a Level 3 course following successful completion of a course at Level 2) or provides appropriate progression in the case of students with EHCPs. If unsure about your eligibility owing to academic levels, we advise that you contact the Council for advice using the contact details provided in the Council Contact section, Annex 2, and
- Your course is foundation learning, level 1, 2 or 3, but not level 4 or higher education or, if you are an Apprentice. Students undertaking work placements, apprenticeships or traineeships are advised to contact their employer or learning provider; and
- You live 3 or more miles, by the shortest route measured and indicated by the local authority, from your nearest appropriate learning provider, or you live less than 3 miles from your nearest appropriate learning provider but the route is not deemed to be a safe walking route by the Authority or, in the case of students with an EHCP, you live within 3 miles of your nearest appropriate learning provider that can meet your needs, but following an assessment, it is clear that the nature of your disability or special needs is such as to make it unreasonable for you to travel to school or college without such support.

The walking distance is measured using the County Council's approved GIS system, the current version which is in use is QGIS 2.12.0-Lyon. This measuring tool is not publicly available so we advise using Google Maps to measure the distance as that will (except in the most marginal of cases) provide an outcome consistent with distance measures undertaken via our version of the GIS measuring tool. Where the difference in distance calculations to two or more different educational establishments is slight (within 1 mile) please contact the Council using the contact details in Annex 2 for confirmation of your nearest educational establishment prior to submitting an application for Post 16 transport. Distance measures between home and school will be strictly applied. This means that in some cases pupils living in the same street or even adjoining properties may not all be eligible for free home to school transport. Routes are measured from the main entrance to the property that opens onto a road or street that is maintained at public expense to the main school entrance. Private driveways or roads not owned or maintained by Northumberland County Council are **not** included in the measurements. Decisions about the safety of walked routes follow the guidelines on the Assessment of Walking Routes issued by the Road Safety Officers Association (ROSA). Such assessments of walking routes address issues from a road safety perspective. They do not consider matters of personal security which is deemed to be the responsibility of parents; and

- Your estimated journey time to your chosen learning provider will be no more than 75 minutes (150 minutes daily travelling time). This calculation will be based on using

public transport, typically local bus services, to get to and from your learning provider; and

- The cost to the Council of your proposed journey is in the opinion of Northumberland County Council an efficient use of public resources; and
- You make the appropriate contribution (eg. payment of the non-refundable administration fee at the time of application) towards the costs as determined by the Authority. The fee is not required in the case of applications for students with Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs) or for students from low-income backgrounds who are in receipt of certain benefits (please see section 8).

For the purposes of this policy the **nearest appropriate learning provider** is as follows:

- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is the nearest learning provider to your home address measured using the County Council's approved GIS system (this measuring tool is not publicly available so we advise using Google Maps to measure the distance as that will (except in the most marginal of cases) provide an outcome consistent with distance measures undertaken via our version of the GIS measuring tool. Where the difference in distance calculations to two or more different educational establishments is slight (within 1 mile) please contact the Council using the contact details in Annex 2), or
- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is not the nearest to home but is the setting named by the local authority as the catchment area setting for your home address; or
- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is not the nearest to home but is the nearest which would be consistent with your religion or beliefs and you supply the necessary evidence of that religion or belief; or
- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is not the nearest to home but is the educational establishment that is able to make provision as detailed in your EHCP;
- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is not the nearest establishment to your home address but it is the nearest that offers the course you wish to study in accordance with the following:
 - i. For a student wishing to study one or more A-levels, this will be the nearest educational establishment that offers 9 or more different A-levels. For the avoidance of doubt, all high school sixth forms will offer at least 9 or more A levels. The student's choice of A-levels, A-level subject combination, timetable clashes etc. will **not** be taken into account when determining eligibility.
 - ii. For a student wishing to undertake a vocational course, this will be to the nearest education establishment that offers a course in the relevant vocational area at the appropriate level. To facilitate this, all courses are categorised by the Authority under "vocational areas" and transport will only be provided for students who express a desire to study at their nearest educational establishment that offers a course under their chosen vocational area at the appropriate level of study. There are approximately 30 separate categories, including "Travel & Tourism", "Art & Design", "IT & Computing/Media" or "Catering & Hospitality". The full list of vocational areas is set out below. For the avoidance of doubt, the student's precise choice of course within each of these areas of vocational study will **not** be taken into account when determining eligibility.

Normally, the only exception in applying these criteria will be where an individual has applied to the appropriate provider at the appropriate time but has been refused admission by the school/college due to GCSE exam results, the course being oversubscribed or cancelled due to low enrolment, in which case that establishment will be ignored when considering eligibility. In such cases, written evidence of refusal will

be required.

List of Vocational Areas

Aerospace	Fashion
Accounting	Foundation Learning
Agriculture	Hairdressing
Animal Management & Care	Health & Social Care
Arboriculture	Horse Management & Care
Art & Design	Horticulture
Beauty Therapy	IT & Computing/Media
Business & Administration	Motor Vehicle
Catering & Hospitality	Outdoor Education & Activities
Childcare	Renewable Energies
Construction	Sports & Leisure
Countryside Management	Public Services
Customer Service	Science & Technology
Engineering	Skills for Working Life
Floristry	Travel & Tourism

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Northumberland
County Council

CABINET

9 MAY 2023

ENERGISING BLYTH PROGRAMME: CULTURE HUB AND MARKET
PLACE OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE

Report of: Councillor Wojciech Ploszaj, Portfolio holder for Business

Lead Officer: Janice Rose, Interim Executive Director of Regeneration

Purpose of report

This report seeks the approval of the Outline Business Case (OBC) and project budget for the Culture Hub and Market Place project. This flagship project will initiate the regeneration of Blyth town centre.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) Approve the Outline Business Case (OBC) summarised in this report for the Culture Hub and Market Place project to enable progression to Full Business Case**
- (2) Approve a total revised budget in the Capital Programme of £14,705,732. There is a current budget in the Capital Programme of £12,536,685 this report requests approval of £2,169,047 drawn from existing Council funds allocated to the Energising Blyth Programme. The project is funded by HM government Future High Streets Fund and the Council as set out in Financial Tables 3-5**
- (3) Note that Jam Jar Cinema Community Interest Company (CIC) will be formally appointed as the main operator of the Culture Hub and that an operator for the Creative Play concession within the facility will be appointed in due course subject to Cabinet approval of the recommendations in this report**
- (4) Delegate authority, in accordance with the Energising Blyth Local Assurance Framework, to the Council's s151 Officer following consideration by the Energising Blyth Programme Board to approve the Full Business Case and report any subsequent capital implications to Cabinet (via the Capital Strategy Group) for inclusion in the Capital Programme**
- (5) Delegate approvals to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to**

enter into any contracts relating to the project subject to confirmation of associated funding being in place and the appropriate procurement processes being followed.

Link to Corporate Plan

This project is part of the £70m Energising Blyth Programme to grow, renew and connect the town supported by Northumberland County Council, HM Government Future High Streets Fund and Town Deal, North of Tyne Combined Authority and other funding partners. This is a placemaking 'whole town' programme which contributes across most of the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities but particularly to the living, enjoying, thriving and connecting strategic priorities.

Key issues

- Northumberland County Council and its partners have been successful in attracting Future High Streets Fund (£11.1m) and Town Deal (£20.9m) funding from HM Government to deliver 11 major projects supporting the objectives of the Blyth Town Investment Plan (TIP) which aims to grow, renew and connect the town.
- This includes a focus on transforming Blyth town centre given the significant market failure evident in the area.
- This funding now forms part of the £70m Energising Blyth regeneration programme and is matched with identified NCC budgets in the capital programme and contributions from other funding partners including the North of Tyne Combined Authority.
- The first major project in the town centre is the development of a new Culture Hub and improvements to Market Place to stimulate renewed confidence in the area.
- It includes vibrant new additional facilities including three screen cinema, creative play and café to attract new spend and visitors and attract further investment.
- This new flagship project will provide a major attraction to stimulate the wider rejuvenation of the town, helping to kick start the transformation of the town centre.
- The new Culture Hub, combined with public realm improvements and the creation of a new outdoor performance space in the Market Place will deliver the central attraction the town currently lacks, encouraging visitors to consume, engage and participate in culture and creativity and in the wider leisure offer.
- Since the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) award, a considerable amount of work has been undertaken to develop the Outline Business Case (OBC). This OBC is now prepared and serves two purposes. Firstly, to provide sufficient confidence to the Council that this is an attractive and robust project. Secondly, to provide a solid foundation for finalising the full business case, thereby securing approval of the project.
- The OBC has been externally appraised with a recommendation to proceed to Full Business Case (FBC). It was approved by Blyth Town Deal Board on 28 March 2023.
- This Cabinet report seeks approval for the updated budget for the project which now stands at £14,705,732. There is a current budget in the Capital Programme of

£12,536,685 this report requests approval of £2,169,047 drawn from existing Council funds allocated to the Energising Blyth Programme. The project is funded by HM government Future High Streets Fund and the Council as set out in Financial Tables 3-5.

- Planning permission has been submitted with determination by June 2023, construction will commence in October 2023 and complete in October 2024, with the FHSF allocation needed to be defrayed by March 2024.
- A main operator has been procured for the building – the successful award-winning local operator Jam Jar Cinema CIC. Jam Jar currently operate in Whitley Bay and will be formally appointed upon agreement of this report's recommendations. A separate operator for Creative Play will be procured over the forthcoming months.
- This report explains the rationale and scope of the project as the first catalytic project to change the future of the town centre. It summarises the five cases (Strategic; Economic; Commercial; Financial; Management) contained within the OBC whilst highlighting the implications within each for the County Council.
- Appendix 1-6 provides the Energising Blyth Project Map, visual CGI images and maps of the project area referred to in the body of the report as well as additional information about the design rationale.

BACKGROUND

1. Northumberland County Council and its partners have been successful in attracting Future High Streets Fund (£11.1m) and Town Deal (£20.9m) funding from HM Government to deliver the Blyth Town Investment Plan (TIP) which aims to grow, renew and connect the town. This includes a focus on transforming Blyth town centre given the significant market failure evident in the area.
2. This funding now forms part of the £70m Energising Blyth regeneration programme delivering 11 major projects in the town between 2022-2026 and is matched with identified NCC budgets in the capital programme and contributions from other funding partners including the North of Tyne Combined Authority. See Appendix 1 for the Energising Blyth Project Map.
3. HM Government has also recently awarded the town £20.7m funding from the Levelling Up Deep Dive for a range of new projects which will be integrated and add to the existing Energising Blyth Programme and provide further impetus to transform the town including housing renewal, town centre living and measures to tackle anti-social behaviour and retail crime alongside additional investment in the new Energy Central Campus. A separate report will be brought back to Cabinet later this year to establish this new funding package as part of the Energising Blyth Programme.
4. The establishment of the Energising Blyth Programme was agreed by Cabinet in July 2021 and the Future High Streets Fund bid was agreed by Cabinet in June 2020. The Future High Streets Funded element of the Programme has a particular focus on rejuvenating the town centre and addressing market failure.
5. This substantial funding will stimulate confidence and further investment, create new jobs, bolster economic growth and transform the town ensuring it realises its full potential. This significant programme of renewal is underpinned by creative engagement with the community of Blyth demonstrating demand and support for positive change.
6. The first major project in the town centre is the development of a new Culture Hub and improvements to Market Place to stimulate renewed confidence in the area. It includes vibrant new additional facilities including three screen cinema, creative play and café to attract new spend and visitors and attract further investment. This new flagship project will provide a major attraction to stimulate the wider rejuvenation of the town, helping to kick start the transformation of the town centre.
7. The new Culture Hub, combined with public realm improvements and the creation of a new outdoor performance space in the Market Place will deliver the central attraction the town currently lacks, encouraging visitors to consume, engage and participate in culture and creativity and in the wider leisure offer.

8. The delivery of the investment and change in the area through the Energising Blyth programme is sequential and predicated on the early success of this major intervention. Further major development in the town centre including additional improvements to the public realm and new hotel, restaurant, education and innovation uses will add to this new and exciting offer. This cumulative impact will be to reposition the town centre as a place which is able to fully contribute and benefit from the wider growth and success of Blyth as a Clean energy port and as a major part of the Northumberland and North East economy connected by the investment in the Northumberland Line including two stations in Blyth.
9. The Energising Blyth Local Assurance Framework requires the completion of a proportionate 'Green Book' Business Case for all projects within the programme through 3 key stages, Strategic Outline Business Case, Outline Business Case and Full Business Case. The OBC was externally appraised on 14 March 2023 and approved by the Town Deal Board on 28 March 2023.
10. The main purpose of the FBC stage is to confirm any outstanding project details that were not finalised at the time of the OBC submission and will include, confirmation of costs following completion of the second stage tender process, draft construction contract and confirmation of funding, planning and programme. The FBC is due to be completed by 11 August 2023.
11. This report provides a summary of the project context and rationale, project scope and outlines the OBC sections to provide an overview of the scheme. The appendices provide a visual overview of the project including scheme area map and CGI visuals of the new Culture Hub and Market Place demonstrating the significant positive change the project will deliver.

PROJECT CONTEXT

12. There is a significant reliance on retail to bring residents and visitors into Blyth Town Centre, however as the retail market continues to decline and commercial confidence decreases, residents have fewer reasons to travel into the town centre. This has led to significant market failure in the town centre environment which provided the rationale to secure Future High Streets Fund support and establish the Energising Blyth Programme with the new Culture Hub and Market Place as the flagship scheme in the town centre.
13. Therefore, investment in a transformational development, that gives residents and visitors alike new and compelling reasons to visit the town centre is essential. This will attract residents, including the growing population of higher earners and families, as well as visitors into the town centre, capturing their spending power for the benefit of the local economy.

14. The creation of a new cultural venue in Blyth Town Centre will deliver that much needed buzz and vitality, by bringing more people into the Town Centre, increasing footfall and dwell time, encouraging people to spend time and money in the area.

15. The Strategic Objectives for the project are:

Culture Hub and Market Place – Project Objectives

- Revitalise the town centre experience through culture-led renewal, creating a welcoming, safe, and vibrant destination.
- Improve the culture, leisure, and evening economy offer in Blyth, encouraging more residents to spend time and money in the area.
- Increase annual footfall in Blyth Town Centre by attracting audiences and visitors to the centre.
- Support the growth of the visitor economy, creating new jobs, and making the town a more attractive place to live, work and visit.
- Re-develop Blyth Market Place, creating an attractive, safe, and welcoming outdoor space, suitable for a variety of uses (e.g. outdoor performances, markets, temporary displays, pocket parks).
- Increase participation in culture and arts in Blyth by creating accessible, affordable, and enjoyable opportunities to engage.

16. The proposed Culture Hub, will incorporate 2,344 m² (GIA) of new floorspace for cultural and leisure activities, aligned to and informed by the needs of local communities across Blyth. The new Culture Hub will be located in the Market Place, which itself will be transformed into an attractive outdoor meeting and performance space where people can meet and socialise. See Appendix 2-5 for a full overview of the scheme area, CGI visuals, building design and supplementary information.

17. The facilities to be provided at the new Culture Hub are based on extensive consultation with local stakeholders and communities, and a market analysis of current provision. The feasibility study identified; a lack of cinema provision in Blyth; a general shortage of live performance venues in Blyth, and a specific shortage of venues able to accommodate larger audiences; demand for gallery space to exhibit locally produced work, and a lack of creative and developmental play facilities.

18. The demand for the Culture Hub and Market Place improvements stems originally from the development of the Future High Streets fund bid to regenerate the town centre.

19. This indicated significant market failure due to retail dieback and a lack of significant attractors in the town centre. As a result of consultation and engagement with the public a significant demand from the public and businesses became clear around the need to make Market Place a more welcoming, safer and more attractive place to visit.

20. Significant concerns about safety, anti-social behaviour and the general poor appearance and lack of positive activities for the community were key messages. This followed town centre showcases and business survey work targeting both the community and businesses in the area and wider town. There was also longstanding evidence from Arts Council funded studies of the need for a central culture anchor in the town centre reaching back a number of years.
21. As a result, the Council's Future High Streets Fund bid focused on introducing a new Culture Hub in the town centre. The business case presented to Cabinet in this report is based on demand work with potential operators and independent demand assessment work and options appraisal considering various uses including the Culture Hub concept and site availability, suitability and deliverability in the context that to secure funds a project will need to be delivered by Spring 2024.
22. This concluded that to meet community and business demand for a new positive use the Market Place is the optimum site to meet the project objectives and address the issues outlined above by creating a transformative new central attraction with improved Market Place features around it. A number of sites around Market Place were discounted due to issues regarding ownership, capacity and costs which would of lessened the likelihood of success in bidding for competitive funding nationally to regenerate the town.
23. Since the bid was approved the demand for the new Hub has been further tested via independent analysis through a demand and feasibility study combined with community and partner engagement and consultation to develop the planned specification and delivery model for the project as the project has progressed through RIBA design stages.
24. Operator demand has been confirmed as part of this process and Jam Jar Cinema CIC have been appointed as the main cinema led operator, subject to final approval by NCC Cabinet.
25. On the basis of the above development work, the business case for the Culture Hub and Market Place project establishes that it will create opportunities for local people, communities, and visitors to enjoy a range of new leisure and cultural activities, both indoors and outdoors, including events, festivals, and markets. The evidence and research demonstrate demand for the facilities which is further summarised in Appendix 5.
26. Cultural and leisure activities are also needed to encourage activation of the town centre and of the wider town. The complementary Culture and Placemaking Programme (funded through Towns Fund and NCC) will build audiences, deliver cultural events alongside a programme of 'animating spaces' and investment in infrastructure and placemaking improvements.

27. The designs are currently at RIBA Stage 3 and a considerable amount of work has been undertaken to develop the Outline Business Case (OBC). A design specification was produced based on the findings of the feasibility reports and used as the basis of Tender documents to procure a Design Team.
28. In January 2022 an experienced and reputable multi-disciplinary team were appointed led by Faulkner Brown Architects. Since then, they have developed the designs through RIBA Stages 1 to 3.
29. As the project has developed in more detail, there have been some changes to the original proposal. The floorspace has increased from 1,616 GIA at RIBA 1 to 2,344 GIA (allowing for circulation and plant) at RIBA Stage 3. Appendix 3 shows the ground and first floor plans.
30. The area of the Market Place to be improved has also increased from 6,277m² to 8,250m². Appendix 2 shows the red line boundary.
31. The floor plans and Computer-Generated Images (CGIs) were presented to the public as part of a Showcase Event in July and November 2022 and were generally very well received. See Appendix 3 for the CGIs and Appendix 6 for a summary of the design rationale for the building.

Outline Business Case Summary

Strategic Case

32. The Culture Hub will be an iconic flagship building, located in the Marketplace, in the heart of Blyth's town centre. It will provide a significant boost to Blyth's culture and leisure offer and evening economy, creating a new 'anchor' development which will attract more people into the town centre throughout the day and into the evening, increasing footfall, dwell time and spend. It will offer a range of culture and leisure opportunities, providing residents and visitors with new reasons to visit the town centre. (see Appendix 3 for Computer Generated Images of how the building will look).
33. The project reflects the towns proud heritage, being located on the site of the former central cinema and music hall, returning the area to its historic role as a cultural attraction.
34. The Culture Centre and Market Place project contributes to, and aligns with the Energising Blyth Town Investment Plan (TIP), directly delivering against three of the core strategic priorities – namely Vibrant Town, Growing Town, and Inclusive Town.
35. The project is consistent with and will contribute towards the achievement of

national, regional, and local strategic objectives and will address the following three market failures:

- *Positive externalities* – Investment is required to increase Blyth’s profile, change perceptions, and reinvigorate the town’s former retail centre
- *Equity* – There is a strong case for public investment in new and improved economic infrastructure in peripheral and smaller towns, where the incentives for private landlords and investors are weaker.
- *Information gaps (asymmetries) and the free rider problem* – both businesses and consumers in the visitor economy suffer from knowledge / communication gaps.

36. To address this market failure, there is a strong case for public investment in offers and assets that strengthen Blyth’s position in the minds of visitors. Investing in a new culture centre and promoting a broader and more attractive culture and leisure offer across Blyth, will have a significant impact on improving information and understanding among visitors, offering them compelling reasons to visit the town.

Economic Case

37. The economic case assesses the benefits and costs of the project based upon its agreed critical success factors and strategic objectives. This assessment is undertaken in a standardised way in accordance with Treasury guidance to both define the extent to which the project provides value for money.
38. The Culture Centre and Marketplace project was part of an integrated economic appraisal including several projects in Blyth town centre within the FHSF programme (undertaken in June 2020). The costs and benefits of the Culture Hub and Market Place were considered alongside other projects to arrive at an overall BCR for the programme in June 2020. On this basis, the FHSF package successfully met DLUHC’s value for money threshold. Therefore, the Culture Centre and Market Place project has already passed an HMT Green Book compliant value for money assessment.
39. However, in the time that has elapsed, the costs of the project have increased, and there have been some minor changes to the benefits. Therefore, the value for money assessment has been revisited to reflect the current position. However, considering the increase in costs the project still returns a positive BCR of 2.7, which is an acceptable value for money according to DLUHC BCR categories.

Commercial case

Construction options

40. Three construction options have been considered:

- Option 1 - In house build
- Option 2 - Procure third party contractor
- Option 3 - Design and Build – two stage procurement

41. The recommendations from the Design Team were to proceed with a two-stage design and build procurement (Option 3) as this provides greater flexibility and ongoing engagement with the contractor to ensure the project delivers on the vision and outcomes required by the client.
42. To progress Option 3, a number of options were considered, with NEPO207 Building and Construction Works Framework being selected as the preferred way forward. This option involves a 2 stage call off process through an established multiple supplier framework, with five contractors appointed to the relevant Lot (Lot 5: Building Construction Works)
43. This option was selected as it provided the shortest route to market. In addition, the framework usage costs are reimbursed to NCC, providing a cost-neutral option, and it allowed for early contractor appointment and development of supply chain/sub-contractors post award, with visibility of proposed sub-contractor costs and competition at Stage 2. However, as stage 2 costs are not set at the point of award, it does not fully test the market.
44. Three expressions of interest were received from Kier, Wilmot Dixon and Wates. A formal bid was received from one potential supplier – Kier. Kier have now been appointed under a Pre-construction Services Agreement (PCSA) and will support the team to complete the design and develop a final contract sum (construction price). Final award of the full contract is subject to the final contract sum being presented and approved by NCC late Summer 2023.

Operation options

45. Four operation options have been considered:
- Option 1 - In-house service delivery
 - Option 2 - Procure commercial operator for the cinema plus other key elements of the culture offer.
 - Option 3 - Procure commercial operator for the cinema only, with other elements contracted out to a partner organisation/operator of other facilities
 - Option 4 - Procure commercial operator for the cinema only, with other elements contracted out to a special purpose vehicle
46. Following a review of the options, Option 2 to procure an operator for the cinema, studio, multi-purpose space, and café/bar was chosen.
47. In Autumn 2022, the Council issued an Invitation to Tender to appoint an independent commercial operator for the new Culture Hub. Jam Jar Cinema CIC

were confirmed as the preferred operator, they have several years' experience running an independent cinema as a successful commercial business. Since January 2023 they and have been working with the design team to input into the designs, as well as developing a detailed business plan for the operation of the Culture Centre.

48. Jam Jar will operate the cinema, the studio space, multi-purpose space, and the food and beverage offer on a 15 year lease basis. The contract was signed in January 2023 and the lease and SLA will be signed in May/June 2023 subject to Cabinet approval of the OBC.
49. To ensure the new facility has an exciting mix of functions for families with an emphasis on health and well-being outcomes a creative play facility has been included in the design. An allocation of £100,000 from the Cultural Investment Portfolio was agreed by Cabinet in February 2023 and will be used to support a free Creative Play facility within the Culture Hub delivering tangible health and well-being outcomes for the community of Blyth - a key objective of the project and meeting the council's corporate commitment to this agenda.
50. As Creative Play will be free at the point of delivery for customers and not based on a commercial model (the Council will be buying a service) it will be procured separately under a Services Contract for 3 years. Before the tender documents are agreed further discussions with key stakeholders are being undertaken around the level of offer and any match funding opportunities.
51. Following these discussions, the opportunity will be advertised with an aim of having an operator appointed by Autumn 2023, one year before the building completes

Financial case

Capital budget allocation in the Energising Blyth Programme

52. This Cabinet report seeks approval for the updated budget for the project which now stands at £14,705,732. This will be drawn from the identified existing allocated Energising Blyth budgets in the Capital Programme funded by external grant from Future High Streets Fund and the council as set out in the recommendations.
53. The costs in this report update the initial estimates provided in June 2020 as part of the Future High Streets Fund bid and which the ongoing provisional allocation to the project has been based upon as part of the programme to date. This was submitted based on outline costs for the project which at that stage were £7,253,198.
54. At that stage in 2020 it was likely that the funding available from FHSF would not meet the scale and ambition of the project to transform the town centre environment and provide a new flagship central attraction.

55. As such, as part of establishing the Energising Blyth programme budgets NCC capital was identified to contribute to the final budget of the project and this potential contribution was retained and agreed by Cabinet as part of the establishment of the programme in June 2021.
56. This budget is part of the overall Energising Blyth Programme budgets within the Energising Blyth project delivery support budget and this report seeks to formally agree its use for this project moving existing allocations within the Capital Programme between Energising Blyth budget headings.

Rationale for costs

57. The rationale for the project budget at this stage relates to the objectives to:
- Deliver a project that fully meets the ambition to kick start the regeneration of the town centre
 - Ensure the project is of an appropriate scope and scale which meets both community demand and operator requirements
 - Deliver a high quality, high impact scheme.
58. The costs have also been impacted, as with all major capital schemes by inflationary pressures and a competitive contractor environment. All costs have been subject to an extensive value engineering exercise by the project team.

Total Project Budget

59. As the design has progressed the latest budget has been reported regularly to the Energising Blyth Programme Board including with oversight of the s151 Officer at each RIBA stage to meet the above objectives combined also reflecting costs changes due to the impact of inflation.
60. The project has now progressed to RIBA stage 3 (see diagrams and CGI's in Appendix 1-3) and the total capital project budget is now estimated as £14,705,732 (See also Financial Table 1 overleaf).
61. This is based on cost estimates for the Culture Hub and Market Place project's delivery included in the Outline Business Case (OBC) and additional budget allocations related to complimentary projects and NCC PM costs as described below:

Included in the OBC

- **Culture Hub and Market Place - £14,316,816** (inclusive of construction, design and associated fees and also client contingency of £450k to address any unforeseen costs during construction).

Additional Budget allocation from NCC included in total budget

- **Complimentary Projects – public toilets and remembrance garden improvements** – An additional allowance of £275,000 for two complimentary projects on Market Place described below – public toilets and remembrance garden improvements which are being treated as separate interventions to the main scheme for business case purposes.
- **Project Management Costs (NCC)** – The Energising Blyth Programme team is funded partly by NCC revenue (agreed as part of the Economy and Regeneration Service budget) and capital contributions from the projects in the Programme. The budget shows a £113,916 allowance for the capital contribution to these staff costs for the duration of the project. This is drawn from the Energising Blyth Future High Streets fund budget heading in the Capital Programme.

Complimentary works to Market Place public toilets and the remembrance garden

62. As part of the project development, design and consultation process, additional capital works to the public toilets on Market Place and the remembrance garden area adjacent to St Mary's Church have been identified.
63. Improvements in these areas would further enhance the town centre adjacent to the Culture Hub and Market Place project and tie the whole area together in terms of the look and feel of the town centre as a high quality attractor.
64. Both projects are included in the overall financial allocation in this report but are separate small-scale interventions and as such are not included in the Business Case for the Culture Hub and Market Place. Final costs for these projects will be progressed in quarter 1 of 2023-24 within the £275k budget estimate requested. A summary of the two projects is set out below.
65. Both projects will be delivered under the main contract of Kier with the timing and phasing of these works to be agreed within the overall construction of the Market Place.

Refurbishment of the public toilets in the Market Place

66. Community and stakeholder feedback has identified how important the provision of quality public toilet provision is in Blyth town centre given its role in hosting a range of events in addition to the new facilities within the Culture Hub. The current toilets are among the most utilised facilities in the county however are in a poor state of repair and in need of improvements. Survey work has been undertaken with an estimated cost established for internal and external refurbishment. Without these works the new Culture Hub and Market Place will be sited beside a significant

premise which detracts from the new works.

Public realm improvements to remembrance garden adjacent to St Mary's Church

67. This area is a valued and important part of the overall Market Place however was not originally included in the improvement plans for the area. The area is positively viewed given its role as a memorial garden for remembrance and aspects of greenery. The design of the Market Place has considered how the area can be integrated and enhanced to ensure that it feels fully a part of the new Market Place and so there is no risk of the area feeling separate or disconnected from the new improvements.
68. There is therefore a budget allocated to undertake minor landscaping, access and repair works which will retain the current assets in the area and enhance them so they fully tie into the overall scheme. The works will also ensure that the High Street Car Park is fully accessible to Market Place for a range of pedestrians including features such as dropped kerbs which are currently not in place and will make the area safer and more accessible particularly for disabled visitors and visitors with any mobility issues.
69. The total cost of the above works is estimated at £275,000 and will be funded from the requested NCC capital programme funding from within the existing project delivery support budget.

Total costs and financial allocation in the capital programme

70. With the above allocation included the total project financial allocation is **14,705,732**. The breakdown of the costs is as follows:

Financial Table 1 – Project Budget Summary	
Item	£
Building construction and external works	11,351,440
Design development	£507,193
Inflation	£559,828
Sub-total	£12,418,461
PCSA fees	£136,420
Design fees	£1,005,380
PM fees (Advance)	£118,555
Statutory fees	£72,988
Surveys	£65,012
Sub-total	£1,398,355
Client contingency	£450,000

Additional FFE / signage allowance	£50,000
Sub-total	£500,000
TOTAL (OBC Culture Hub and Market Place project costs)	£14,316,816
Complimentary Works (Public Toilets and Remembrance Garden Improvements)	£275,000
PM fees (NCC)*	£113,916
TOTAL FUNDING	£14,705,732
<p>The costs do not include VAT. Northumberland County Council is the funding applicant and the asset owner, and is able to reclaim VAT.</p> <p>* This is drawn from the Energising Blyth Future High Streets Fund budget heading in the Capital Programme.</p>	

71. The project was established in the Capital Programme approved in November 2021 by Cabinet to allow eligible capital expenditure to progress the design and development of the project. Since then, a total of £703,444 has been incurred to date on project development e.g. design team, project management and surveys included in the above budget.

Operational costs and income

72. There are no revenue requirements for the main operator (Jam Jar) as the building will be run on a commercial basis. Jam Jar will pay rent to NCC for the building, which is a total of £93,000 over 5 years.
73. The building, as an asset owned by the County Council will be maintained and insured by the council's asset management team as is the case with a number of other culture venues in the county.
74. Maintenance, repair and replacement requirements were set out in the procurement specification developed in liaison with the councils legal and strategic estates teams. This includes details for both the Council as the asset owner and operator as the tenant within the draft lease agreement. The operator has included the allowance for these requirements above allowing for depreciation, repair and replacement of specialist equipment.
75. A final repairs and maintenance agreement will be finalised as part of the stage 4 RIBA process and at this stage are expected to be met by the above rental income proposed by the new operator. The final arrangements will be confirmed in a future progress report linked to the Full Business Case.
76. As noted earlier in the report an allocation of £100,000 from the Cultural Investment Portfolio was agreed by Cabinet in February 2023 and will be used to support a free (to the customer) Creative Play facility within the Culture Hub delivering tangible health and well-being outcomes for the community of Blyth - a key objective of the

project and meeting the council's corporate commitment to this agenda. This provision will be procured later this year.

Financial Table 2 - Creative Play		
Revenue budget allocation (NCC Cultural Investment Portfolio)		
Year	Period	Amount
1 (5 months)	1 Nov 2024 to 31 Mar 2025	£40,000
2 (12 months)	1 Apr 2025 to 31 Mar 2026	£60,000
	Total	£100,000

77. As the funding allocated to the Cultural Investment Portfolio is only currently agreed until March 2026, the allocation for April 2026 to March 2027 cannot be included in the tender documents. Discussions are taking place with key public sector stakeholders to explore match funding opportunities.

Project Funding

78. The breakdown of the proposed funding sources and amounts is set out below.

Financial Table 3 – Project Funding Sources		
Funding source	Capital	Status
FHSF	7,253,198	Confirmed by DLUHC subject to Local Assurance
NCC	7,452,534	Requested revised allocation from the Energising Blyth Programme funds in the Capital Programme
Total	14,705,732	

Financial profile

79. The financial profile overleaf provides a summary of the project budget on an annual basis.

Financial Table 4 - Financial Profile						
Expenditure	21/22 actual	22/23 actual	23/24 forecast	24/25 forecast	25/26 forecast	Total
Capital						
Design fees		504,714	392,997	107,669		1,005,380
PM fees (Advance)	9,656	49,570	37,439	21,890		118,555
PM fees (NCC)		41,916	42,000	30,000		113,916
Stat fees		32,576	36,411	4,001		72,988
Surveys		65,012				65,012
Pre construction services agreement			136,420			136,420
Building works and landscaping			8,673,054	3,372,854	372,553	12,418,461

Contingency			300,000	150,000		450,000
FF&E			50,000			50,000
Complimentary Projects				275,000		275,000
Total	9,656	693,788	9,668,321	3,961,414	372,553	14,705,732

80. The financial profile of anticipated spend and subsequent drawdown from the various funding sources is detailed below.
81. It is requested that the current budget in the Capital Programme is amended to reflect the revised profile below.

Financial Table 5 – Funding Source Annual Profile						
Income	21/22 Actual	22/23 Actual	23/24 Forecast	24/25 Forecast	25/26 Forecast	Total
Capital						
FHSF	9,656	693,788	6,549,754	0	0	7,253,198
NCC	0	0	3,118,567	3,961,414	372,553	7,452,534
Total	9,656	693,788	9,668,321	3,961,414	372,553	14,705,732

Management case

82. NCC are the project lead, with overall responsibility for delivery of the Culture Hub and Market Place project. Advance Northumberland will project manage delivery of the capital project, on behalf of the Council.
83. NCC's Programme Board and the Energising Blyth Town Deal Board will have overall responsibility for the Project. They will provide strategic decision-making and are the formal decision-making bodies for the Project.
84. The Culture Hub Project Board involving representation from key teams within Northumberland County Council, meet on a monthly basis. The Project Board will have overall responsibility for managing the Culture Centre, including reviewing performance against key delivery milestones, spend and output targets, reviewing and updating the programme risk register, identifying any issues or areas of concern, and agreeing any corrective or remedial action to be undertaken. The Project Board will report to, and be accountable to the Councils' Programme Board, and the Town Deal Board.
85. The Project Delivery Team consisting of Advance Northumberland, core consultants, and NCC meets fortnightly. The Design Team meets on a monthly basis, while the Principal Designers (Faulkner Brown) meet weekly with Advance to report on progress. The Project Delivery Team uses established programme control measures and resource management software to support effective project management, reporting, and performance monitoring.

86. A new internal Programme Delivery Group, with representation from Finance, Funding and Programmes, and the Director, has been established to oversee all Energising Blyth projects. The monthly progress and performance report will also be considered by this group, which is responsible for providing project assurance.

Key Milestones

87. The key milestones for the subsequent delivery of the project are set out below. The programme plan will continue to be reviewed and updated on a monthly basis.

Project milestone	Target date
Stage 4 Design and Report	16 May 2023
NCC Approvals (Cabinet)	9 May 2023
Press Release announcing Project Approval, Operator, Contractor and Planning Permission (date tbc)	30 May 2023
Planning Determination	9 Jun 2023
Final Contract Sum	21 Jul 2023
Project Board Approval to award contract (delegated approval from Cabinet)	11 Aug 2023
Full Business Case Submitted	11 Aug 2023
Construction starts on site	7 Oct 2023
Practical completion	4 Oct 2024
Handover	4 Oct 2024
In Use and Defects period	Nov – Dec 2024

IMPLICATIONS

Policy	The project fully supports the NCC Corporate Blyth Town Investment Plan
Finance and value for money	<p>This Cabinet report seeks approval for the updated budget for the project which now stands at £14,705,732. For a capital allocation of £7,452,534, the Council is securing an external investment of £7,253,198. There is a current budget in the Capital Programme of £12,536,685 this report requests approval of £2,169,047 drawn from existing Council funds allocated to the Energising Blyth Programme. The project is funded by HM government Future High Streets Fund and the Council as set out in Financial Tables 3-5.</p> <p>All funding requested is drawn from existing NCC resources for the project which are identified in the Energising Blyth (EB) Programme identified in the Capital Programme.</p>

Legal	<p>The appointment of the Hub operator has been undertaken through a fully compliant procurement process in accordance with the council's recognised procedures. As part of the business case process subsidy control advice is a condition of grant funding for the project. The specialist legal advice on this is being prepared and will be confirmed as part of the full business case approval.</p> <p>The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council.</p>
Procurement	<p>Project spend will be subject to the Council's recognised procurement procedures. Rule 4.9.1(e) of the Council's Finance and Contract Procedure Rules requires Executive approval before commencing procurement of goods or services where the value is over £2 million.</p>
Human Resources	<p>The project is being developed by NCC's Energising Blyth Programme Team within the Economy and Regeneration Service in conjunction with Advance Northumberland as appointed project management service providers and appointed contractors/operator.</p>
Property	<p>The property will be owned by NCC and managed as part of the council portfolio of assets. The costs of maintenance and insurance are anticipated to be met by operator rental income. Once final costs are available as part of the next stage of project development any implications for council property will be considered in detail prior to Full Business Case submission and subject to additional reporting.</p>
Equalities	<p>(Impact Assessment attached)</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A Available on request</p>
Risk Assessment	<p>A risk register is in place for the project which will manage and monitor risk.</p>
Crime & Disorder	<p>This project is part of the proposals in the Energising Blyth Programme which in totality include various measures intended to reduce crime and disorder in Blyth through positive regeneration measures. This project in particular concentrates on addressing community perceptions of the area as being unsafe due to the poor public realm, lack of things to see and do and perceptions about anti-social behaviour and crime. The project is anticipated to have a significant positive impact as a new positive attractor making the area more welcoming and safe as a destination.</p>
Customer Consideration	<p>There has been detailed and regular partner and community consultation during the development of the project. This will continue as detailed designs are developed.</p>
Carbon reduction	<p>The project will contribute towards carbon reduction and clean growth objectives by promoting sustainable modes of transport.</p>
Health and Wellbeing	<p>The Town Investment Plan proposals include an underpinning objective to support the development of an 'Inclusive Town' supporting positive health and wellbeing outcomes through successful town centre regeneration. This project as a whole and particularly through the new Creative Play facilities will make a meaningful contribution to</p>

	improving health and well being for the whole community including young people and families.
Wards	All wards in Blyth

Background papers:

Culture Hub and Market Place Strategic Outline Business Case – May 2022

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Energising Blyth Project Map

Appendix 2 – Culture Hub and Market Place Scheme Boundary

Appendix 3 – Culture Hub and Market Place CGI Visuals

Appendix 4 – Culture Hub Building Diagram

Appendix 5 – Culture Hub and Market Place – Facilities demand summary

Appendix 6 – Culture Hub Building - Design rationale summary

Report sign off

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

	Full Name of Officer
Interim Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Resources and Transformation (S151 Officer)	Jan Willis
Interim Executive Director for Regeneration	Janice Rose
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder for Business	Wojciech Ploszaj

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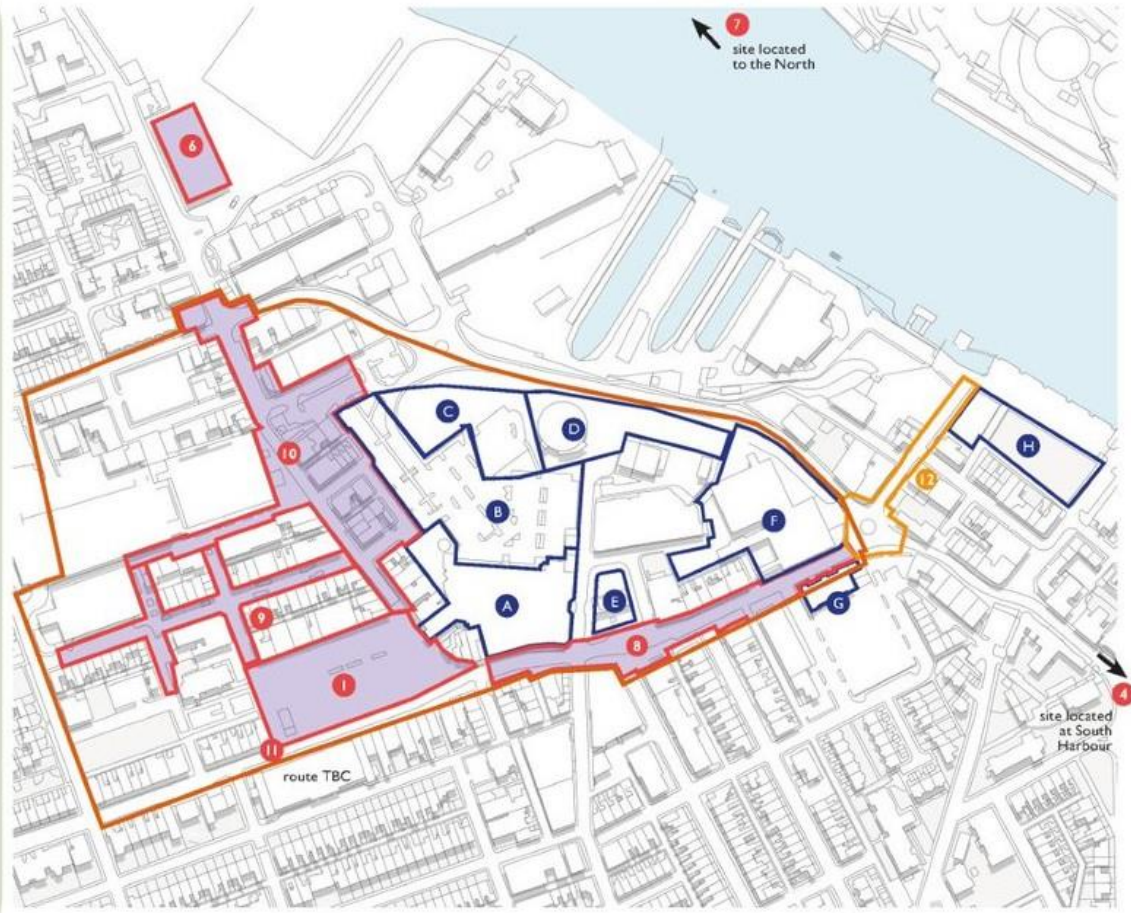
07816 110340

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Appendix 1 – Energising Blyth Programme Project Map

Energising Blyth Town Centre Project Map

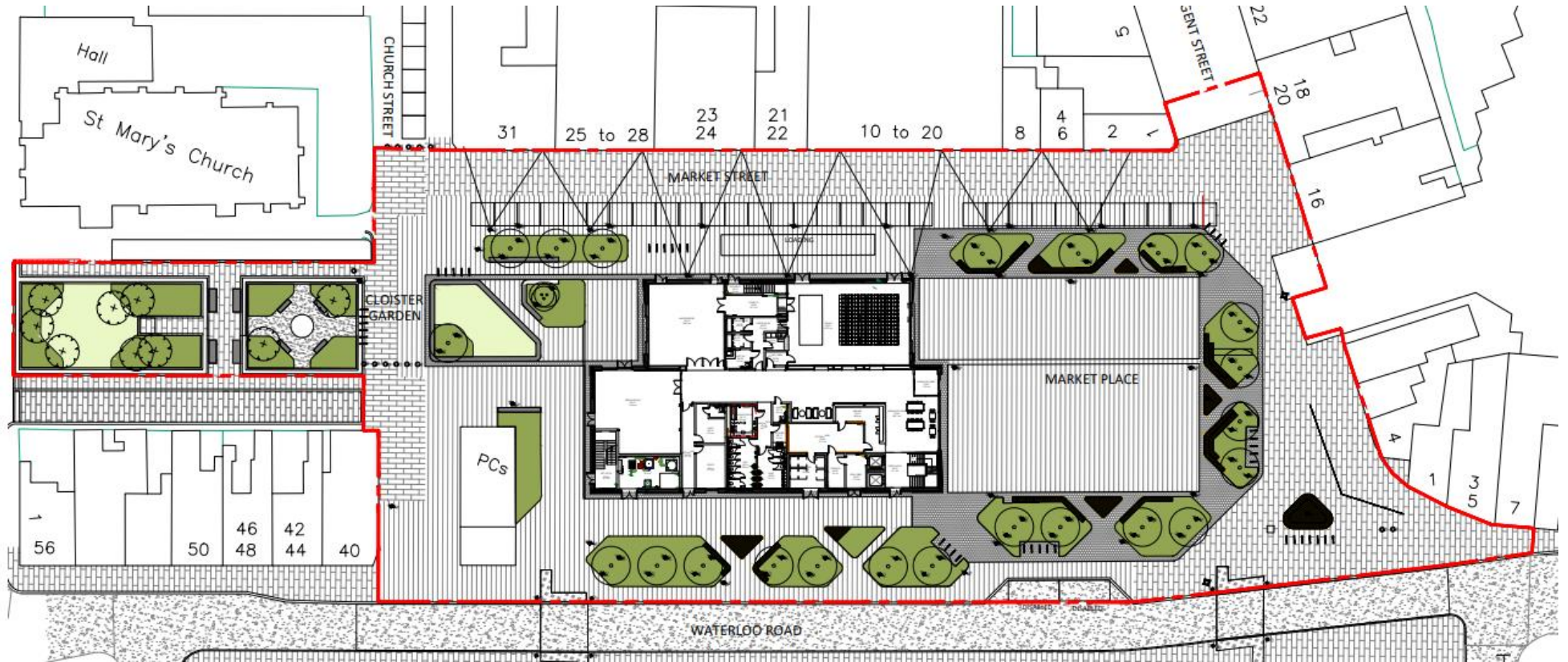
- Energising Blyth Projects**
- 1 Culture Hub and Market Place
 - 2 Culture and Placemaking Programme (across town)
 - 3 Hotel and Restaurant Town Centre Location TBC
 - 4 Energy Central Campus (ECC) Phase 1 (Learning Hub)
 - 5 ECC Phase 2 (Institute) Town Centre Location TBC
 - 6 Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult (OREC) Technology & Subcomponent Innovation Demonstration Centre (T&SIDC)
 - 7 Northumberland Energy Park Infrastructure
 - 8 Bridge Street Improvements (The Link)
 - 9 Bowes St, Church St and Wanley St Improvements (Northern Gateway Phase 1)
 - 10 Regent Street Improvements (Northern Gateway Phase 2)
 - 11 Bebside to Town Centre Walking and Cycling Corridor
- Other Potential Projects**
- 12 Quayside Gateway
- Key Locations**
- A Keel Row Shopping Centre
 - B Keel Row Car Park
 - C NCC Land
 - D Gasometer Site
 - E Arriva Bus Station
 - F Arriva Bus Depot
 - G Richard Stannard House
 - H Dun Cow Quay
- route TBC
- Blyth Town Centre Boundary



Appendix 2 – Culture Hub and Market Place Scheme Boundary

Red Line Boundary

Page 328



Appendix 3 – Culture Hub and Market Place CGI Visuals

Looking West from the Keel Row Shopping Centre

Page 329



View from Waterloo Road looking West



Page 330

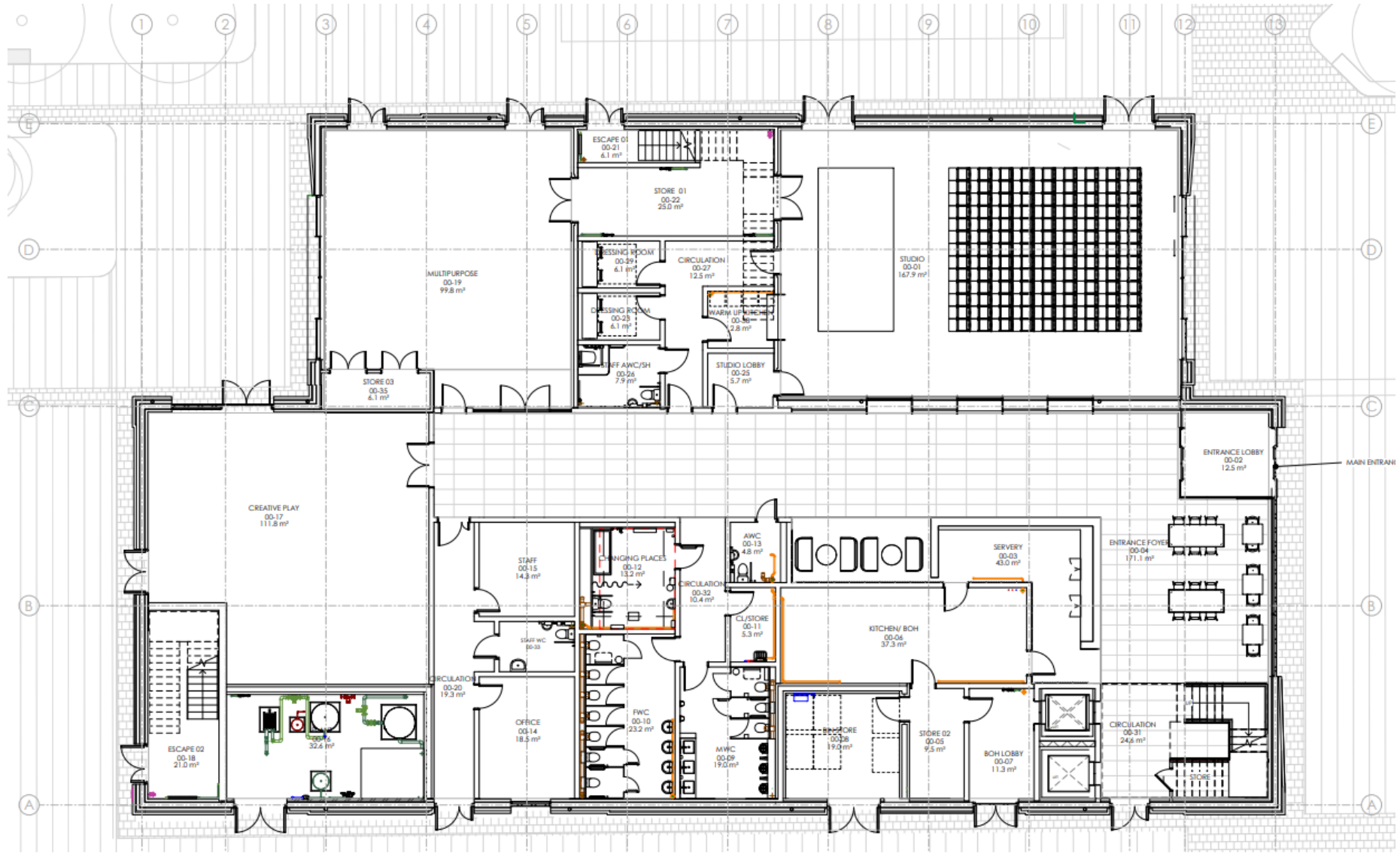
View from St Marys Church looking East



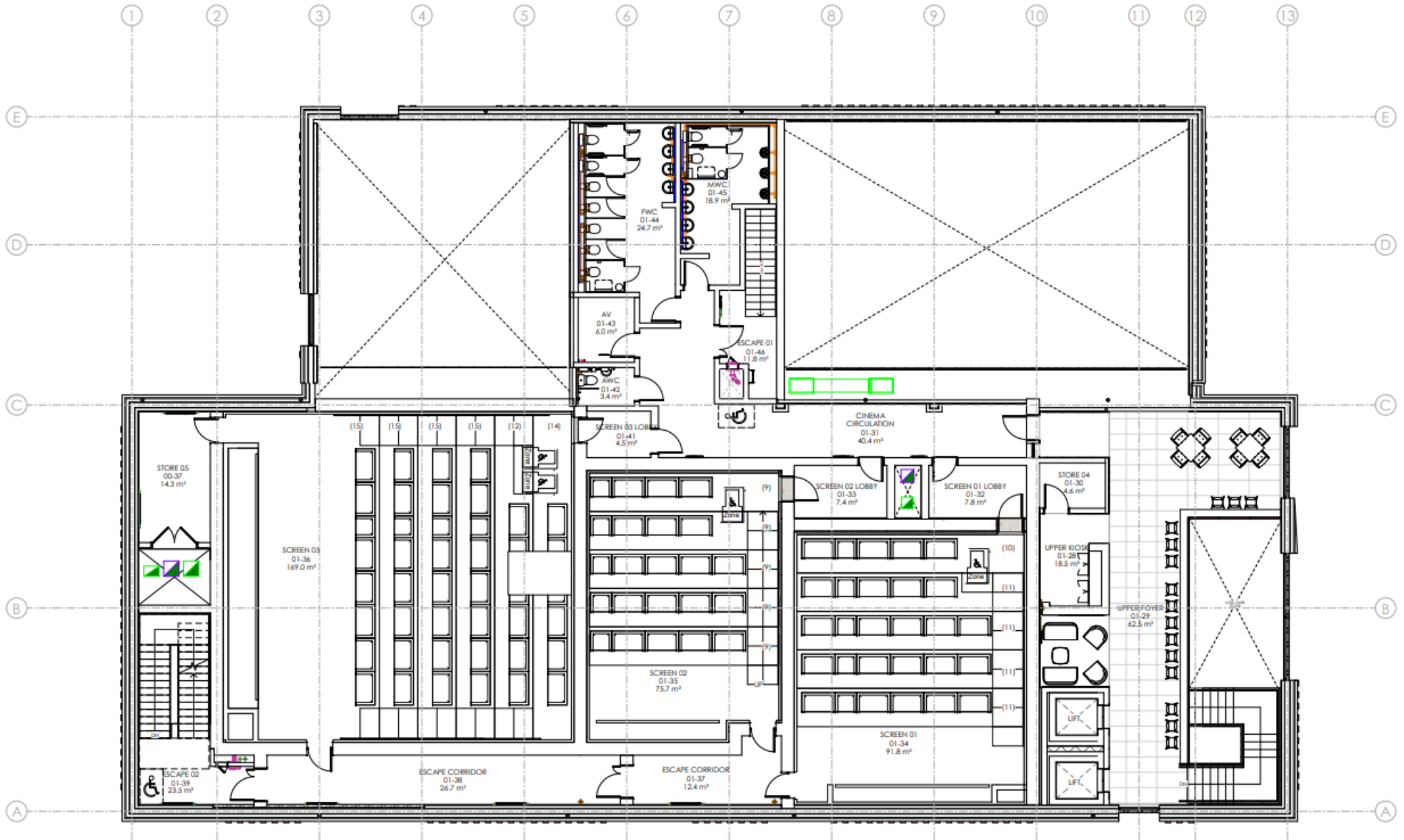
Page 331

Appendix 4 – Culture Hub Building Diagram

Ground Floor



First Floor



Appendix 5: Culture Hub and Market Place – Facilities demand summary

Cinema

- The research for the project, undertaken by specialists in the industry continues to support a distinctive three screen cinema offer in the town centre operating full time with a focus on first day releases, carefully attuned to local demand, providing a comfortable setting at a reasonable price.
- The Culture Hub proposes three fully digital cinema screens in a comfortable setting with capacity to accommodate a total audience of 190 people (90, 55, and 45 seats)
- The above demand identifies market demand for a complimentary offer to the wider market in the area. This includes consideration of the context that there have been no cinemas in Blyth since 2004, and the existence of multiplexes within a reasonable drivetime of the town. Also in 2022, the Phoenix Theatre also added cinema to its existing theatre offer, through a single screen, part time offer providing releases within the existing theatre environment (film releases are a number of weeks following 'first releases' at other cinema venues). This additional provision was introduced following the approval of the Future High Streets Fund bid including the new Hub and cinema provision planned in the town centre.

Studio Space (Performance) and Multi-purpose Space (Arts/health and wellbeing)

- Consultation with stakeholders and secondary market research evidenced a gap in the market for a flexible multipurpose flat floor performance space, capable of seating around 120 people or 200 standing.
- This will provide a much-needed facility for live music, comedy, drama, dance and community celebrations. This facility will be different from spaces currently available in community centres, pubs and bars and The Phoenix Theatre studio space, which all have considerably smaller capacity.
- Further consultation identified the need for an area for health, wellbeing, arts development activities, community events, courses, workshops, and meetings.
- As there are other spaces at this scale available in the town, provision at the Culture Hub will focus on arts/health and arts development functions, rather than extending to more general functions so as not to compete with existing spaces, particularly in community centres.
- The Culture Hub proposes a flat floor performance space, known as the Studio Space able to accommodate around 120 people seated/200 standing, for live music, comedy, drama, dance, and community celebrations. As well as a multi-purpose space suitable for health and wellbeing activities.

Creative and Development Play

- There is a high level of support from stakeholders in Blyth for this type of facility to underpin a family offer. Creative play environments give children opportunities to play

in open-ended and non-prescriptive ways, so children make more of their own decisions about how to play, how to 'lead' the play process and shape the play environment through imaginative interaction.

- Creative play is seen as an effective way of enriching children's lives, particularly in the early years, building confidence, resilience, creativity, positive social connections, and a long-lasting desire to learn, thereby helping to overcome low aspiration levels and barriers to achieving full potential.
- The Culture Hub will have a dedicated area for play activities to build confidence and social skills (through arts, crafts, music, dance, drama) for children and families.
- This provision is a critical element in providing positive health and well being outcomes through the new centre acknowledging and seeking to make a positive impact on the significant health inequalities in Blyth.

Café/Bar Offer

- The performance space and cinema facilities will bring the primary demand for social space and a café/bar food and beverage offer, catering both for event/cinema attenders but also diversifying the commercial café / food offer in the town centre and driving footfall day and evening into the culture centre

Outdoor Space

- Public realm improvements are also essential to create a safe and welcoming environment.
- The planned public realm improvements to the Market Place, include a new outdoor performance space, areas for events and markets, green spaces and improved public realm will create a safe and welcoming environment for both residents and visitors to the town.

Appendix 6 - Culture Hub Building Design Rationale Summary - The following sections detail the design rationale and how the operational requirements have been considered.

- **Building Access** - The main building entrance is situated to the eastern elevation with a lobby and double automatic doors. A lobby has been incorporated into the main entrance which will act as a draft lobby, as Market Place can be windy due to its coastal location. Further entrance/exit points are included on the ground floor; namely, the studio space has a specific 'Get in' point to the northern side of the facility, this is complimented with a one-way vehicular route onto Market Place from Waterloo Road to support deliveries and event set up. Creative Play has its own access onto Market Place, so the offer has the ability to open up and spill out onto the newly landscaped area.
- **Studio Space** - A 168m² Studio is incorporated into the North-eastern side of the building, a blackout feature will be incorporated into this room if certain performances require such setting, whether this be in the form of a moveable partition, blinds or curtains. The space is generously sized for medium scale events by having capacity to seat 120 with tables or 200 standing comfortably. Adjacent to the Studio sits a 21m² storeroom with direct access from both the Studio and Multi-function room. A dressing room to cater 3 persons with a separate accessible shower room is included and a warmup kitchen facing and opening into the Studio to support any catering during events.
- **Multi-purpose Space** - This is situated to the north-western elevation of the building, it has been designed in a way to work well and compliment other aspects of the building such as the Studio Space and Creative play. The room is embedded with flexibility by the means of a folding/ sliding partition so the space could be open to the foyer (allowing a café overspill or a fluid event space) or closed off for private events/hire. The space is double height which whilst is distinctive and attractive, it also provides further flexibility for potential events/hirers. The space commands attractive views across to St Mary's Church and cloister gardens as part of the new public realm which provides additionality to the space and its ability to host combined indoor and outdoor experiences for the cafe and/or events.
- **Creative Play** - Is located to the western side of the building and is generously sized at 110m². It has direct access to the proposed cloister garden and like the Studio, it could open and extend programming onto Market Place. Due to the successful operator having the opportunity to programme this space, the room will remain an empty shell to provide further flexibility of the space.
- **Back of house (BOH) accommodation** - is situated to the southern side of the building, with an aim to contain as much BOH accommodation together as possible. The Servedy, kitchen, store, bin store and office are all incorporated together to provide operational ease.
- **Cinema Screens** - are located on the first floor of the building, one of the projects aspirations is to re-activate Market Place as much as possible by generating increased footfall. Cinemas are often referred to as 'black boxes' therefore, the decision to place the screens on the upper floor allows the buildings ground floor activity to be visible from Market Place, lobbies to the cinema screens are required for two reasons. Firstly,

for fire regulations and secondly, acoustic performance of the space. Having the cinemas on the first floor in a self contained manner, provides the operator with further flexibility of control allowing the whole floor to be closed/locked off during certain periods of the day/week.

- **Lifts and Stairs** - Two lifts (to support unexpected breakdowns) and a main staircase are located at the main entrance towards the eastern side of the building. All visitors regardless of accessibility needs shall therefore arrive at the same point on the first floor. In addition to the main staircase, a further 2 escape stairs have been introduced, one with a disabled refuge point for staff to manage during a fire evacuation.
- **Café, Servery and Kiosk** - It is envisaged the café will have free standing furniture to provide further flexibility. The L shaped servery allows staff to monitor building activity at all parts of the building, supported directly by a kitchen to the south. Further seating and a smaller kiosk are shown on the first floor, to support the cinema offer.
- **WC provision** - A generous WC provision is proposed on both floors.

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Northumberland County Council

CABINET

TUESDAY, 9 MAY 2023

THE FUTURE OF THE BERWICK MUSEUM AND ART COLLECTIONS

Report of: Councillor Jeff Watson, portfolio lead for Healthy Lives

Lead Officer: Janice Rose, Interim Executive Director for Regeneration

Purpose of report

The purpose of the report is to agree the future housing of the Berwick Museum and Art collections in the custodianship of the Council and currently managed by Museums Northumberland within the context of the opportunities and challenges presented by The Living Barracks Initiative.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1. Approve the retention of the Berwick museum and art collections as part of The Living Barracks initiative, subject to further discussions with relevant partners on the issues set out at paragraph 47.**

Link to Corporate Plan

The provision of quality cultural and heritage attractions is a central feature of the Council's strategy to regenerate our towns and countryside. Equally, such facilities are key assets in engaging with residents in an equitable way that helps build self-worth, community cohesion, and collective aspirations. Finally, the appraisal of the alternative options for housing the Berwick collections takes account of the need to maximise value for money.

Key issues

The Berwick Barracks is a significant Grade I listed structure, built in the 18th Century and designed by the famous architect Nicholas Hawksmoor. It is currently home to a number of heritage and cultural attractions, including the Berwick Museum and Art Gallery, each operated by a range of organisations under lease agreements with English Heritage.

Although the buildings are generally secure and watertight, it is recognised that most require fairly significant levels of investment, including service upgrades, to bring them up to a standard that would allow them to be more fully used.

In June 2019, the Berwick Barracks partners appointed Amion Consulting to define a business planning and governance model that would secure the sustainable future of both the Barracks complex and the cultural and heritage attraction showcased within it.

In November 2020, the Amion report advocated the reuse of the Barracks complex for a proposed mix of uses consisting of a dynamic combination of residential units, artists workspaces, affordable offices, an archives and research centre, plus an exciting new heritage and cultural space with new visitor facilities complex known as *The Living Barracks*.

The Amion report also recommended that the governance of the site should be streamlined to allow for a more viable operating model. The proposed model would see a single operator (one of these partners) managing the visitor facilities as well as the artists' workspaces and offices. The combined income from these functions would cover the day to day running costs of the operation.

In July 2021, Museums Northumberland announced that they were withdrawing from the initiative on the basis that the emerging proposals didn't meet the accommodation requirements for the Berwick Museum and Art Gallery. Nonetheless, in August 2021, the residual stakeholders within the Berwick Barracks Partnership launched *The Living Barracks* vision and sought the public's views on the proposals.

Over the past two or so years, good progress has been made in taking forward the culture hub proposals within the *Living Barracks* with an initial sum of almost £5m secured to meet the total anticipated cost of around £12million. With the next funding application to be submitted by December 2023, English Heritage has now requested that, as a matter of urgency, the County Council make a final decision as to whether or not the Berwick collections are to form part of the initiative.

In May 2022, Museums Northumberland commissioned Fourth Street Consulting to undertake a Capital Project Feasibility and Demand Study for the potential of a new Museum & Art Gallery for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

The outcome from this report (produced in October 2022) was to recommend that the creation of a new dedicated museum on the Shoregate site on the town's riverside represented the optimum way forward to realise the potential of the collections and maximise the beneficial impact on the regeneration of the wider town

This report weighs the advantages and disadvantages of these two alternative options to define the future of the Berwick collections within the custodianship of the Council.

BACKGROUND

1. The Berwick Barracks is a significant Grade I listed structure, built in the 18th Century and designed by the famous architect Nicholas Hawksmoor. One of the country's first purpose-built barracks, over the years it has fulfilled a number of important military roles, most recently as the permanent home of the King's Own Scottish Borderers (KOSB) from 1881 until 1963. Today it remains an important landmark in the town, under the stewardship of English Heritage (EH) who are responsible for its operation and maintenance under licence from Historic England.
2. The large site is currently home to a number of heritage and cultural attractions, each operated by a range of organisations under lease agreements with English Heritage, as follows:
 - the Berwick Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG), operated by Museums Northumberland (legally known as the Woodhorn Charitable Trust) on behalf of the County Council in the Clock Block – see Appendix 1 for more information;
 - the King's Own Scottish Borderers (KOSB) regimental museum, operated by the KOSB Association in part of the East Barracks Block;
 - By Beat of Drum exhibition, operated by English Heritage in part of the East Barracks Block; and
 - the Gymnasium Gallery operated by the Maltings (Berwick) Trust in a separate building, adjacent to the East Barracks Block.
3. Ticketing arrangements to the site are complex. The main point of arrival for most visitors is via the original Guard House which is managed by English Heritage. There is an entry charge, which provides access to the Berwick Museum, the KOSB museum and the English Heritage exhibition. English Heritage members get in free. By request however, visitors can also purchase a Museum Membership ticket on site from Museums Northumberland, which gives 12 months unlimited access to the museum, and free access to visitors aged 16 and under. Serving members of the Armed Forces and KOSB Association members are given free access to the KOSB Museum. Access to the Gymnasium Gallery is outside the pay barrier and is free to visitors.
4. Throughout the year, the site hosts a number of events on the central parade ground and in the buildings, some of which are organised by the site partners, others by third parties. Some events are free, others are paid. Visitor facilities are limited and include shops at each of the museums and at the entrance and visitor toilets which are in need in improvement. There are no visitor catering facilities. A significant number of spaces within the site are currently unoccupied including the West Barrack Block and the Mess Room. Other parts of the site are used for storage including the Mobilisation Store.
5. Although the buildings are generally secure and watertight, it is recognised that

most require fairly significant levels of investment, including service upgrades, to bring them up to a standard that would allow them to be more fully used.

6. But as for many large heritage sites, finding a financially viable model that not only covers day to day operating costs but also generates a surplus for the long term protection of the buildings, has proved challenging.
7. On this basis, from around 2016, the partners at the Barracks started to work together to identify a sustainable future for the site. This culminated in 2019 with the appointment, supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, of Amion Consulting to define a business planning and governance model that would secure the sustainable future of both the Barracks complex and the cultural and heritage attraction showcased within it.
8. The scope of the brief also included assessing the feasibility of the Berwick Record Office (BRO), owned and managed by the Council, relocating into the building – see Appendix 2 for more background.
9. Amion were tasked with providing a number of outputs, as follows:
 - a governance and management strategy for the site to include: a governance assessment and report; an MOU or similar agreement for partners; an Action Plan for implementation; and a training and mentoring plan;
 - a financial options appraisal which identifies a viable operating model to include: a market appraisal (supply and demand); a reassessment of the options previously considered; identification of additional options and including the Records Office; financial modelling of these options; and a recommended preferred option; and
 - development of a vision for the site which will underpin the future development and act as a unifying structure for partners. The vision should set out the key parameters by which the partners will work together and operate on the site in the future.
10. Within this context, it's worth emphasising that the County Council is a key partner within Berwick Barracks. The Council has a direct interest through its funding relationship with Museums Northumberland and the Maltings Trust and its need to find a more accessible and sustainable home for the BRO. It also clearly retains a wider interest in the economic success of the town. The importance of tourism and culture are referenced within the Northumberland Economic Strategy and the role that Berwick plays within the County's future is fully recognised.

Collections Review

11. Simultaneous to the Amion commission, the Berwick Barracks partners also commissioned the National Conservation Service (NCS) to review the collections held within the Barracks complex. The NCS was tasked with:

- assessing the current status of collection management for each of the heritage bodies
 - developing a series of recommendations to enable joint working around collections management and access between the four bodies, as well as recommended improvements in collections management by each body
 - describing the heritage value of the collections and presenting a suggested model of interpretative themes to communicate that value, to include guidance and recommendations on developing a coherent public offer
12. The NCS reported their findings in November 2019. The full Executive Summary of the report is reproduced at Appendix 3, and it highlighted a number of salient points as follows:
- The combined collections provide an unrivalled historical record of Berwick-upon-Tweed that are fundamental to understanding the town's past. They are unique, extensive and irreplaceable.
 - The collections complement each other in many ways, providing diverse and comparative perspectives of the past which enhance each other e.g., personal and official, civilian and military, conflict and collaboration.
 - Individually, however, the partners' collections can only provide a limited public offer because they are specialist (KOSBM), lack robust coherence (BMAG and English Heritage) or are challenging to display (BRO).
 - Consequently, there is significant potential for providing a single heritage offer which will benefit the public, the partners and the collections.
 - It would be mutually beneficial for the partners to combine their collection management and public access provision.
 - The partners are recommended to develop a combined display facility at the Ravensdowne Barracks and a single storage facility, whilst also creating a joint public research room, single reception point and shared spaces for collection management and for general office space
 - The combined public heritage offer should be located at the Ravensdowne Barracks as it provides a striking backdrop and supports the interpretation of the KOSB museum collections.
 - However, the chosen accommodation will need refurbishing to bring it up to professional heritage standards for display and access.
13. In addition, NCS looked across the collections of all the partners to assess their historic value and to develop an initial suite of interpretive themes. From this, it was concluded that all the collections have strengths and weaknesses. However, taken together the depth, range and engagement value of the combined collections is significant and greater than any one partner's collections can provide on their own.

14. From this, it was recommended that the collections could be interpreted through three interdependent themes that would provide the basis for engaging and revealing engagement. On this basis, the recommended target audiences for the partners should be families, tourists and repeat local visitors.

**Proposed Interpretive themes for the collections
National Conservation Society**

A landscape without borders

- Berwick-upon-Tweed disregards the border 4km away but being a town on a border is an integral part of its unique nature and history
- Berwick-upon-Tweed had great military and strategic importance which shaped its physicality and psychology
- Despite being south of the Border, Berwick-upon-Tweed has strong Northern links e.g. The Burrell collection in Glasgow and KOSB in Edinburgh
- Berwick-upon-Tweed derives its sense of place from its people, from the land and from the sea
 - Industry in Berwick-upon-Tweed and its hinterland
 - Trade with the wider region and abroad, particularly Europe

The experience of being a meeting place

- Because of its politically sensitive location and its natural resources Berwick-upon-Tweed has always drawn people to its locality.
- The reasons for meeting in Berwick-upon-Tweed reflect both local and national historical trends – the growth of the fishing industry, the coming of the railways, the expansion and shifts in international trade, the ebb and flow of military personnel with international events.

A culture of not conforming

- Berwick-upon-Tweed is a resilient community that has survived and coalesced by ignoring external norms and creating its own customs and understanding
- The people of Berwick-upon-Tweed and the region have a clear identity that stands apart any sense of nationality
- Non-conformity is threaded through both the formal and informal life of the area including its governance and religion
- Berwickers have a great pride in their town and its place in the world

The Living Barracks Initiative

15. Unfortunately, the Amion study was delayed by several months due to the impact of the Covid pandemic. The final report was presented in October 2020.
16. The preferred option for the reuse of the complex – known as *The Living Barracks* – proposed a mix of uses consisting of a dynamic combination of residential units,

artists workspaces, affordable offices, an archives and research centre, plus an exciting new heritage and cultural space with new visitor facilities. It was cited that these uses would bring diverse and year-round footfall to the site – and just as importantly, attract a mix of capital funding which will allow essential repairs and maintenance to be undertaken. They would also provide a sustainable revenue model for the future.

17. The Amion report also recommended that the governance of the site should be streamlined to allow for a more viable operating model. The Berwick visitor market is very small and the current situation, with four not-for-profit partners operating on the site, is unsustainable. The proposed model would see a single operator (one of these partners) managing the visitor facilities as well as the artists' workspaces and offices. The combined income from these functions would cover the day to day running costs of the operation. A realistic financial model has been developed, based on an achievable number of visits and space occupation.
18. At this juncture, Outland Architects concluded their design schemes which sought to translate the indicative layout illustrated at Appendix 4 into accurate architectural drawings that could clearly define the scale of the operational spaces. These incorporated a new element with the introduction of a substantial and attractive new flexible exhibition and gallery space with new education and community facilities. This proposed 'infill' space would connect the proposed heritage visitor area in O and A block with the Gymnasium gallery, and significantly increases the flexibility for more diverse and dynamic programming.
19. In order to help inform the subsequent decision-making process, architectural drawings were produced for three variations on the preferred option. These were:
 - Option 1 – mixed use of heritage, culture & community
 - Option 2 – additional residential
 - Option 3 – less residential incorporating Clock Block museum
20. In light of these alternatives, Amion Consulting produced, in November 2020, an addendum to their original report entitled "Additional Options Financial Modelling". This concluded that there were some specific potential benefits and risks to each. These are detailed at Appendix 5.
21. Having taken on board and carefully considered all of the above information, the Berwick Barracks Partnership was minded to approve the preferred option 1. However, in finalising the Vision for public consultation and the associated Memorandum of Understanding to formalise the partnership arrangements, MN announced, in July 2021, that they were withdrawing from the initiative on the basis that the emerging proposals didn't meet the accommodation requirements for the Berwick Museum and Art Gallery
22. In August 2021, the residual stakeholders within the Berwick Barracks Partnership

launched *The Living Barracks* vision and sought the public's views on the proposals set out above. It can be accessed [here](#).

23. Over the past two or so years, good progress has been made in taking forward the culture hub proposals which are anticipated to cost a total of around £12million. In March 2022, a grant of £4.2m was secured from the Cultural Development Fund to fund the initial phase of works, and in November 2022, a further £476,000 of Stage 1 development funding was secured from the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF). It is anticipated that this allocation will unlock a further significant Stage 2 bid to NHLF to implement the next phase of the hub.
24. Both these funding applications are currently predicated on the inclusion of the Berwick collections (including the Burrell collection), as forming part of the culture hub within the Berwick Barracks.
25. However, English Heritage has now requested that, as a matter of urgency, the County Council make a final decision as to whether or not the Berwick collections are to form part of the *Living Barracks* initiative.
26. The urgency of this request relates to the deadline for the submission of the Stage 2 bid to NHLF by December 2023. A full Activity Plan for the museum space needs to be included as part of that submission, having also been subject to public consultation and engagement. This Plan will subsequently inform the design the allocation and functionality of the gallery spaces across the refurbished Eastern block.
27. The inclusion or not of the Berwick collections obviously has a material impact on physical capacity, spatial mapping, and on associated environmental and security systems. Equally, incorporating the collections will have an impact on project and ongoing costs relating to the development of additional stores and the requirement for curatorial expertise management. Any such costs need to be included as part of the Stage 2 application process. Essentially, a continued lack of clarity around the Berwick collections brings significant risk to that process and will constrain our ability to deliver a convincing stage II submission.

The alternative approach being advocated by Museums Northumberland (MN)

28. In May 2022, MN commissioned Fourth Street Consulting to undertake a Capital Project Feasibility and Demand Study for the potential of a new Museum & Art Gallery for Berwick-upon-Tweed.
29. The purpose of the commission was to develop detailed project options informed by a robust evidence base, exploring potential offers and facilities, demonstrating potential demand, and describing how it could be implemented and operated in practice. The identification of a preferred option in the Study would provide a suitable starting point to form the basis of a subsequent capital project design and

development process.

30. Fourth Street Consulting presented their report in October 2022. It set out an initial appraisal of a short list of potential site options against the filters of fit with project objectives, finance (capital and revenue), and risk.
31. The definition of the project objectives of the project were informed by stakeholder discussions, the review of relevant policy and strategy documents, and a market appraisal. They sought to ensure that Berwick Museum & Art Gallery can play a material role in local economic development and cultural placemaking.

**Objectives of Berwick Museum and Art Gallery
Fourth Street Consulting**

Reimagined Cultural Offer

- Raise Berwick's profile and position it as an international cultural hub through an iconic, exciting, and accessible attraction
- Advance placemaking and tourism aspirations, attracting visitors with imaginative and engaging collections, exhibitions, and events
- Further unveil collections, including the Burrell Collection, to further develop existing partnerships and create new opportunities
- Create an all rounded and resilient attraction, by diversifying income streams and creating a new asset for the town

Champion Berwick's Stories

- Share and develop Northumberland's stories past, present and future
- Work with the community, showcasing their lives and voices through cultural co-creation
- Tell relevant stories, creating broader, more inclusive narratives

Enrich Our Berwick Communities

- Increase access to high quality cultural provision for residents
- Work inclusively, raising aspirations, confidence, and skills attainment for all
- Foster a supportive and attractive environment for creative and cultural practitioners
- Improve health and wellbeing and support NCC's 2030 carbon neutral aspiration through sustainable development

32. The potential site options fell into three broad groupings as follows:
 - Options within Berwick Barracks
 - Refurbishment of an existing building
 - Land acquisition and new build

33. The Executive Summary of the Options Appraisal is reproduced at Appendix 6 with Fourth Street reaching the following conclusions and recommendations:
- Staying within Berwick Barracks is highly problematic
 - Relocation has significant capital cost and funding implications
 - Preference must be given to options that can have a transformational impact on Berwick
 - A choice between the Cowe Building and the Shoregate site
 - Preference for the Shoregate option
34. The MN Board have subsequently endorsed this recommendation and are keen to seek development funding from the NHLF to progress the next steps detailed by Fourth Street. The MN Board fully acknowledge that the development of a dedicated museum is a medium-term proposition and as such have provisionally identified 2031 as a target opening date.

Weighing the options

35. Over the past couple of years, the County Council has continued to maintain a dialogue with all the partners involved in directing managing the cultural and heritage assets referenced in this report.
36. Recognising that the timeline for deciding the future home of the Berwick collections within its custodianship was drawing nearer, the Council facilitated, in March 2023, a discussion between representatives from English Heritage and MN, together with colleagues from Arts Council England in their role as maintaining museum accreditation standards.
37. The aim of this discussion was to try and triangulate the preferred different approaches to see if there was any scope for a shared approach to emerge. To this end the discussion focused on two particular issues.
38. The first was to explore the challenges previously cited by MN in housing of the Berwick Collection within the Living Barracks Culture Hub, namely:
- Space requirements
 - Visibility
 - Accessibility
 - Exhibition complementarity
 - Exhibition and storage of sensitive objects
 - Income generation
 - Site management arrangements
39. From this discussion, it became increasingly clear that solutions to each of these challenges could be satisfactorily addressed if there was a willingness from all parties to work through them and negotiate mutually acceptable ways forward. However, given the chain of events over the past two or three years, it has to be

acknowledged that working relationships are now such, that this may not be possible.

40. Even if it was, the one notable exception to this is the extent of the available gallery space. The Living Barracks initiative will provide a total **net** exhibition space (for all the collections) of 719m² plus a further 117m² of storage with MN maintaining that approximately 1,200 m² is needed to accommodate their various collections, storage, activities and events (i.e. **gross** space) to optimise BMAG's potential.
41. Obviously addressing this space differential can be met in different ways, particularly through the creative use of permanent/temporary exhibitions, including the use of other buildings within the town as appropriate for the latter. In addition, all of the studies undertaken in relation to The Living Barracks Initiative have recommended the need for additional storage either in a bespoke unit on site or by customising a building elsewhere in the town.
42. Nonetheless, the one residual issue of concern within this, given its unique nature, is the level of prominence and permanent space that will be given to the Burrell collection within the culture hub facility proposed for the Barracks.
43. The second salient challenge that was discussed was the plans for the housing of the Berwick Collections managed by MN in the period from 2024 to 2031 once they move out of the Clock Block to make way for the proposed residential development.
44. In this regard, there doesn't appear to be a clear strategy. The collections would be decanted to another property within the town centre, preferably with a shop frontage on the ground floor to maintain some form of visibility. Essentially, however, the inference was that the bulk of the artefacts would be held in storage with limited public access other than through temporary exhibitions or loans to other venues. This approach would, if applied over several years, seriously jeopardise the retention of the current accredited museum status.
45. The tables below summarise the advantages and disadvantages of each of the options.

Option 1: Remain within the Berwick Barracks	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reuses a landmark heritage building in the centre of town• Creates an integrated and all-year round culture hub that provides a unified museum, art and archive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Available museum space is smaller than that currently afforded within the Barracks complex• Insufficient storage space within the East Block to house all the collections

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> offer to the public, plus a new civic space Provides economies of scale in relation to shared infrastructure – single operator, toilets, café, office space, etc Has a strong business case which has already secured external funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges in exhibiting / storing sensitive artefacts to minimise / negate carbon footprint Reduced visibility from the street Museum accreditation would need to be renewed to reflect the new arrangements
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Option 2: Establish a standalone BMAG	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction of a purpose-built museum facility that meets all the space and storage requirements for the collections Building would be designed to minimise / negate carbon footprint Proposed site has high profile location on the banks of the River Tweed Retention of museum accreditation (subject to temporary housing solution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary housing of the collections until the new facility is open Splits the museum, arts and archives offer to the public over two locations in a small market town No business case as to whether the new facility would be sustainable – and would render the Berwick Barracks hub less viable Sourcing the capital funds for the scheme Proposed site is challenging to access for both pedestrians and vehicles

46. Within all of this, it should also be noted that the two options are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The proposed culture hub within the Barracks, depending on its success, could subsequently justify the development of a second, linked facility in the town to provide more permanent gallery space. Such a phased approach would reap all the benefits of better aligning the collections in upgraded and more accessible spaces, whilst embedding an integrated operating model that brings economies of scale to the effective running of such a facility. This would provide a sustainable foundation for progressive expansion of the culture hub approach to other buildings and sites in the town as required.

47. Given all of the above, it is recommended that the Council advise English Heritage of their intent to seek the retention of the Berwick collections within the Barracks complex as part of the Living Barracks initiative. This will be subject to further discussions over the coming months to:

- achieve the appropriate balance across the collections as to the material on permanent display, whilst recognising the scope for temporary exhibitions both on site and in other locations
- provide increased storage space for the collections, that can also afford the appropriate protection for sensitive artefacts
- further develop the operating model to ensure the collections and the wider hub facility are managed appropriately, including the retention of museum accreditation

IMPLICATIONS

Policy	The provision of quality cultural and heritage attractions is a central feature of the Council's strategy to regenerate our towns and countryside.
Finance and value for money	Whilst there are no direct financial implications associated with this report, the assessment of the alternative options for housing the collections have included value for money, extent of business planning, and extent of capital funding secured.
Legal	The operational arrangement between the Council and Museums Northumberland is managed via Service Level Agreement which is renewed on an annual rolling basis. The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council.
Procurement	n/a
Human Resources	n/a
Property	None of the buildings or sites put forward as alternative options for the housing of the Berwick collections are currently owned or managed by the Council.
Equalities	(Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Quality cultural and heritage attractions represent key assets in engaging with residents in an equitable way that helps build self-worth, community cohesion, and collective aspirations.
Risk Assessment	Further dialogue is required with the stakeholders involved to mitigate the risks associated with availability of museum gallery space, storage capacity, and the operation of the culture hub.

Crime & Disorder	n/a
Customer Consideration	n/a
Carbon reduction	Regardless of which option is pursued, the care and management of the Berwick collections will be undertaken in a way that minimises carbon impacts.
Health and Wellbeing	Quality cultural and heritage attractions represent key assets in engaging with residents in an equitable way that helps build self-worth, community cohesion, and collective aspirations.
Wards	Berwick East, Berwick North, and Berwick West with Ord

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Background information on the Berwick Museum and Art Gallery
- Appendix 2: Background information to the Berwick Records Office (BRO)
- Appendix 3: The Berwick Barracks Collection Review – Executive Summary of the National Collections Service’s report, November 2019
- Appendix 4: Berwick Barracks preferred option, proposed by Amion Consulting, October 2020
- Appendix 5: Summary of Additional Options Financial Modelling, Amion Consulting, November 2020
- Appendix 6: Executive Summary of the Options Appraisal for BMAG, Fourth Street Consulting, October 2022

Background papers

- Service Level Agreement for the provision of a museum service for the county of Northumberland, October 2018
- Collection review of the historic collections at Berwick Barracks, National Conservation Service, November 2019
- Berwick Barracks Design Options Appraisal Report, Outland Architects, November 2020
- Berwick Barracks Business Planning and Governance, Amion Consulting, November 2020, as supplemented with Additional Options Financial Modelling addendum
- Berwick Museum and Art Gallery Option Appraisal, Fourth Street Consulting, October 2022

Report sign off

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

	Full Name of Officer
Interim Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Resources and Transformation (S151 Officer)	Jan Willis
Interim Executive Director for Regeneration	Janice Rose
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Appendix 1:

Background information on the Berwick Museum and Art Gallery

1. Museums Northumberland (MN) is the public name for the Woodhorn Charitable Trust an independent charity which provides the Council's museums service in accordance with a Service Level Agreement (SLA) signed in October 2018.
2. This SLA prescribes that MN shall present a compelling and coordinated 'story of Northumberland' through the following museum facilities:
 - Woodhorn Museum
 - The Morpeth Chantry Bagpipe Museum
 - Berwick Museum and Art Gallery
 - Hexham Old Gaol, Hexham Moot Hall, and the House of Correction
3. The SLA also prescribes the Services to be delivered from each of these sites. The relevant extract relating to the Berwick Museum and Art Gallery is reproduced below.

BERWICK MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY (BMAG)

Location: The Clock Block, Ravensdowne Barracks, Berwick upon Tweed

Description: The museum is located within the English Heritage pay-zone. It has a number of displays and exhibition galleries as well as a small shop area and an education space.

Collections: Comprise the Burrell Collection of international fine art; decorative art; arms and armour; Egyptology; local history; costume; natural history; social history; archaeology; fine art and palaeontology.

Specific responsibilities:

- Provide a museum and visitor attraction utilising the Collection and other on-loan collections
- Deliver a varied and changing programme of events, workshops and education sessions
- Market and promote the Site to a wide and diverse audience by all appropriate channels
- Provide an effective and adaptable social media presence
- Deliver outreach activity
- Maintain the UK accreditation standard for museums

4. With regard to its collections, the BMAG inventory covers over 7,600 items. Ranging from fine art (c.230 items), arms and armour (115), and banknotes and coins (710) to mixed social and other historical items (approximately 2900 items listed) and includes quantities of library and archival materials. The library materials comprise about 130 linear metres of mostly 19th century published works (books and pamphlets), with plan chest drawers of drawings, plans, maps, prints and some

watercolours and some boxes of ships plans and photographs. In the main, the collections at BMAG relate to Berwick-upon-Tweed and its hinterland. In addition, archives are held on the upper floor where the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club manages 3,000 books relating to Berwick's rich local and natural history.

5. The collections include the eclectic Burrell Collection of fine art and porcelain which was gifted to the town in 1940 by Sir William Burrell. He lived (and died) at nearby Hutton Castle in the Scottish Borders hence his close association with the town. Burrell believed that access to art and culture enhanced one's life, and through his collections he hoped to impact as many people as possible. The collection contains items of both local and global significance and as such is regarded as one of the most important in public hands in the North of England. Unfortunately, however, the vast majority is currently in storage due to the lack of exhibition space.
6. The museum is open for half of the year (April to October, Wednesday to Sunday). Visitor numbers have been fluctuating (with a general downwards trend) over a number of years with August and September in 2020 the busiest months with 2,700 visitors each month on average. According to visitor surveys, 84% of visitors visited for the first time and just 4% had visited within the last 12 months and 12% visited over a year ago - highlighting the need to increase repeat visits. Generally, people visited to learn something, it was important to their identity or to spend time with friends and family. Based on audience data, visitors were mostly white, able bodied and female (aged between 45 – 64 whilst 43% of visitors came from the North East, followed by a quarter travelling from outside of England (most likely Scotland).

Appendix 2: Background information to the Berwick Records Office (BRO)

1. The Berwick Record Office (BRO) owned and managed by the County Council has a statutory duty to collect and appropriately care for specific categories of public records i.e., records relating to central government bodies which have a direct relevance to the locality e.g., court records. As such, the BRO has the status of a Place of Deposit having been approved by The National Archives as a suitable custodian of public records.
2. The archive contains extensive material about the town and borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed, with a strong continuity of records from the fifteenth century to the modern day, although its oldest record dates from AD 1290. This collection extends to approximately 650 linear metres of boxed paper and parchment documents and folders of records; ledgers and registers, maps and plans and some large quantities of plastic and glass negatives (approximately 260 boxes and file folders). BRO is still collecting, including contemporary records to ensure the on-going continuity of its collections.
3. These collections are currently held in a warehouse on the outskirts of the town with public access facilitated through a search room located within Berwick Library. This facility does not provide a secure physical environment and can only open when the archivist is present two days a week. This approach is not adequate and as such the BRO has to demonstrate by 2025 to The National Archives that there have been material improvements to its accommodation to retain its Place of Deposit status and fully meet the National Archive Service Accreditation standard.

**Appendix 3:
The Berwick Barracks Collection Review
Executive Summary of the National Collections Service's report, November 2019**

The collections

The combined collections of Berwick Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG), Berwick Record Office (BRO), English Heritage (EH) and the King's Own Scottish Borders' Museum (KOSBM) provide an unrivalled historical record of Berwick-upon-Tweed. They are fundamental to understanding the town's past. They are unique, extensive and irreplaceable.

The combined collections have wide-ranging heritage value. For example, they chart the history of the area and its people, provide an untapped narrative of the Ravensdowne Barracks, include rare and unique items, support individual and community identity, provide immense potential for partnership working, and are an informational and economic asset for the region

The collections complement each other in many ways, providing diverse and comparative perspectives of the past which enhance each other e.g. personal and official, civilian and military, conflict and collaboration. The extensive range of media underpins this diversity. Furthermore, individually the partners' collections can only provide a limited public offer because they are specialist (KOSBM), lack robust coherence (BMAG and EH) or are challenging to display (BRO). Consequently, there is significant potential for providing a single heritage offer which will benefit the public, the partners and the collections.

Collections management

It would be mutually beneficial for the partners to combine their collection management and public access provision. Uniting activities would promote the sustainability of all the partners' collections by driving economies of scale, significantly expanding the potential public offer, sharing skills and knowledge and creating a larger, clearly identifiable unified heritage presence in Berwick-upon-Tweed.

The partners each face their own versions of serious long-standing issues around collections management and access. These include insufficient and inappropriate accommodation for storage, public access and collections management work; cataloguing backlogs which impede access and collections management; small numbers of staff restricting activity and in-house skills; very limited or no conservation budgets; restricted funding. There are also emerging challenges notably around managing digital media and succession planning for knowledgeable staff and volunteers.

All the partners subscribe to professional standards and museums or archive Accreditation. They have a shared aspiration to radically improve their collections management and access.

The partners are recommended to undertake the following with respect to developing shared accommodation:

- Develop a single storage facility to professional heritage standards by the conversion either of the Mob Store at the Barracks site or through conversion of an industrial unit

Develop a combined display facility at the Ravensdowne Barracks which meets professional heritage standards

- Create a joint public research room and single reception point
- Create shared spaces for collection management and for general office space

The partners can also work on joint projects independently of the capital works to embed partnership regardless of the outcome of the Barracks development. However, these projects would support the Barracks development by providing vital experience of joint working, informing the capital works, and enabling preparation for a combined public offer from the Barracks. It is recommended that the partners undertake the following:

- A full scale assessment of the conservation needs of all the partners' collections
- Coordinate collecting activity by aligning policies and operating a joint collections development committee
- Joint cataloguing and collecting management funding bids
- Online collection access through a single portal
- A combined volunteer cohort
- A joint 'Friends' organisation

The individual partners should also work on a range of collection management improvements within their individual operations.

Audience development

The combined public heritage offer should be located at the Ravensdowne Barracks as it provides a striking backdrop and supports the interpretation of the KOSBM collections. It will also provide the opportunity to engage the public in the history of the Barracks through the collections. This will enable English Heritage to fulfil its remit to increase public understanding of the site's story. However, the chosen accommodation will need refurbishing to bring it up to professional heritage standards for display and access.

The heritage value of the collections can be interpreted through three interdependent themes: a landscape without borders; being a meeting place; a culture of not conforming.

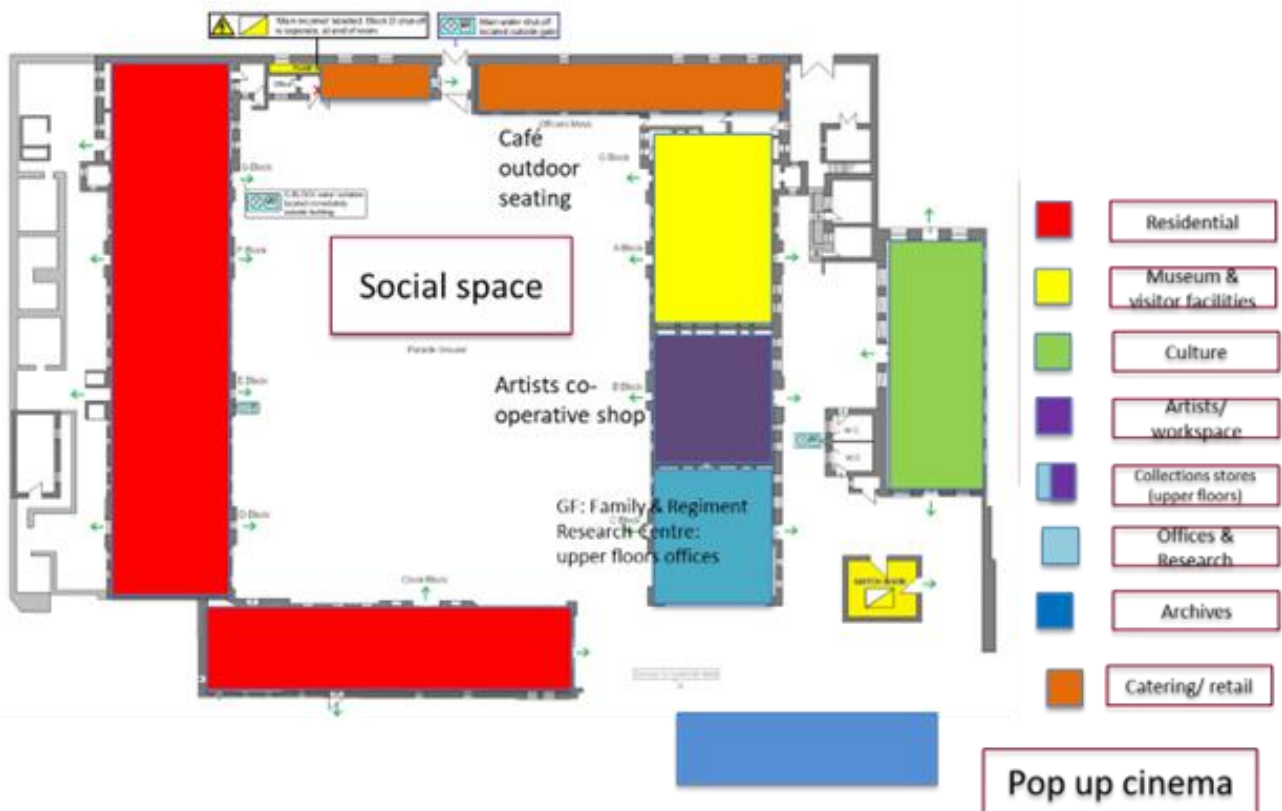
These themes provide the basis for engaging and revealing engagement. The target audiences for the partners should be families, tourists and repeat local visitors. They should be engaged through a mixed offering including permanent and changing exhibitions, outreach (both onsite and offsite), and events onsite delivered by others (e.g. re-enactment, food fairs). The offer should seek to diversify visitation patterns and include an active approach to local community engagement. However, audience development will require an increase in the partners' capacity through joint working, seeking out new partners and additional funding.

**Appendix 4:
Berwick Barracks preferred option, proposed by Amion Consulting, October 2020**

The core elements of the scheme include:

- The redevelopment of the West Barracks and the Clock Block into striking residential units, which will provide additional and much needed housing in the town
- Transformation of O and A blocks (in the East Barracks) into a stunning new visitor centre which showcases the buildings and provides permanent and temporary displays which will include the much loved KOSB collections as well as parts of the town’s BMAG collections; Improvements to the Gymnasium gallery to allow it to host a more diverse programme of exhibitions, year round
- New and affordable artists workspaces and an artists’ collective shop in B block (East Barracks)
- Meanwhile and permanent offices for site partners and tenants in C block (East Barracks); Relocation of the BRO archives into the Mob Store with a new family research centre on the ground floor of C block
- A new café in the Officers Mess, catering for visitors, workers and residents on the site;
- A shared public space in the dramatic parade ground.

The indicative proposed layout is reproduced below.



Appendix 5
Summary of Additional Options Financial Modelling
Amion Consulting, November 2020

As the AMION study was drawing to a conclusion and a preferred option had been identified, Outland Architects were commissioned to produce some designs for the site, primarily focusing on the preferred option. They were also asked to consider the design implications for two further options, should the preferred option prove not to be deliverable, as follows:

- Option 1: Mixed use of heritage, culture & community – The preferred option is a mixed use scheme which would include heritage, culture, workspace, community and residential uses with visitor and community facilities.
- Option 2: Additional Residential – This option essentially replaces the artists spaces and offices with additional residential conversion in B and C blocks in the Eastern Barrack
- Option 3: Less residential incorporating Clock Block museum – This option allows Museums Northumberland to remain in the Clock Block on a market rent with residential use limited to the Western Barrack

As a result of this, Amion Consulting was commissioned to assess the financial implications of these three options. The subsequent short report sits as an addendum to the main report.

Available Museum Space

The first and third options create a differential in the extent of the museum space that would be available as outlined in the tables below.

Option 1	East Terrace	Clock Block	Total
	m ²		
Gallery and flexible exhibition space	719	0	719
Ancillary uses (reception/shop/toilets/meeting space)	87	0	87
Arrival and circulation space	172	0	172
Total	978	0	978
Storage (in Block C of Eastern Barracks)	117	0	117
Option 2 (The Clock Block capacity is equivalent to the existing space currently occupied by BMAG)	East Terrace	Clock Block	Total
	m ²		
Gallery and flexible exhibition space	719	436	1155
Ancillary uses (reception/shop/toilets/meeting space)	87	92	179
Arrival and circulation space	172	108	280
Total	978	636	1614
Storage (in Block C of Eastern Barracks)	117	170	287

Benefits and Risks Assessment

Amion Consulting concluded that there were some specific potential benefits and risks to each option, as follows:

- Option 1 (preferred mixed use of heritage, culture & community) will deliver a greater level of benefit to the town overall, generating higher visitor numbers and creating a new artists community with attractive new office spaces and local community facilities. It is likely to be more attractive to some funders on this basis. It does however require the greatest amount of non-residential capital funding to be found (at £3.7m). This mixed use proposition may also be more appealing to companies considering the café and retail leases. Perhaps most importantly, the proposition 'hangs together' well with the broad mix of heritage, cultural and community uses with the potential for the artists' community to contribute to a changing public programme.
- Option 2 (additional residential) will place less of a management burden on the operator without the need to secure and maintain the artists and office tenants in particular. There is also a smaller revenue risk with lower income expectations and lower operating costs. It may however be less attractive to both funders and the local community since it offers less to the community and less opportunity for dynamic programming. The additional residential space may make the opportunity more attractive to a developer, although it may be too fragmented to work as a residential scheme, with some residential use effectively sandwiched between visitor uses. This will need to be tested with potential developers. The option also has the lowest capital cost overall and requires the least non-residential capital to be found. Finding capital to support the redevelopment of the heritage and cultural uses is likely to prove challenging, certainly in the short to medium term when funds are diverted towards Covid recovery. But although the amount of capital required, at £1.7m, is lower than for the other options, a substantial amount still needs to be found. Arguably it may prove easier to secure £3.7m for option 1 than £1.7m for this option, since option 1 will deliver a wider range of benefits and a greater number of jobs and GVA.
- Option 3 (less residential incorporating Clock Block lease) could potentially be delivered if partners do not ultimately agree to the shared management proposal. It is questionable however if the residential opportunity will be appealing to a developer without the Clock Block. This would need to be tested. It is equally uncertain whether MN will be able to raise the capital required to refurbish the Clock Block to an acceptable standard of presentation. This option would also require the KOSB to make its own management arrangements long term. It is highly unlikely, for a number of reasons, that this option would appeal to potential funders. This option provides little in terms of a creative and forward-thinking approach to future governance. It continues to require that the partners work largely as they do now, with four separate organisations operating with limited resources from the site. It provides limited opportunity to significantly improve the experience and no opportunity to reduce duplication and waste in operating costs. On many levels it presents an unappealing option to both partners and potential funders.

Appendix 6

Executive Summary of the Options Appraisal for BMAG

Fourth Street Consulting, October 2022

The purpose of this report is to identify and test site and location options for Berwick Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG).

This study is as an opportunity to reconsider – from first principles – the material role that Berwick Museum & Art Gallery can play in local economic development and cultural place-making. Our work considers the need to exhibit and interpret the Museum & Art Gallery's significant collections more effectively – unleashing the latent potential of the Burrell, as well as opportunities to make a transformational impact on the town.

From a long list of potential site options, we identified a short list for more detailed consideration. These options fall into three broad groupings:

1. Options within Berwick Barracks
 - a. Do Nothing (Baseline)
 - b. Do Minimum ('Living Barracks' redevelopment project)
2. Refurbishment of an existing building
 - a. The Cowe Building
3. Land acquisition and new build
 - a. Shoregate
 - b. Walkergate
 - c. Castle Site

Each of these options was assessed in detail across the following filters:

1. Fit with client objectives
2. Finance (capital and revenue)
3. Risk

The body of this report describes these analyses in detail.

In summary, however, we reached the following conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions are reinforced by the extensive consultation that we have carried out with key stakeholders in Berwick – some unattributed quotes from these consultations are included below.

1. **Staying within Berwick Barracks is highly problematic.**

The existing premises are too small, with weak visibility, inadequate environmental standards, poor accessibility, and very limited opportunities for income generation. To literally 'do nothing' is, in any event, a purely theoretical option as the Barracks as a whole is in the process of wholesale transformation. The prescriptions of the *Living Barracks* project ('Do Minimum') unfortunately do little to improve accessibility, visibility, income or environmental conditions, while reducing rather than growing the amount of space available for exhibition, storage and learning. In short, we have not identified an option *within* the Barracks that advances – in any material way – any of the client's objectives.

“It’s inaccessible and unsuitable for a modern museum - Berwick deserves a high quality museum considering its history”

“The Museum is hidden away and inaccessible – especially for older and disabled visitors.”

“The Museum and Gallery is operating as a small town generalist museum and could perform better”

2. Relocation has significant capital cost and funding implications.

Accepting that there is no practicable solution within the Barracks suggests that the collections must relocate. This has important implications for capital costs and capital funding. Site acquisition, new build development and/or major refurbishment all require a major capital outlay. It could also be argued that – in the current funding climate – the ‘concentration’ of funding at a single site (i.e. the Barracks) is preferable to the ‘fragmentation’ of funding across multiple sites.

“Funders look at the concentration of different funding streams in a location – it’s very competitive.”

3. Preference must be given to options that can have a transformational impact on Berwick.

It follows from (2), above, that any relocation option must justify the additional cost, risk and the rationale for investment across multiple sites. In our view, this is only possible where the option does *more* than simply address the spatial and operational constraints of the Museum & Art Gallery – it must also be capable of making a transformational impact on Berwick (as a place to live in, a tourist destination, and a place in which to work and invest). This is not only important for demonstrating strong value for money, but also opens new potential funding opportunities (e.g. future rounds of Levelling Up or other economic regeneration funds). Two of the remaining options – Walkergate and the Castle Site – do not meet this criterion. While attractive options for a new museum, it is difficult to see how these options could be catalysts for a wider and more substantive economic impact.

“The waterfront is an under-used asset.”

“A lack of joined up thinking will reduce the impact of any investment.”

4. A choice between the Cowe Building and the Shoregate site.

This leaves two meaningful options: refurbishment of the Cowe Building on Bridge Street and a part-refurb / part-new build of the Shoregate site. These represent very different opportunities, but they both have merits. They both represent an opportunity to use a high-quality cultural anchor to effectively ‘fix’ a part of Berwick town centre that exhibits some form of market failure. The Cowe Building has been vacant for an extended period and is now blighting what is an otherwise attractive street. There is ample precedent for converting this type of characterful historic building into a new museum. Likewise, the Shoregate site represents an opportunity to make a major contribution to an active and attractive waterfront as both an amenity for residents and a destination for visitors. Here too, it is common for cultural anchors to serve as the catalyst for new waterfront developments.

“The quayside (Shoregate) is an obvious place in need of redevelopment, especially considering the derelict Grade II Customs Watch House”

“...a strategic location, ripe for development”

5. Preference for the Shoregate option.

On balance, we recommend the Shoregate site as the preferred option for relocating Berwick Museum & Art Gallery. While the Cowe Building option has merit, its redevelopment as a museum is complicated by its structure and location. A constrained site and significant level changes make for a complex project to deliver the levels of accessibility, vertical circulation and health and safety standards that modern museums require. By contrast, the opportunity to create an active waterfront at the Shoregate site is extraordinary:

- a. Like many post-industrial towns that evolved around a 'working' river, Berwick effectively turns its back to the water.
- b. Faced with similar circumstances, many if not most towns have taken steps to 'reclaim' their riverfronts for residents and visitors. Active riverfronts have time and again been shown to contribute to destination development, economic regeneration, and – importantly – health and wellbeing (notably by encouraging active travel and improving people's enjoyment of the outdoors). It is also not uncommon for these new riverfront destinations to be anchored by cultural destinations. In our view, this represents an important untapped opportunity in Berwick that could be accelerated through the development of a new museum and art gallery at Shoregate.
- c. The site is available and likely, affordable. A private investor – keen to see this type of culture-led waterfront destination – has obtained an option to acquire the site at a fixed price and has confirmed his willingness to work in tandem with the Trust on its development.
- d. Lastly, it represents an opportunity to refurbish a set of at-risk buildings of arguably greater heritage significance than the Cowe Building.

“Excellent location as it reconnects the town to its history and river...”

“An attractive gateway location and a strategic site for the town.”

Next Steps

If the recommendation is accepted, then we anticipate the following as immediate 'next steps':

1. Consideration of temporary decant or relocation options to de-couple the Museum and Art Gallery from ongoing development of the Living Barracks project
2. Site investigations and valuations required to inform the possible acquisition of the site
3. Ongoing liaison with potential partners in any wider waterfront regeneration project
4. A masterplan for Berwick waterfront and preliminary design options for its cultural anchors
5. Detailed business planning for the proposed new museum
6. Capital funding strategy



Northumberland County Council

CABINET

Date: 9 May 2023

The Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund 2023/24

Report of Councillor Wendy Pattison, Portfolio Holder for Adult Wellbeing

Executive Director: Neil Bradley – Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing

Purpose of report

The report makes proposals for the allocation in 2023/24 of a Government grant for adult social care. Urgent approval of a broad approach to the use of this grant is required to comply with a grant condition requiring submission of proposals by 24 May.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended:

- 1. To approve the proposed uses of the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) in 2023/24 set out in this report, and the resulting commitments in subsequent years, which it is anticipated can be funded through the increased MSIF grant in 2024/25 and will be covered in later years either by continuation of this grant or by consolidation of the funding into the general local government financial settlement;**
- 2. To authorise the Executive Director – Adults, Ageing and Well-Being, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adult Well-being, to make detailed decisions about the allocation of this grant, within the broad framework set out in this report, taking account of further consultations with care providers and any other relevant information which becomes available.**

Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

Tackling inequalities

The recommendations aim to address current issues which prevent the Council from arranging care and support needed by disabled people in a timely way. They will also increase the incomes and status of care workers who are currently low paid.

Encouraging growth

Grant expenditure will be on locally-based services whose workers are likely to live in Northumberland

Best Value

The proposed approach is designed to ensure that maximum benefits for people in need of care and support are achieved from the grant funding.

Key issues

1. The MSIF is a Government grant of £3.563m in 2023/24, which is expected to increase to £5.357m in 2024/25 if the basis of allocation between local authorities remains the same, though only the total national value of the grant in that year has so far been announced. It is funding which was initially included in national spending plans to support the adult social care charging reforms that were scheduled to be introduced from October 2023, but which has now been made available to help local authorities meet current pressures, following the decision to defer the charging reforms.
2. The main purpose of the grant is to enable local authorities to make tangible improvements to adult social care, in particular to increase social care capacity in three ways: reducing social care waiting times, increasing fee rates, and increasing workforce capacity and retention. One of the conditions attached to the grant was a requirement to submit a return to the Department of Health and Social Care by 24 May, indicating at least in broad terms how the local authority intends to use the funding.
3. Part of the grant (£1.027m) is specifically intended to cover the costs of continuation of fee increases introduced from a previous grant paid in 2022/23. The £620K full-year cost of the scheme introduced last autumn to fund improved mileage payments to home care workers will be charged against that element.
4. Plans for the use of the new element of the grant must include selecting at least one of the three areas of improvement listed in the statement of its purpose as a specific target, which the Council will be required to report progress against. Since the three objectives are intertwined, the recommended approach is to identify as the target for reporting purposes increases to fees, which are the simplest indicator to measure, though the purpose of these increases will be to reduce waiting lists and waiting times, in particular by increasing workforce capacity.
5. While all adult social care services are currently experiencing some significant pressures, by far the most concerning current problem with the capacity of services is in home care, with the number of people waiting for a service which they have been assessed as needing having been at an unprecedentedly high level since the summer of 2021. While this may in part be attributable to the specific circumstances of the period since the Covid pandemic, it also represents an abrupt acceleration of a longer-term trend.
6. Home care providers report that measures previously adopted by the council have had some positive impact on recruitment and retention of care workers, particularly during

periods when early introduction of increased rates of pay has created for a period a substantial margin above the National Living Wage. There has also recently been a modest reduction in the number of people waiting for a home care service, which appears to be attributable in part to changes in immigration regulations which have made it easier to recruit care workers from overseas. However it appears unlikely that current capacity problems can be resolved without a substantial further initiative to make working in home care more attractive. The MSIF provides an opportunity to launch such an initiative, and it is recommended that £2.0m of the 2023/24 grant is allocated to support that.

7. Of this sum, it is recommended that £1.5m is allocated to support an immediate increase in the minimum sum paid to home care workers, over and above the increase previously agreed, to a level of £12.00 per hour, to be introduced from 1 July 2023, establishing a differential above the “Real Living Wage” rate available to care workers in all services in Northumberland whose providers have signed up to the Council’s Wage Support Scheme, and that a further £500K is provisionally allocated to fund the introduction of a “Northumberland Home Care Worker Guarantee” to be implemented from 1 October 2023, details of which will be developed in consultation with home care providers. Assuming that both elements of the scheme are carried forward pro-rata into 2024/5, additional costs in that year would be of the order of £1m, out of expected additional grant of £1.794m.
8. Evidence from the “fair cost of care” survey carried out in 2022 suggests that the proportion of the costs of care homes for older people which is linked to energy prices is significantly above the weighting for these used in the general inflation index provided for in the contract, and that there may also be some pressures from cost increases for food and inflation which are not reflected in the index used in the contract. The scale of any funding to meet these pressures is a matter of judgement, with significant variations between care homes, and some forecasts suggesting that energy costs may fall later this year. Long-term changes to the inflation mechanisms in the contract are not recommended until consultations have taken place about the new three-year contract due to begin in April 2024, but in the meantime it is recommended that MSIF grant be used to fund a one-year increase of 1.5% to the fees paid to care homes in Northumberland, at an estimated cost of £770K, over and above the inflation increase already provided for in the Council’s budget, backdated to 1 April 2023.
9. Fee increases funded through the MSIF are also expected in most local authority areas outside Northumberland, and in line with standard practice the Council will match these for older people from Northumberland placed in care homes outside the County. A pro-rata allocation of £75K to the commissioning budget is recommended to fund this cost.
10. Finally, it is recommended that a contingency sum of £98K be held back initially to address any further cost pressures experienced by providers during what may be another unpredictable year. In the worst case, this could include emergency assistance to a provider at risk of closure because of short-term financial pressures, though this would be relevant only in extreme circumstances. The Council’s current contract with care homes for older people includes specific provisions about emergency assistance.

The Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund 2023/24

BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Cabinet has received previous reports discussing the serious problems which commissioned adult social care service providers have faced in the period since the end of Covid-related restrictions in the summer of 2021.
- 1.2 The primary issue has been difficulties faced by many providers in recruiting and retaining care workers and some other categories of staff such as nurses. This is part of a wider issue about labour shortages affecting many sectors of the economy, though there were also some particular issues in the care sector, including the effect on care providers of expanded opportunities to work for NHS organisations at a time when the NHS is aiming to increase capacity to catch up with the treatment backlog in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- 1.3 There are also some specific issues about the impact of rising costs, with evidence that the standard inflation formula used in the Council's contract does not fully reflect the impact, particularly on care homes for older people, of some cost pressures, including increased energy costs as a result of the war in Ukraine.
- 1.4 One area of uncertainty is whether there is still a need to consider the potential impact of the adult social care charging reforms announced by the Government in 2021. There is some reason to think that if those reforms, which have now been deferred to October 2025 instead of the previous state of October 2023, would require some further changes to the fees that the council pays to care homes for older people, because of the complicated potential impacts of the proposed changes on the relationship between public sector fees and those paid by private care home residents. Our initial analysis suggests that there might be a particular issue about care homes in rural areas where the local population may be sufficient to sustain only one home, and which currently accommodate a mix of publicly funded and private residents.
- 1.5 Our understanding is that the "fair cost of care" survey of care home costs which local authorities were required to carry out in 2022 was designed to assess the potential increase in average fee levels which might be made necessary by the charging reforms. Officers' view is that the design of that survey made it difficult to draw any clear conclusions about what that impact might be, and which care homes might be most affected. It has been argued by some care home providers that the survey provides evidence that there should be a general increase in fees even in the absence of the charging reforms, but as previous reports have explained, officers' assessment is that the evidence about that is unclear.
- 1.6 DHSC guidance on the use of the MSIF does not clearly address the question of whether the grant funding is intended to support preparations for an October 2025 implementation of the charging reforms. Since the funding that was intended to pay

for the direct costs of those reforms has been reallocated to provide more general support for the care sector through the MSIF, it seems reasonable to await further guidance before using the grant funding specifically to prepare for judging reform implementation, and to work on the basis that the main issue is now the capacity of care services to meet needs within the existing statutory framework.

2. Support for home care

2.1 In discussions with providers about the reasons for their continuing difficulties with recruitment and retention, a number of issues have repeatedly been raised, which appear consistent with information from other sources:

- a) While the increases in wage levels for care workers which the Council has funded have been welcome and helpful, their effect has largely been to enable home care providers to avoid falling further behind pay rates for comparable work in other sectors rather than to make working in home care positively financially attractive.
- b) At a time when care services are competing for a limited number of available workers, home care providers are at a disadvantage because the work they are offering is less predictable in its time commitments and may not offer a reliable income if paid work reduces unpredictably when a service user does not need support (for instance because they are in hospital). Some providers told us they are increasingly employing people on a shift basis, to make care workers' hours and income more predictable, though there is a tension between this and the unpredictability of people's care and support needs. Some workers do positively prefer not to have a fixed schedule, but others are attracted away from home care by alternative work which can offer that.

The case for consistency between care providers

2.2 The simplest way to provide additional financial support to care providers would be to increase the rate paid per planned hour of care, and leave it up to each provider to decide how best to use the funding to recruit and retain more workers. However we have been told by some home care providers that there are disadvantages to that approach:

- a) Some providers have told us that in their experience care workers have been easily attracted to alternative home care services which appear to offer slightly better rates of pay, and that comparisons are not always easy for care workers to make because headline rates of pay don't always reflect the actual pay level for total hours worked – for instance differences in how pay for travel time is calculated may more than offset differences in the advertised rate per hour spent actually providing care.
- b) It has also been put to us that the overall home care workforce suffers if some people's first experience of working in home care is a negative one – for instance because they are repeatedly asked to take on more work than they can comfortably manage, or have frequent disruptive changes to their schedule at short notice. After experiences of this kind, it has been suggested, people are

unlikely to consider working in home care again.

- c) Some providers think that the support that has been offered by the Council is not widely enough known about, and that home care would benefit from a Council-sponsored campaign giving a consistent message about the improved terms now available to home care workers, which might attract back into the sector some people who have left it.

- 2.3 At a meeting on 21 April attended by managers from 22 home care providers, almost all of those present supported a suggestion that the Council should, in consultation with providers, develop a set of standards for agencies in Northumberland employing home care workers, and an assurance scheme for monitoring that the standards are being met. Providers could be required to sign up to this scheme as a condition for some of the additional grant funding, and the standards could be described as a guarantee to care workers which could form the basis of a publicity campaign about how home care work has changed and its status has improved.

The proposed approach

- 2.4 The proposed page is in two stages:

- a) With effect from 1 July, additional funding specifically for visit-based home care, increasing the rate paid for planned hours in return for a commitment to further increase the wages paid to home care workers from the Real Living Wage rate currently set at £10.90 per hour to a new rate of £12 per hour. This would establish a differential compared to the statutory National Living Wage of over £1.50 per hour. A differential on that scale was being paid between December and March this year, supported through grant funding from the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund, and we have been told that during that period there was perceived to be a significant increase in the number of people applying to work in home care, which reduced from 1 April when the differential returned to a lower level (currently the Real Living Wage rate is 48p per hour above the National Living Wage).
- b) A set of standards for employers of home care workers within Northumberland would be developed in consultation with home care providers, with the aim of implementing it from 1 October. The expectation would be that this would include some commitments, for instance about greater stability of income and possibly pay increases for staff continuing in the role for more than a specified period, which would give rise to additional costs for providers. It is proposed to allocate a provisional sum of £500K in the current year (£1.0m in a full year) to meet these additional costs. Assurance arrangements would be introduced at the same time, and there would be a publicity campaign to bring the new standards to the attention of existing and potential future care workers.

3. Care homes for older people

- 3.1 As explained above, the “fair cost care” survey carried out in 2022 because of a national requirement did not produce clear evidence of a gap between average

current Council fees paid to care homes for older people and the median figures from the survey returns for care home costs during 2021/22, though the design of the survey and the nature of the returns received left room for different interpretations of some elements of the calculation. However the information collected did support the view that the inflation index currently used in the Council's contract is likely to be understating the cost increases which providers are facing because of increases in energy, food and insurance costs, though these may be partly offset by lower increases in some other costs.

- 3.2 The Council contracts with care homes for older people on the basis of three-year contracts, and the current contract is due to end at the end of March 2024. For that reason, and because the issues involved are complex and call for careful consultation with all affected providers, it is not suggested that a revised inflation index be introduced before the start of the new contract in 2024. However the MSIF provides an opportunity to introduce a one-year increase to the fees paid to care homes for older people during 2023/24, in recognition of the likelihood that many homes are facing some financial pressure because of the specific balance of costs which they incur. An increase of 1.5% is proposed. There would be no guarantee that this increase would continue after March 2024, or that if an increase was agreed from April 2024 it would be on the same basis, but the manner in which inflation increases are calculated would be one of the issues on which care home operators would be consulted during the period leading up to the new three-year contract.
- 3.3 A specific concern raised by care homes is that it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain nurses to make it possible to provide nursing care. Within Northumberland and elsewhere in the region some care homes which formerly provided nursing care have ceased to do so. At the same time, for reasons which are not entirely clear, there has been a reduction in the number of people assessed by the NHS as needing nursing care in care homes.
- 3.4 This is not primarily an issue for local authorities, which are prohibited by law from paying for care which has to be delivered by a registered nurse. However it clearly affects the ability of the local authority to make arrangements for older people with complex needs, and to support the local NHS where people require nursing home care after they leave hospital. Officers are in ongoing discussion with the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board about this issue, and will review during discussions about the new contract whether there are any measures which the local authority could take within the legal limits to its responsibilities.

4. Contingency funding

- 4.1 Unlike the grant funding made available in 2022/23 to support the care market, the MSIF is not limited to supporting fee increases in home care services and care homes for older people. However these two sectors still appear to be those in most need of additional financial support, and the proposals above would allocate most of the grant to them. However it is proposed to allocate part of the grant to a contingency fund available for use to address any concerning issues which may develop during the year affecting any care service. This could potentially include

support for services whose sustainability is at risk because of short-term financial pressures.

- 4.2 One potential use of this funding may be to increase the premium currently paid to care homes for older people in Northumberland to recognise the additional staffing resources required if they agree to accommodate older residents with dementia whose condition causes them to behave in ways which create serious risks to themselves, other residents, or staff. It may alternatively be possible to fund this using a separate grant to support discharges from hospital, since residents in this category can be some of the most difficult to find suitable accommodation for after an episode of hospital treatment. However the Government's expectations for the use of that grant have not yet been fully clarified.

5. Summary

- 5.1 The table below summarises the proposed allocation of the 2023/24 MSIF, and the projected full year costs to be charged against the increased grant expected to be available in 2024/25.

	Sector	Current year cost	Additional full-year cost
Mileage support scheme*	Home care	£620K	-
Increase to Wage Support Scheme hourly rate to £12.00*	Home care	£1,500K	£500K
Guaranteed standards scheme for home care workers	Home care	£500K	£500K
One-year fee increase of 1.5%	Care homes for older people	£770K	-
Fee increases for out of area placements	Any	£75k	Unknown
Contingency	Any	£98K	
Totals		£3,563K	£1,000K

* The grant conditions specify that at least £1.027m of the grant "must be used to continue to support the progress local authorities and providers have already made in 2022-23 on increasing fee rates to move towards paying a fair cost of care", explaining this as meaning that it must be used "to maintain fee uplifts originally made as part of the 2022/23 Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund". Accompanying guidance says that "This should be achieved through sustained fee rate increases as opposed to non-recurrent fee uplifts". There are some difficulties in interpreting how these expectations are expected to be met in Northumberland, since more than half of the 2022/23 grant was used to fund temporary enhancements to fees during the second half of that year (which the conditions for that grant appeared to

permit). However the Mileage Support Scheme introduced for home care was identified as a long-term change to fees, and its full-year effect therefore clearly complies with the grant conditions and guidance. Since the recommended increase in the Wage Support Scheme hourly rate for home care is intended to be a sustained fee rate increase, it is suggested that the most reasonable way to apply the guidance and conditions to the situation in Northumberland is to regard that as making up the remainder of the expenditure on maintaining 2022/23 fee increases.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

<p>Policy</p>	<p>The MSIF consists of funding which was originally announced as support for the Government’s charging reform policy; its revised purpose is a more basic one of ensuring that care services are sustainably funded and have sufficient capacity to meet assess needs.</p>
<p>Finance and value for money</p>	<p>All commitments proposed in this report can be met within the Council’s allocation of MSIF funding for 2023/24, and their full year effects can be met within any likely allocation of the grant for 2024/25, with a comfortable margin. The assumption has been made that equivalent funding will continue to be available in subsequent years.</p>
<p>Legal</p>	<p>Section 5 of the Care Act (2014) sets out duties on local authorities to facilitate a diverse, sustainable high quality market for their whole local population, including those who pay for their own care and to promote efficient and effective operation of the adult care and support market as a whole. Alongside this, the Council has a critical role in local market shaping to encourage quality, choice and sufficiency of provision.</p> <p>The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council</p>
<p>Procurement</p>	<p>The proposals in this report would be implemented through variations to the Council’s existing contracts for home care and for care homes for older people, both of which are open to any qualified provider.</p>

Human Resources	Some additional staffing capacity may be to implement the proposed assurance arrangements for the treatment of home care workers. This will be assessed as details of the arrangements are developed.
Property	No implications have been identified
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	The proposals are designed to increase the capacity of care services to meet the assessed needs of people with a disability or illness. They are expected to have positive consequences for disabled people; other impacts linked to protected characteristics are more difficult to assess, though we know that the home care workforce is disproportionately female. A full impact assessment would not be expected to identify significant further issues.
Risk Assessment	A full risk assessment is not required.
Crime & Disorder	No implications have been identified
Customer Considerations	Current capacity issues in home care are leading to a situation in which a substantial number of people with care and support needs, and their families, partners or other carers, are having to put up with unsatisfactory support arrangements which they would not have chosen.
Carbon reduction	Discussions with care home providers about future contractual arrangements will include consideration of the scope for improved insulation or other measures which will reduce carbon costs. However in the short-term higher energy costs are an unavoidable cost pressure because of the needs of older people who require care home accommodation
Health and wellbeing	Ensuring that care services have sufficient capacity to meet needs is important both for the health and well-being of service users and the efficient use of hospitals.
Wards	All

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no background documents for this report within the meaning of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

Report sign off.

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

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Executive Director	Neil Bradley
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson
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