



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting:	Scremerston First School – Staff Meeting
Location:	Scremerston First School, Berwick, TD15 2RB

Date & Time:	Monday 7 th November 2022 at 3.30 pm
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Present:	
<u>NCC</u>	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
<u>Union</u>	Andrew Gibson (AG) – GMB Steve Bird (SB) - NASUWT Phil Rowett (PR) - NEU
<u>School</u>	Headteacher 10 Members of Teaching and Non-teaching Staff 2 Governors (at the request of staff)

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

3.	<u>Vision for Change</u>
	<p>During preliminary work, school leaders and governors in Berwick agreed a Vision for Change for the Berwick partnership. The vision covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving Educational Outcomes. • Sustainability of Education. • Improving and extending the SEND offer. • Engaging the Berwick Community. • Ensure schools work together. • Underpinning best value for NCC capital investment.
4.	<u>Factors facing the Berwick Partnership</u>
	<p>Factors facing the Berwick Partnership include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falling pupil numbers. • Need to reduce surplus places. DfE holds local authority to account for surplus places. In January 2022 there were 1074 surplus places in the partnership. • The number of pupils not attending Berwick schools. Equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million across the partnership. • The financial challenges facing schools. Budgets are based on per pupil funding. By 2025/26 it is estimated that over half the maintained schools in Berwick will have deficit budgets. • Growing number of children and young people with special educational needs and the need to provide appropriate specialist provision close to home communities.
5.	<u>Education Outcomes</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational standards in Berwick are very good with 15 out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. • Two schools are rated as 'Requires Improvement' but are taking effective action according to Ofsted. • KS1 outcomes are not published – teacher assessed. • 2019 is the last validated data we have for KS2, KS4 and KS5.
6.	<u>Proposals for this School</u>
	<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"> • Scremerston would close on 31st August 2025 (in November 2024 the Admissions Pool would not include Scremerston). • On 31st 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. • Catchment to Tweedmouth West/Prior Park, with a small area to Spittal. <p><u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scremerston would close on 31st August 2025. (In November 2024 the Admissions Pool would not include Scremerston). • On 31st 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. • Catchment to Tweedmouth Prior Park, with a small area to Spittal.

7.	<p><u>Rationale for the Proposals</u></p>
	<p>The rationale for the proposals was given as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven by number of pupils in the catchment area. • According to Dec 2021 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. • 46% of the pupils within the catchment attend Scremerston First with 51% choosing other schools. These figures don't include pupils attending special schools. • Of the pupils currently on roll 71% reside outside of the catchment. • The school has 35% surplus places. • Distance to the next nearest school is 1.7 miles. • Encouraging attendance at local schools reduces unnecessary car journeys therefore supporting the Council's Climate Action Plan.
8.	<p><u>Implications of the Proposals for Staff in the Berwick Partnership</u></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under both models the staff working in schools proposed for closure or amalgamation would be at risk. • The ambition is to retain as many staff as possible within the Berwick partnership of schools. • 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.
9.	<p><u>Special Educational Needs in Berwick Partnership</u></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • The Grove is the only specialist provision in Berwick, but it is not designated for students with SEMH and ASD. • Diagnosis of pupils with SEMH and ASD is increasing significantly. • Currently 22 pupils living in Berwick with SEND must travel outside of the partnership to access education daily. • There are two proposed models for additional SEND provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Model A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Grove continues with its existing provision for PMLD and SLD on current site. ○ Specialist SEMH and ASD provisions are created at St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy. ○ Create opportunity to access peripatetic provision for all schools in the partnership <u>Model B</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Grove relocates to the site of Tweedmouth Middle, or another identified site, and increases its planned pupil number and extends its designation to include SEMH and ASD. ○ The shared site with Berwick Academy would allow some pupils to access mainstream lessons and study for qualifications. ○ The primary support base at St Mary's First would continue. • We welcome, and would like to hear, of other potential ideas for increasing SEND provision in Berwick.
10.	<p><u>Other Implications</u></p>
	<p><u>School Buildings and Capital Allocation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council has allocated £39.9m towards investment in school buildings within the Berwick Partnership. • Officers will be undertaking background work to establish what the budgets will be for carrying out any proposed building works under both models.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicative costs for the SEND proposals will also be developed. • All indicative costs will be presented to Cabinet for consideration. <p><u>Transport</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposing no changes to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. • 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. • Under Model A those pupils living in Wooler and Belford catchment/transport eligibility areas would become eligible for transport to Alnwick Duchess' High School. • Under Model B pupils in Belford catchment/transport eligibility area would become eligible for transport to Alnwick Duchess' High School. • Estimate that there would be little impact on the transport costs overall of either model.
11.	<u>Other Factors to consider</u>
	<p><u>Post-16/Post-18</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The investment presents an opportunity to extend and improve the Post-16/Post-18 offer for pupils and the wider community. • Therefore, we are seeking your views and ideas on Post-16 and Post-18 provision. <p><u>Early Years</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from previous consultation and information from the Council's Early Years Team indicated that this is sufficient early years provision within the partnership. • The concerns are continued viability of the provision especially with the falling birth rate. • Again, we seek and welcome your views and ideas on early years provision.
12.	<u>Next Steps</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advised that the consultation runs until midnight on 3rd March 2023. • Staff were encouraged to submit a response. Staff can respond individually or collectively. However, 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. • Reassured that it was a consultation and no decisions have been made. Staffs' views on alternative suggestions/models, to address the issues, were welcomed. • 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. • Cabinet Committee would decide either to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cease the process and do nothing. ○ Approve formal statutory consultation on a particular model. Statutory consultation would last four weeks. ○ Approve further consultation if a sufficiently different proposal was put forward that needed to be consulted on. • Hoped that a final decision can be made in the late summer term or early autumn term 2023.
13.	<u>Questions</u>
	<p><i>Q – Educational outcomes for first schools – what does that include?</i></p> <p>Key stage 1 results aren't published so it's difficult to talk about outcomes generally across the partnership at Key Stage 1. As teachers you speak to parents about their individual children but is it not something we measure as a local authority. We wouldn't, with the data provided to us, measure one school against another.</p>

Q – Can judgements be made in terms of the quality of education between individual schools?

Ofsted do inspect schools and as part of that look at outcomes for children and make their judgement.

Q – Have Ofsted reports been used as part of this process for educational outcomes?

At first school level it hasn't been a major factor. The key data that we are looking at is the falling pupil numbers and birth rate.

Q – In terms of our catchment pupils attending Tweedmouth Prior Park First School the distance stated is 1.7 miles. Would those pupils be eligible for school transport?

1.7 miles is the distance from school to school not individual pupils' homes to school. School transport would depend on whether the individual pupil met the criteria, and this is based on individual circumstances. Usually, for first/primary pupils transport is provided if they live over two miles, or the walking route is deemed to be unsafe.

Q – The impact of these proposals would result in a lot of travelling to Tweedmouth Prior Park and increased congestion around that school. Would the carbon footprint be considered in this instance and how is it measured (eg. miles travelled or idling/congestion)?

Not experts regarding carbon footprint and how its measured. Agreed to try and find out and feedback to the school.

Q – In terms of the Planned Admissions Number (PAN) and Capacity, is capacity based on the square footage of classrooms and is the admission number linked to capacity?

Capacity is based on teaching spaces within the school. Libraries and breakout areas are taken into consideration but it's predominately on how many teaching areas there are. Admissions numbers can't be higher than capacity but can be lower.

Q – Who decides the PAN?

The local authority decides the planned admission number for community-controlled schools. Voluntary Aided Schools can set their own, but in conjunction with the local authority.

Q – Can Scremerston First School's PAN be reduced therefore reducing the number of surplus places?

This could be put forward as an alternative proposal.

Q – How do you calculate a catchment's number?

The authority receives annual GP data of children born in the area. It also considers house building in the area and triangulates the data. The School Organisation Plan explains this in more detail and is available on the Council's website.

Q – Why is Scremerston the only school to be proposed for closure under both models? Why are other schools not being considered (eg. Lowick FS/Holy Island, Norham and Ford have lower pupil numbers on roll)?

It is about the Council investing money and making sure there is a sustainable education system in Berwick for future generations. Although schools can be popular and attract pupils from outside of its catchment at the detriment of other schools - is that the right education model? Need to remember also that a school's popularity can change as it is linked to many factors – eg. leadership, governance, relationship breakdown.

These proposals are only ideas and options. You are being asked to give your views and provide alternative suggestions. Also, must take into account the distances pupils would have to travel to school. Norham and Lowick have further distances to their nearest schools whereas the next nearest school to Scremerston is only 1.7 miles.

Q – As a staff member it is disappointing that first schools can't bring educational standards in to focus particularly as Scremerston First School has a strong case to put forward in relation to the educational standards of its pupils, particularly in relation to SEND support. How do we demonstrate/illustrate this?

This could be put forward as a change to the model or an alternative proposal. As a staffing group you could set out the reasons and rationale why Scremerston First should remain open.

Q – Staff felt that they had been treated badly over the last seven weeks, particularly in the way they were informed about the contents of the report. How do they deal with parental questions when they don't know the answers themselves?

SA outlined the process that the Council needs to follow as a democratic society and reiterated that no decisions had been made. This was their opportunity to have a say on the potential models and put forward alternative suggestions/options for consideration. The feedback from Phase 1 Consultation requested detailed models and this is what we have provided.

Q – The admission portal is currently open for reception pupils and staff believe that the uncertainty over Scremerston's future will impact the choice of parents choosing Scremerston. Can there be a statement, which can be added to websites, that states no decisions have been made?

Yes, a statement can be included on the admissions portal to advise that this is a consultation with options and ideas, and it is not a forgone conclusion that Scremerston, or any other school in Berwick, will close.

Q – There are rumours within the community that funding is dependent on going two-tier and Scremerston closing. There needs to be a clear communication that isn't the case and that neither option will result in a new high school being built.

It was reiterated that the funding was not dependent on the partnership going two-tier. The Director of Education agreed to speak with the Lead Member and arrange for some communications to go out. Unfortunately, the Council can't control what other people say within the community.

Q - Can the message about funding not being dependent on a particular model be passed onto Elected Members?

Elected Members are fully aware of the difficult circumstances that any change brings. They are also aware that some people are driving rumours for their own advantage. However, this is a consultation process, and it is up to individuals to have their say.

SA finished the meeting by thanking the staff for attending and the meeting closed at 4.55 pm.