



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting: Tweedmouth Prior Park First School – Governors Meeting
Location: Tweedmouth Prior Park First School, Dean Drive, Tweedmouth, TD15 2DB

Date & Time: Tuesday 8th November 2022 at 5.20 pm

Present:
NCC Sue Aviston (SA) (Head of School Organisation and Resources)
Lorraine Fife (LF) (School Place Planning and Organisation Manager)
Deborah Anderson (DA) (Project Support Officer)

School Headteacher
6 Members of the Governing Body

1.	<u>Welcome and Purpose of Meeting</u>
	<p>SA welcomed everyone to the meeting and those in attendance were noted above. Purpose of the meeting outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically Tweedmouth Prior Park First School.• Provide the opportunity for governors to ask questions.• Brief, but not verbatim, notes would be published as part of the report to the Council's Cabinet Committee.• Noted that the presentation used in this meeting is the same one that was used at the staff meeting.
2.	<u>Context and Rationale for the Proposals</u>
	<p>SA set out the context and rationale for the proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council has allocated investment for the partnership.• 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 agreed a Vision for Change in 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 tackle surplus places. In January 2022 there were 1074 surplus places in the partnership and the DfE holds local authorities to account over these surplus places. • Number of pupils attending schools outside the Berwick partnership. Equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million from the partnership. • Financial challenges facing schools as budgets are based on per pupil funding. • 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. • The growing number of children and young people with special educational needs and the need to provide appropriate specialist provision close to home.
5.	<u>Education Outcomes</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berwick is a strong partnership of schools with 15 out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. • The two schools rated as 'Requiring Improvement' are taking effective action according to Ofsted. • The last validated data we have is from 2019. 2022 data will be available towards the end of January, and this will be included in the report to Cabinet. However, caveat by DfE is not to draw comparisons with previous years as schools were in a very different place to what they are now.
6.	<u>Proposals for this School</u>
	<p>Proposals for Tweedmouth Prior Park First School:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Under Model A (revised 3-tier structure)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tweedmouth Prior Park and Tweedmouth West First Schools would amalgamate on 1st September 2025 under Tweedmouth West's DfE number. ○ Pupils on roll on 31st August from Scremerston First and part of Norham would transfer to the amalgamated school (or another school of parent's choice) on 1st September 2025. ○ Catchments of Tweedmouth West, Tweedmouth Prior Park, Scremerston and part of Norham become one catchment. A small area will be transferred to Spittal. • <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Re-organised to become a one form entry primary school on 1st September 2025. ○ Pupils on roll on 31st August from Scremerston First would transfer to Tweedmouth Prior Park (or another school of parent's choice) on 1st September 2025. ○ Catchment area of Tweedmouth Prior Park expands to include Scremerston, with a small area transferred to Spittal.

7.	<p><u>Rationale for the Proposals</u></p>
	<p>The rationale for proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven by the number of pupils in the catchment area. GP data shows declining birth rate within the catchment. This is a picture across the partnership and county. • December 2021 data states that 60% of pupils living in the catchment attend Tweedmouth Prior Park First with 38% choosing other schools • Of the pupils on roll 28% reside in other schools' catchment areas. • The school has 26% surplus places. • Distance to the next nearest school is 1.2 miles.
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. It is hoped that all governing bodies will sign up to protocol. • The protocol looks at drawing a ring-fence around the partnership regarding any newly created posts through changes or posts created through resignations/retirements. • Headteachers would be asked to consider those staff at risk in the first instance for any vacant posts.
9.	<p><u>Special Educational Needs in Berwick Partnership</u></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council investment presents opportunity to join up with SEND capacity needs in the area. • Held workshops with Berwick headteachers, 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. • 2021/22 data shows that 22 pupils living in Berwick with SEND have to travel outside of the partnership to access education on a daily basis. • Two proposed models for additional SEND provision have been suggested. Either model can be established under a two-tier or three-tier school structure: <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 pupils on its current site. ○ Specialist SEMH and ASD provisions created at St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy. ○ Create opportunity for peripatetic provision which all schools in the partnership can access. <u>Model B</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Grove relocates to the site of Tweedmouth Middle (or another identified site), increases its planned pupil number and extends its designation to include SEMH and ASD pupils. ○ Shared site with Berwick Academy would provide opportunities for some pupils to access mainstream lessons/qualifications. ○ Primary support base at St Mary's First would continue. • Welcome other ideas for increasing SEND provision in Berwick.

10.	<u>Other Implications</u>
	<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 but the final figure could be less or more. • Officers will be undertaking desk top exercises to establish what the potential budgets could be for carrying out any potential building works required under both models. • Indicative costs for 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"> • The proposals for Tweedmouth Prior Park will not have any impact on school transport. • Noted that the Council is not proposing any changes to the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy. • There may be some impact for pupils living in Belford and Wooler under the proposals.
11.	<u>Other Factors to consider</u>
	<p><u>Post-16/Post-18</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment presents an opportunity to extend and improve the Post-16/Post-18 offer for pupils and the wider community and are seeking views and ideas. <p><u>Early Years</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from previous consultation is sufficient early years provision in the partnership and that the provision was good. • There are concerns that with the falling birth rate that this provision remains viable.
12.	<u>Next Steps</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advised that the consultation runs until midnight on 3rd March 2023. • Governors encouraged to submit a response. Can respond as an individual as was as a collective governing body. • Not a referendum. Decisions and recommendations made on the quality/rationale of the response, not in the number received. As educational professionals your views are held in high regard by Elected Members. • Outcomes and feedback 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 could decide either to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stop the process and do nothing. ○ Approve any recommendation(s) and move to formal statutory consultation. Statutory consultation would last four weeks. ○ Approve further consultation if a sufficiently different proposal was put forward. • Final decision potentially made late summer/early autumn term 2023.
13.	<u>Questions</u>
	<p><i>Q - Why pick Tweedmouth West First School’s DfE Number when they are coming onto this site?</i></p> <p>Several factors are considered when we are looking at a school going forward. One school must go forward in terms of the DfE number, but it is not to say that it is the school that is continued.</p>

Q - Would there be a fair process for the staff (eg. would Tweedmouth West staff come in and take over, or would Tweedmouth Prior Park staff remain with additional staff from Tweedmouth West appointed due to the increased capacity or would both schools' staff go into a pool?)

It is hoped, if this is the structure that went forward, that the two governing bodies would work together to ensure that it is a fair and open process for all the staff within both schools and there is a fair process of appointing staff from either school into the most appropriate post.

Q – Can you give a clear rationale why the DfE Number from Tweedmouth West comes to this building on this site?

We have suggested a merger of two schools so one URN number needs to continue. We could close both schools and open a new school, but it would have to be a Free School or an Academy as local authorities can't open new schools. Therefore, it has been suggested that the two schools come together and Tweedmouth West's DfE number would be the number that would continue as they are moving onto the Prior Park site, but have higher pupil numbers, their pupil data is more stable, and they have a healthier budget.

If, as a governing body, you have a different viewpoint and alternative suggestion then please include this in your respond to the consultation.

Have received challenges that the decision was based on the Ofsted grading of the schools', and this wasn't the case as there is a lot more to a school than just an Ofsted judgement.

Q – The proposal is a merger of two schools but in essence you are closing down the Tweedmouth West site therefore the logical step would be to retain the URN of the site remaining (eg. Tweedmouth Prior Park).

Tweedmouth West School's relocation is not the same as closing a school. We can provide you with more clarity, in writing, about how the statutory regulations are being implemented.

Q - Did you consider creating fewer larger primary schools as an alternative within the two-tier option? If so, what were the key reasons why it was not pursued?

Have to bear in mind what is a reasonably sized primary school as well as the distances pupils would need to travel. These are the key factors we take into consideration. Also need to think whether we want to put young children into a three or four form entry first/primary school. However, we are open to looking at alternative proposals if that is a suggestion as part of the consultation.

Acknowledged that having larger schools mean that it is easier to deal with the fluctuation of pupil numbers.

Q – When will the building costs be available?

Nothing has been worked out yet. It would be wrong to spend vast sums of money working up options at this point as there isn't a clear direction of travel. There will be more detail available after the 3rd March 2023.

Q - Will there be extra funding to retain staff in the longer term until the budget improves or could Tweedmouth Prior Park First School open a Year 5 class in September 2025?

There will be no additional funding available. There is a small contingency of funding, which Schools Forum have to agree too, which can be used for school transition.

Schools can run a deficit budget provided there is a clear plan (usually three years) to get back into credit.

Q – Is there an indication of how many pupils from Scremerston would come to Tweedmouth Prior Park First School?

It is hoped that the majority of pupils would come to Tweedmouth Prior Park, but that it was ultimately down to parental choice.

Q – Has potential future house building in the area been considered?

Yes, our forecasting does take into account future house building. However, it should be noted that house building doesn't always result in a significant increase of children and developers also build over a period of time and years.

Q – Was a Memorandum of Understanding agreed and signed about how schools should behave during the consultation as there has been a great deal of false narrative and toxicity aimed at this school?

No there wasn't a Memorandum of Understanding agreed as we didn't think one was needed. There is a Code of Conduct which the local authority would expect all schools to follow and adhere to. SA asked to be notified of any specific incidents so that these can be followed up. Unfortunately, the local authority can't control what the press says or reports.

In relation to false information etc. SA encouraged staff and governors to direct parents to the Padlet on the Council's website and to attend the various public events. The Padlet would be updated regularly with Frequently Asked Questions and Council staff would be present at the public events to answer any questions.

Q – Aware that the questionnaire is on-line. To enable governors' discussions would it be possible to have a copy of the questions emailed to us?

We will send a copy of the questionnaire to the Headteacher. If responding as an individual, you can use the online form. However, if you are responding as a group (eg. staff or governing body) you can submit your response by letter or email.

Q – Backlog maintenance was referred to in the consultation document. Is there a figure going to be ring-fenced and added to the £39.9m investment?

The investment can't be used to address backlog maintenance within schools. Any backlog maintenance is addressed via a separate funding pot. However, it might be possible to add backlog maintenance to any building programme if it would provide better value for money to address the issue at the same time. There is also the opportunity for schools to add to the scope of works. However, you will not be left at the end of the process with a school that looks like a brand-new school due to all the backlog maintenance being addressed as there isn't sufficient money available.

Q – Is the website the main way of informing parents?

As well as the website and Padlet we are also running four public events and would encourage parents to attend. However, as a governing body you can meet with your parents.

SA finished the meeting by thanking the governors for attending and the meeting closed at 6.55 pm.