



Northumberland County Council

CABINET

Date: 10 May 2022

PROPOSALS FOR THE COQUET PARTNERSHIP

Report of Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services -
Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member for Children's Services – Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson

Purpose of report

The Council has approved the allocation of £25.5m of capital investment in schools in the Coquet Partnership. Before committing such investment to relevant school capital projects, Council officers have met with school leaders collectively and individually in the partnership to discuss what structure of organisation of schools would be, in their view, the most effective in improving outcomes for pupils in all phases and for the long-term sustainability of the partnership.

This report sets out the findings of these meetings, and as a result of feedback received by each of the Governing Bodies of the Coquet Partnership schools to the Council, Cabinet is recommended to approve a six-week consultation on proposals for a 2-tier structure in the Coquet Partnership with effect from 13 May 2022.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1) Approve the initiation of a 6-week preconsultation from 11 May to 29 June 2022 on proposals for a 2-tier model of school organisation in the Coquet Partnership.
- 2) Note that should Cabinet approve Recommendation 1, the following elements of education in the area would also be included in the consultation:
 - a. The SEND offer for pupils in the Coquet Partnership area;
 - b. The Early Years offer in the Coquet Partnership area;

- 3) Note the feedback received during the informal meetings with the schools in the Coquet Partnership at para. 14-19, setting out their request and rationale for the Council to initiate consultation on a proposal for a 2-tier, primary/secondary structure in the Coquet Partnership.
- 4) Note the draft proposed models of school organisation suggested as the basis for consultation.
- 5) Note that £25.5m has been proposed in the medium-term plan for investment in schools in the Coquet partnership, including for the replacement or refurbishment of the buildings of James Calvert Spence College (JCSC) at Acklington Road site.
- 6) Note should Cabinet approve the initiation of informal consultation, the outcomes presented to Cabinet may include a recommendation to permit the publication of statutory proposals for relevant schools in the Coquet Partnership.

Link to Corporate Plan

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.'

Key issues

1. In 2016, Cabinet approved the allocation of funding towards replacement or refurbishment of JCSC buildings, while in 2022 the capital allocation in the Medium term Plan was increased to £25.5m towards the improvement of school buildings in the Coquet partnership as a whole.
2. In the same way as for other partnerships, Cabinet will want assurance that any capital investment made in school buildings in the Coquet Partnership is spent on an organisational school structure that supports viable and sustainable schools at all phases of education, leading to the enrollment of the majority of children living in the Coquet at their local schools, in line with the Council's objectives.
3. Following on from the Council's decision to allocate capital funding to Coquet Partnership and communications initially received from all first schools and James Calvert Spence College in 2019 in relation to organisational structure, Council Officers met with the headteachers and Chairs of Governors on several occasions, both at full partnership level and as individual schools, to determine high level views in January to March this year. A summary of the outcomes of feedback on those meetings is set out in paras. 14-9. Overall, the feedback received from the majority of schools clearly pointed to the desire to carry out a consultation on proposals for schools to be organised within a 2-tier structure.
4. It is therefore, recommended that Cabinet should approve a 6-week informal consultation, taking place within term-time between 11 May and 29 June 2022. The

informal consultation would include the development of an online consultation document via the Council's Citizen Space facility, with hard copies available on request. The link to the consultation document would be sent directly to those Governors, staff and parents relevant to those schools most directly impacted; however, it would also be made available on the Council's website to enable any interested party to respond. A 'padlet' containing additional information and Frequently Asked Questions would also be set up as part of the consultation process.

5. As well as a consultation document, meetings with both the Governing Body and staff groups at each school would be held. Furthermore, at least one public event would be held within the consultation period to enable parents and members of the public to find out further information about how the proposals might impact education and the wider local community.
6. A report setting out the results of informal consultation, should it be approved, would be brought back to Cabinet at a later date. A request to publish statutory proposals on changes to schools in the Coquet Partnership may also be included in that report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

7. The Coquet Partnership includes the following schools:
 - Amble First – age 4-9
 - Amble Links First– age 2-9
 - Broomhill First – age 3-9
 - Grange View CE First – age 3-9
 - Red Row First – age 3-9
 - NCEA Warkworth Church of England Primary (academy) – age 2-11
 - James Calvert Spence College – age 9-18.
8. JCSC was originally an age 13 to 18 year high school, but in 2016 the school amalgamated with JCSC South Avenue (formerly named Amble Middle School) to become an age 9-18 school; the two schools had previously formed the James Calvert Spence Federation. Although theoretically pupils in schools in the Coquet Partnership have only one transition to the next school phase, this occurs at 2 years into KS2 at the midway point and at the end of Year 4 in the first schools, with pupils transferring into Year 5 at JCSC where they complete the remaining 2 years of the key stage. This structure is based on the 3-tier system of organisation remaining in place within 5 of the 14 school partnerships in the county (including Coquet). In a primary/secondary 2-tier structure, transition takes place at the end of Key Stage 2 at Year 6 with pupils transferring to

secondary school for the beginning of Key Stage 3; this structure is in line with the National Curriculum and is the prevalent system in the country.

9. The Governing Body of NCEA Warkworth Church of England Primary School took the decision a number of years ago to become a primary school as a result of the reorganisation of the Alwick Partnership, whose catchment it borders.
10. In early 2019, a letter signed by all headteachers and Chairs of Governors of the five first schools in the Coquet (Amble) Partnership was received by the incumbent Director of Education and Skills. The letter set out a request for informal consultation to be undertaken on a proposal to reorganise schools in the partnership to a two-tier, primary/secondary organisation, together with the rationale for their proposal.
11. Subsequently, a letter was received from the Governing Body of JCSC to the Director setting out its view that, while the need to improve outcomes at KS2 was acknowledged, a change in organisational structure was not necessarily the only solution to achieving such improvements. The letter set out the Governing Body's suggestions on what actions could be undertaken with a whole-partnership approach that could lead to better outcomes but retaining the existing transition point.
12. At this point in 2019, the Council decided that without consensus from all schools in the partnership to request consultation on an alternative structure of organisation, it could not support such a consultation at that time.
13. The impact of COVID has resulted in delays to the implementation of the schools Capital Programme and therefore a business case for the investment in the Coquet Partnership hasn't been developed along the original timescales. However, as the Major Educational Capital Programme is once again moving forward, the Councils Cabinet need assurance that the allocated funding for improvement in schools in the Coquet Partnership would be invested in a viable and sustainable school structure.

Process and feedback from work with schools in the Coquet Partnership

14. Informal discussions with the Coquet Partnership to gain their views on their preferences for school organisation took place as follows:
 - **18 January 2022**
Opening meeting with partnership presented by NCC officers and attended by Heads and Chairs of Governors and CE diocesan education representative.
 - **January – February 2022**

NCC officers meet with Heads and Chairs of Governors of individual schools for confidential discussions on views.

- **16 March 2022**

Plenary meeting of NCC officers headteachers and Chairs of Governors to share high level themes arising from individual meetings.

15. The informal discussions that took place with each headteacher and Chair of Governors centred around their views of the 3-tier and 2-tier system. They were also asked if they had any other ideas on how the challenges faced by the school in the partnership could be addressed. The headteachers and chairs were also asked their views about the possibility on joining a multi-academy trust (there is currently only one academy in the partnership at the moment - Warkworth CE Primary).
16. The key themes arising from the discussions were:
 - The topic of structural change has been discussed for a long time on Coquet – it's now time for change;
 - The need to improve KS2 outcomes;
 - The need to retain more pupils in the Coquet Partnership, particularly in the secondary years;
 - The need to improve the offer to children and young people with Special Educational Needs within the partnership;
 - The need for investment in buildings.
17. The summary of the views on the 3-tier and the 2-tier system are set out in Table 1:

Table 1

Main views on 3-tier system	Main views on 2-tier system
3-tier no longer the right fit for the partnership or educational journey	Majority of schools support consultation on 2-tier option for partnership
No accountability for key stages	One school has accountability for whole Key Stage
Transition currently splits key stages	Transition at end of KS2 in line with National Curriculum
Children not 'ready' for middle school at age 9 e.g. travelling on bus	Longer term viability under 2-tier
Schools losing children to primaries in other partnerships	Timing of any change important
Many children are happy to move into Year 5 at 'middle' phase	
Both models have their pros and cons	

18. Other themes and ideas that emerged from discussions with the schools were:
- Some schools would like to extend age range down to include 2 year olds;
 - Wraparound care;
 - Tie up this project with leisure centre/community facilities
 - Financial concerns
 - Buildings and site suitability issues
19. The prevalent views of schools on becoming part of a multi-academy trust which could be within a 3-tier or 2-tier structure are set out in Table 2:

Table 2

Pros	Cons
A MAT in the North could make sense	Staff would not be keen
Removal of school improvement funding from LAs could be ameliorated by a MAT	LA services are valued – can opt in or out already
	Can't see how a MAT would resolve issues
	Not all schools have an equal say in a MAT

The conclusion at this stage was there is no appetite from the partnership to progress further with discussions on forming a MAT at this time.

20. Feedback on key aspects of school organisation is set out in Table 3:

Table 3

How would your community/parents react to consultation on organisational change?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents would support it • Equally, some parents would be apathetic • The variation in views from one village to another would need to be considered • It's time to ask their views
Staff recruitment and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention good • Teacher recruitment good/ Teaching Assistant recruitment difficult
SEND Provision in the partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed need for specialist provision in the partnership, especially for ASD and SEMH • Children with SEND would potentially stay longer in

	mainstream if first schools were primary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in ARPs, but concerns about impact on reputation or education outcomes
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Standards and outcomes in schools in the Coquet Partnership

21. Current Ofsted outcomes

- Amble First – Good (November 2019)
- Amble Links First – Good (September 2021)
- Broomhill First – Good (March 2017)
- Red Row First – Good (December 2017)
- Grange View CE First – Good (March 2019)
- JCSC - Requires Improvement (most recent monitoring visit, January 2021 – school taking effective action)

22. Education Outcomes

Key Stage 1 (First School Phase): Key Stage 1 (KS1) assessments, which are taken by children at the end of Year 2, are not published.

Key Stage 2 (James Calvert Spence): Key Stage 2 (KS2) assessments did not take place in 2020 and 2021, therefore the last available data for the Coquet Partnership is from 2019 set out in Table 4.

Table 4

% Pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths	
James Calvert Spence College	27%
Northumberland Average	66%
England Average	65%

The KS2 results achieved by JCSC in 2019 were the lowest in Northumberland, with the next lowest score achieved by a school in the county being 53%. The best KS2 results at JCSC in recent years were in 2016 when the 40% of pupils achieved the expected standard.

Key Stage 4 (James Calvert Spence):

The last verified outcomes at GCSE (Key Stage 4) for JCSC were in summer 2019 as set out in Table 1. The DfE has stated that due to the unprecedented change in the way GCSE results (KS4) were awarded in the summer terms of 2020 and 2021 and the resulting significant changes to the distribution of the grades received (in comparison to exam results), pupil level attainment in 2020/21 and 2019/20 is not comparable to that of the previous exam years for the purposes of measuring changes in pupil performance.

Table 5 – GCSE results, JCSC

		GCSE 2019
Progress 8 (0 = Expected Progress)	JCSC	-0.02
	Northumberland average	-0.12
	England average	-0.03
%Achieving Grade 5+ inc Eng and Maths	JCSC	38%
	Northumberland average	43%
	England average	43%
Attainment 8 (higher figure is best)	JCSC	45.5
	Northumberland average	46.5
	England average	46.7

JCSC's results in 2019 at GCSE are stronger in comparison at both county and national (England) level, being positioned 11th out of 16 high/secondary schools in Northumberland at that point.

Proposal for reorganisation

23. In the light of the investment allocated to schools in the Council's medium term plan and as a result of the feedback received from the majority of headteachers and Chairs of Governors during the informal meetings in January and February this year, and the rationale set out by them in their letters to the Council, it is proposed that an informal consultation on the proposal for the Coquet Partnership to be reorganised within a 2-tier structure with staff, parents and the wider community is now appropriate and timely.
24. Two first schools in the partnership have closed in the last 7 years, reducing surplus capacity accordingly. While birth data for the Coquet Partnership is relatively steady, this masks some variation in capacity at the individual school level, e.g. in the first and primary phase, some schools are more popular and have attracted pupils from other catchments and as at January 2022 census, there are 25% surplus places across the first schools in the partnership as a whole. However, taking into account the impact that organisational change may have on parental preference for schools and the continuing housebuilding in the Coquet area, it is not proposed at this stage that any first schools would close as part of these proposals.
25. Similarly, JCSC has 18% surplus places in Years 9 to 11, therefore it would not be proposed that its current PAN of 120 would be reduced as part of reorganisation proposals; however, the capacity of the school would have to be amended as part

of its building solution should it become an 11-18 secondary school rather than a 9-18 school.

26. In any proposals for reorganisation, the current structure of schools forms part of the consultation process and therefore this would be expressed as the status quo model as follows:

Model A (status quo)

All schools remain organised as they are currently with phase change to JCSC occurring at the end of Year 4 in the first schools.

The buildings of JCSC age 9 to 18 are remodelled and extended buildings/new build, with all pupils brought together on the current high school site.

It should be noted that this model would not address the poor performance at KS2 without significant collaboration between the first schools and JCSC. The funding within the medium-term capital programme is likely to be sufficient to deliver this option, however given the current rate of inflation and supply shortages in the construction market a revised assessment of the costs will be carried out during any informal consultation period.

Model B

All first schools to extend their age ranges to become either age 2-11, 3-11 or 4-11 primary schools, retaining current Year 4 into Year 5 in the first phase of reorganisation.

Amble First School to relocate to the current Year 5 to Year 9 building of JCSC at South Avenue.

Red Row First School to increase its Planned Admission Number from 29 to 30 (this is a tidying up exercise).

JCSC to reduce its age range from 9 to 18 to 11 to 18 with effect from September 2023 at the earliest, having Years 7 to 13 sixth form.

JCSC to have new school buildings for age range 11 to 18 on current site.

As set out in para 29 of this report an estimated budget for any proposals will be developed during any informal consultation with the outcomes being reported to Cabinet at the next stage if consultation is approved.

Other considerations arising from the proposals

27. SEND provision

The Coquet Partnership currently doesn't have any specialist provision for Children and Young People with SEN, and therefore this results in a significant

number travelling outside of their community in order to have their educational needs met. It is therefore proposed that provision for pupils with SEND living in the Coquet Partnership forms part of the informal consultation process in order to take advantage of an opportunity to develop a joined-up approach for all pupils living in the Coquet area. Some initial informal work has taken place with headteachers in the partnership and these early ideas would be presented as part of the wider consultation.

28. Early Years provision

In the same way as for SEND in the partnership, current Early Years provision would form part of the informal consultation with potential recommendations brought forward for Cabinet's consideration with the other feedback.

29. Implications for staff

There would be implications for staffing structures in schools under the proposed Model B (2-tier structure). As part of the informal consultation process, meetings would be held with the staff body at each school in the Coquet Partnership, together with their Trade union staff representatives (unions) and Council HR (Human Resources) officer to allow specific discussions on this aspect of reorganisation under Model B. It is intended that should informal consultation be approved, Council officers would broker a draft Staffing Protocol agreement during the consultation period to include all schools that would ensure a fair and equitable appointment process under any new structure, should Model B or a variation of Model B be approved for implementation at a later stage.

30. Buildings and funding

As stated earlier in the report, the Council has already allocated £25.5m towards investment in school buildings in the Coquet Partnership. A budget for carrying out capital works under both Model A and Model B would be developed during the informal consultation, should it be approved. The costs of any linked proposals for provision for SEND students that may be set out as part of the recommendations arising would also be developed. These costs would then be presented to Cabinet for consideration along with the outcomes of the informal consultation in order to assist with decision making in relation to the proposed recommendations.

31. Catchment areas

There would be no proposal to change the current catchment areas of any school within the Coquet Partnership as part of the proposed Model B (2-tier structure) for informal consultation, although some proposals for catchment area changes may arise from consultees during the process that may require consideration. However, should approval for Model B be approved by Cabinet at a later date, the catchment areas of the first schools as they became primaries would include

pupils up to the age of 11, while the catchment area of JCSC would include pupils aged 11 to 18.

32. Transport

Under Model A (status quo), there would be no changes to the current arrangements for Home to School Transport. Under Model B (2-tier structure), pupils including those eligible for transport would remain in their first schools for an additional 2 years in Years 5 and 6. Therefore, there may be a small saving to the Home to School Transport policy as a result.

33. Sport and recreation

Under Model A and Model B, there would be the opportunity to enhanced sporting facilities at the JCSC site as a result of remodelling/rebuilding. Under Model B, there may also be an opportunity to improve the current sport and recreation facilities in some first schools. Overall, there will be no negative impact on current sporting facilities as a result of Model A or Model B.

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 £25.5m 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.
Legal	Consultation carried out on proposals would comply with School Organisation guidance and regulations.
Procurement	No implications
Human Resources	There may be some implications for staff in schools in the wider Coquet Partnership should Model B be approved for implementation by Cabinet at a later date. If the status quo remains in place, there may be some implications for JCSCS staff should the school move onto one site.

Property	Refer to 'Finance and value for money' above
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Should Cabinet approve informal consultation, an EIA would be carried out in parallel with consultation and presented together with consultation outcomes.
Risk Assessment	A risk assessment would be carried out should Cabinet approve informal 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 for Adults and Children's Services and the Member for Children's Services.
Wards	Amble; Druridge Bay; Amble West and Warkworth

Background Papers

None

Report Sign Off

	Full name
Service Director Finance & Deputy S151 Officer	Alison Elsdon
Interim Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Adult and Children's Services	Cath McEvoy-Carr
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