



# Northumberland County Council

## Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

### Notes of Meeting

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**Meeting:** Scremerston First School – Governors’ Meeting  
**Location:** Scremerston First School, Berwick, TD15 2RB

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**Date & Time:** Monday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at 5.00 pm

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**Present:**

NCC

Sue Aviston (SA) (Head of School Organisation and Resources)  
Audrey Kingham (AK) (Joint Interim Director of Children’s Services/Director of Education and Skills)  
Lorraine Fife (LF) (School Place Planning and Organisation Manager)  
Deborah Anderson (DA) (Project Support Officer)

School

Headteacher  
6 Members of the Governing Body

<b>1.</b>	<b><u>Welcome and Purpose of Meeting</u></b>
	<p>SA welcomed everyone to the meeting and those in attendance were noted above. The purpose of the meeting was outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically for Scremerston First School.</li><li>• Provide the opportunity for governors to ask questions.</li><li>• Brief, but not verbatim, notes would be published as part of the report to the Council's Cabinet Committee.</li><li>• This presentation was used for the meeting with staff members.</li></ul>
<b>2.</b>	<b><u>Context and Rationale for the Proposals</u></b>
	<p>SA set out the context and rationale for the proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Council has allocated investment for school buildings within the partnership.</li><li>• The investment needs to be in a school system that will deliver improved outcomes, be viable and sustainable for future generations.</li><li>• The community in Berwick needs to support whichever school system is decided to ensure schools thrive.</li></ul>

<b>3.</b>	<b><u>Vision for Change</u></b>
	<p>During preliminary work, school leaders in Berwick agreed a Vision for Change in the Berwick partnership. The vision covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving Educational Outcomes.</li> <li>• Sustainability of Education.</li> <li>• Improving and extending the SEND offer.</li> <li>• Engaging the Berwick Community.</li> <li>• Ensure schools work together.</li> <li>• Underpinning best value for NCC capital investment.</li> </ul>
<b>4.</b>	<b><u>Factors facing the Berwick Partnership</u></b>
	<p>Factors facing the Berwick Partnership include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Falling pupil numbers.</li> <li>• The need to reduce surplus places. In January 2022 there were 1074 surplus places in the partnership. DfE holds local authority to account over surplus places.</li> <li>• The number of pupils not attending Berwick schools. Currently 352 pupils attend schools outside of the partnership which equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million from the partnership.</li> <li>• Financial challenges facing schools due to falling rolls and surplus places. Schools' budgets are based on per pupil funding.</li> <li>• By 2025/2026 over half of the local authority-maintained schools in Berwick will be in deficit. This doesn't take account of recent pay rises and the cost-of-living crisis.</li> <li>• The growing number of children and young people with special educational needs and the need to provide appropriate specialist provision close to home.</li> </ul>
<b>5.</b>	<b><u>Education Outcomes</u></b>
	<p>SA advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards in Berwick are very good with 15 out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.</li> <li>• Two schools are rated as 'Requires Improvement' but are taking effective action according to Ofsted.</li> <li>• KS1 outcomes are not published – teacher assessed.</li> <li>• 2019 is the last validated data we have for KS2, KS4 and KS5. Current data will be available late January. However, DfE have advised caution in relation to comparisons to previous years.</li> </ul>
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Proposals for this School</u></b>
	<p>Proposals for Scremerston First School are as follows:</p> <p><u>Under Model A (revised 3-tier structure)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scremerston would close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025 (in November 2024 the Admissions Pool would not include Scremerston).</li> <li>• On 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025 the pupils on roll from Reception to Year 3 would transfer to the amalgamated Tweedmouth West/Prior Park First School or alternative first school based on parental preference.</li> <li>• Catchment to Tweedmouth West/Prior Park, with a small area to Spittal.</li> </ul>

	<p><u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scremerston would close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025 (In November 2024 the Admissions Pool would not include Scremerston).</li> <li>• On 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025 the pupils on roll from Reception to Year 3 would transfer to Tweedmouth Prior Park First School or alternative first school based on parental preference.</li> <li>• Catchment to Tweedmouth Prior Park, with a small area to Spittal.</li> </ul>
<b>7.</b>	<b><u>Rationale for the Proposals</u></b>
	<p>The rationale for the proposals was given as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driven by number of pupils in the catchment area.</li> <li>• According to the data the number of children within each year group is well below the school's PAN of 18 and shows there is a reducing future demand for places.</li> <li>• 46% of the pupils within the catchment attend Scremerston First with 51% choosing other schools. These figures don't include pupils attending special schools.</li> <li>• Of the pupils currently on roll 71% reside outside of the catchment.</li> <li>• The school has 35% surplus places.</li> <li>• Distance to the next nearest school is 1.7 miles.</li> <li>• Encouraging attendance at local schools reduces unnecessary car journeys therefore supporting the Council's Climate Action Plan.</li> </ul>
<b>8.</b>	<b><u>Implications of the Proposals for Staff in the Berwick Partnership</u></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under both models the staff working in schools proposed for closure or amalgamation would be at risk.</li> <li>• The ambition is to retain as many staff as possible within the Berwick partnership of schools.</li> <li>• Officers will work with schools and the academy to develop a Staffing Protocol and it is hoped that all governing bodies will sign up to protocol.</li> </ul>
<b>9.</b>	<b><u>Special Educational Needs in Berwick Partnership</u></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the consultation, we are asking questions regarding SEN and have held workshops with headteachers in the Berwick Partnership, the Parent Carer Forum, and the North Northumberland Branch of the Autistic Society.</li> <li>• The Grove is the only specialist provision in Berwick, but it is not designated for students with SEMH and ASD.</li> <li>• Diagnosis of pupils with SEMH and ASD is increasing significantly.</li> <li>• Currently 22 pupils living in Berwick needing specialist SEND provision have to travel outside of the partnership to access education on a daily basis.</li> <li>• There are two proposed models for additional SEND provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Model A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Grove continues with its existing provision for PMLD and SLD on current site.</li> <li>○ Specialist SEMH and ASD provisions are created at St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy.</li> <li>○ Create opportunity to access peripatetic provision for all schools in the partnership.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Model B</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Grove relocates to the Tweedmouth Middle School site, or another identified site, and increases its planned pupil number and extends its designation to include SEMH.</li> <li>○ The shared site with Berwick Academy would allow some pupils to access mainstream lessons and study for qualification.</li> <li>○ The primary support base at St Mary's First would continue.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• We welcome, and would like to hear, of other potential ideas for increasing SEND provision in Berwick.</li> </ul>

<b>10.</b>	<b><u>Other Implications</u></b>
	<p><u>School Buildings and Capital Allocation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council has allocated £39.9m towards investment in school buildings within the Berwick Partnership.</li> <li>• Officers will be undertaking background work to establish what the budgets will be for carrying out any proposed building works under both models.</li> <li>• Indicative costs for the SEND proposals will also be developed.</li> <li>• All indicative costs will be presented to Cabinet for consideration.</li> </ul> <p><u>Transport</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposing no changes to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.</li> <li>• Some impact on journey length for some pupils in relation to proposed school closures. Any impact would be below the DfE suggested best practice of 45 mins (each way) for primary aged pupils and 75 mins (each way) for secondary aged pupils.</li> <li>• Under Model A those pupils living in Wooler and Belford catchment/transport eligibility areas would become eligible for transport to Alnwick Duchess' High School.</li> <li>• Under Model B pupils in Belford catchment/transport eligibility area would become eligible for transport to Alnwick Duchess' High School.</li> <li>• Estimate that there would be little impact on the transport costs overall of either model.</li> </ul>
<b>11.</b>	<b><u>Other Factors to consider</u></b>
	<p><u>Post-16/Post-18</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The investment presents an opportunity to extend and improve the Post-16/Post-18 offer for pupils and the wider community.</li> <li>• Therefore, we are seeking your views and ideas on Post-16 and Post-18 provision.</li> </ul> <p><u>Early Years</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from previous consultation and information from the Council's Early Years Team indicated that this is sufficient early years provision within the partnership.</li> <li>• The concerns are continued viability of the provision especially with the falling birth rate.</li> <li>• Again, we seek and welcome your views and ideas on early years provision.</li> </ul>
<b>12.</b>	<b><u>Next Steps</u></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advised that the consultation runs until midnight on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023.</li> <li>• Governors were encouraged to submit a collective response but can also respond individually.</li> <li>• It was noted that it wasn't a referendum in respect of numbers but on the quality/rationale of the response. As educational professionals staff views are held in high regard by Elected Members.</li> <li>• Reassured that it was a consultation and no decisions have been made. Governors' views on alternative suggestions or models to address the issues were welcomed.</li> <li>• Feedback from this consultation would be considered by the Council's Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Committee in April/May 2023.</li> <li>• Cabinet Committee would decide too either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cease the process.</li> <li>○ Approve formal statutory consultation on a particular model. Statutory consultation would last four weeks.</li> <li>○ Approve further consultation if a sufficiently different proposal was put forward that needed to be consulted on.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Hoped that a final decision can be made in the late summer term or early autumn term 2023.</li> </ul>

## Questions

*Q - Governors highlighted that Berwick is now an up-and-coming area and the new hospital, leisure centre and school will attract new people to the area. We need to be in a position to provide good quality education for all the new people coming into the area. Does the consultation take this into account?*

Unfortunately, attracting new people into the area is not an immediate solution, it could be some way down the line (eg. 15 to 20 years). The Council has to look at the currently situation and unfortunately can't hold surplus places in the hope that numbers increase. House building is taken into account and included in forecasts, but unfortunately doesn't always have the impact of increasing pupil numbers. Even in our more populated areas we aren't seeing the numbers feeding though.

*Q - In relation to 2019 data – why hasn't recent data/results been used?*

Within Education we only use published validated data. Due to Covid there hasn't been any validated data since 2019. Results from 2020 and 2021 can't be used as they aren't comparable. Results from 2022 exams and assessments are still being validated but will be made available once validated.

*Q – Will our comments be taken into consideration?*

Yes, all responses to the consultation will be taken into account and considered. The Council is also open to receiving other alternative solutions so please include these in any response. It is important that you respond with your views to the consultation.

*Q – Is it possible to get a copy of all the questions in the survey?*

Yes, a scanned copy of the consultation survey questions will be sent to the headteacher.

*Q – Of the 22 pupils traveling out of the partnership to attending special schools, what are the pupils' primary need?*

There are a variety of primary needs, with Autism and SEMH being typical.

*Q – Of those pupils attending Scottish Schools, have those parents been contacted to ask what the reasons are to why they leave the Berwick partnership? This would identify any patterns.*

Parents are being consulted but we couldn't target a single group to ask why as its down to parental choice and individual needs.

*Q – How does Post-16 options work. Do you look at jobs available within the area?*

Yes. Within this work the whole demographic of the partnership, including industry, is being considered (eg. what jobs are available now and what are the future careers). We need to understand the wider infrastructure and landscape and do forecasting around that.

*Q – It has been highlighted that 71% of parents choose Scremerston First School. This feels significant in terms of parental choice. One thing that stands out is that there are several Church Schools but fewer County Schools. It is crucial and important that parental choice remains, and that this proposal takes that into account. It is also not right that the area is dominated by Church schools.*

The reasons why there are more church schools within an area could be historical as Church communities were responsible for setting up educational provisions within a community.

*Q – If Scremerston First closed there would be no rural schools left in the partnership that aren't Church Schools.*

Parental consultation is important therefore you need to make sure your parents respond to the consultation.

*Q – Can NCC provide a statement that schools can include on their websites stating that 'no final decision has been made'.*

We will look at what has been sent out via communications but agreed that a statement would be included on the Admission's Portal.

*Q – Is there a danger, in the current economic climate, that the funding is at risk or is it safeguarded?*

It is an election commitment to rebuild whatever is required in Berwick with support for this until the end of the current Administration. However, if consultations go beyond that there could be risks.

*Q – Is funding available for additional support for staff/pupils transferring schools etc or just for building.?*

The funding is capital funding and therefore only for building costs.

*Q – What is the current educational viewpoint of speech and language units?*

Depends on local needs but Primary Base Support Units have been created in a number of partnerships included Berwick. St Mary's First School is one and it is up to schools to refer pupils into it via the Inclusion Panel for a period of time. Primary Base Support Units are short-term wrap around provisions.

*Q – There a danger that this money is spent but doesn't change anything and the poor standards continue and pupils drift outside of their catchment. What are you going to do, apart from providing new bricks and mortar, to change this?*

Investment is predicated on improving educational outcomes and with that comes better facilities and resources. Unfortunately, the legacy reputation is becoming detrimental and will take time to recover and will not be fixed with the opening of a new building. We do know that the outcomes are improving, and the Academy has improved its Ofsted grade and been found at three monitoring visits to be taking effective action.

The Academy is not within our jurisdiction. Our responsibility is to build relationships with the academy, challenge where necessary and celebrate achievements.

*Q – What will the impact be of Government's White Paper?*

It is proposing that all schools form or join an Academy Trust by 2030. The local authority has applied to set up an academy trust. The models proposed within this consultation wouldn't prevent anyone converting to an academy.

*Q – How do you sell to parents that their children will be moved to a school which hasn't such a good Ofsted?*

That would be parental choice. However, Ofsted grades are not forever, and school judgements can go up or down.