



# Northumberland County Council

## Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

### Notes of Meeting

---

<b>Meeting:</b>	Tweedmouth Prior Park First School – Staff Meeting
<b>Location:</b>	Tweedmouth Prior Park First School, Dean Drive, Tweedmouth, TD15 2DB

---

<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>	Tuesday 8 <sup>th</sup> November 2022 at 3.30 pm
-------------------------	--

---

<b>Present:</b>	
<u>NCC</u>	Sue Aviston (Head of School Organisation and Resources) Lorraine Fife (School Place Planning and Organisation Manager) Deborah Anderson (Project Support Officer)
<u>Union</u>	N/A
<u>School</u>	Headteacher 16 Members of Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

<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. Purpose of the meeting outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically Tweedmouth Prior Park First School.</li><li>• Provide the opportunity for staff to ask questions.</li></ul> <p>Brief, but not verbatim, notes would be published as part of the report to the Council's Cabinet Committee.</p>
<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 the partnership.</li><li>• 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 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>• 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.</li> <li>• Number of pupils attending schools outside the Berwick partnership. Equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million from the partnership.</li> <li>• Financial challenges facing schools as 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>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Berwick is a strong partnership of schools with 15 out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.</li> <li>• The two schools rated as 'Requiring Improvement' are taking effective action according to Ofsted.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Proposals for this School</u></b>
	<p>Proposals for Tweedmouth Prior Park First School:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Under Model A (revised 3-tier structure)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tweedmouth Prior Park and Tweedmouth West First Schools would amalgamate on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025 under Tweedmouth West's DfE number.</li> <li>○ Pupils on roll on 31<sup>st</sup> August from Scremerston First and part of Norham would transfer to the amalgamated school (or another school of parent's choice) on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025.</li> <li>○ Catchments of Tweedmouth West, Tweedmouth Prior Park, Scremerston and part of Norham become one catchment. A small area will be transferred to Spittal.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Re-organised to become a one form entry primary school on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025.</li> <li>○ Pupils on roll on 31<sup>st</sup> August from Scremerston First would transfer to Tweedmouth Prior Park (or another school of parent's choice) on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025.</li> <li>○ Catchment area of Tweedmouth Prior Park expands to include Scremerston, with a small area transferred to Spittal.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>7.</b>	<b><u>Rationale for the Proposals</u></b>
	<p>The rationale for proposals is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• December 2021 data states that 60% of pupils living in the catchment attend Tweedmouth Prior Park First with 38% choosing other schools</li> <li>• Of the pupils on roll 28% reside in other schools' catchment areas.</li> <li>• The school has 26% surplus places.</li> <li>• Distance to the next nearest school is 1.2 miles.</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. It is hoped that all governing bodies will sign up to protocol.</li> <li>• The protocol looks at drawing a ring-fence around the partnership regarding any newly created posts through changes or posts created through resignations/retirements.</li> <li>• Headteachers would be asked to consider those staff at risk in the first instance for any vacant posts.</li> </ul>
<b>9.</b>	<b><u>Special Educational Needs in Berwick Partnership</u></b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council investment presents opportunity to join up with SEND capacity needs in the area.</li> <li>• Held workshops with Berwick headteachers, 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/ASD. Diagnosis of pupils with SEMH and ASD is increasing significantly.</li> <li>• 2021/22 data shows that 58 pupils living in Berwick with SEND have to travel outside of the partnership to access education on a daily basis.</li> <li>• 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"> <li><u>Model A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Grove continues with its existing provision for PMLD and SLD pupils on its current site.</li> <li>○ Specialist SEMH and ASD provisions created at St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy.</li> <li>○ Create opportunity for peripatetic provision which all schools in the partnership can access.</li> </ul> </li> <li><u>Model B</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 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/ASD pupils.</li> <li>○ Shared site with Berwick Academy would provide opportunities for some pupils to access mainstream lessons/qualifications.</li> <li>○ Primary support base at St Mary's First would continue.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Welcome other 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 but the final figure could be less or more.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Indicative costs for 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>• The proposals for Tweedmouth Prior Park will not have any impact on school transport.</li> <li>• Noted that the Council is not proposing any changes to the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy.</li> <li>• There may be some impact for pupils living in Belford and Wooler under the proposals.</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>• 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.</li> </ul> <p><u>Early Years</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from previous consultation was sufficient early years provision in the partnership and that the provision was good.</li> <li>• There are concerns that with the falling birth rate that this provision remains viable.</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>• Staff encouraged to submit a response. Can respond as an individual but also as a staff group.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Cabinet Committee could decide either to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stop the process and do nothing.</li> <li>○ Approve any recommendation(s) and move to formal statutory consultation. Statutory consultation would last four weeks.</li> <li>○ Approve further consultation if a sufficiently different proposal was put forward.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Final decision potentially made late summer/early autumn term 2023.</li> </ul>
<b>13.</b>	<b><u>Questions</u></b>
	<p><i>Q – Lots of recent data has been provided which is great. However, in the model where it is proposed that Tweedmouth Prior Park is shut you have presumably relied on Tweedmouth Prior Park’s Ofsted report which is historic data. Therefore, would it not be fairer, and beneficial, to re-Ofsted all the schools at risk to give a true reflection of the staff, children and grades?</i></p> <p>The proposal is not based on Ofsted judgements. The Council expects that by the time any model is implemented that Tweedmouth Prior Park First School would have moved to good as all interim reports state that the school is making progress.</p>

Factors taken into consideration are falling pupil numbers, the proximity of other schools within the area, the number of children and where the concentration of children is, distances children would have to travel and what the school sites are like.

*Q – The proposal is to move Tweedmouth West to this site, as it is obviously the better site. If it is not about Ofsted grades, then why close Tweedmouth Prior Park First. Why is it not about Tweedmouth West joining this school and Prior Park’s DfE number continuing?*

Unfortunately, schools as they currently stand are not sustainable. In relation to Tweedmouth Prior Park it does have the better site, but the budget position isn’t as strong as Tweedmouth West. Pupil numbers are also better at Tweedmouth West.

*Q – If we got the pupils from Tweedmouth West we would be in a better financial position?*

That is true and that is something that you can put forward in your response to the consultation.

*Q – The better site is being retained but Tweedmouth West staff are coming across to this site, with job security and getting all Tweedmouth Prior Park’s lovely children and the staff already working in the building will have to apply for posts. It doesn’t sound like a merger.*

The proposal is about two schools coming together, not about one school remaining with the other disappearing. Processes followed during previous re-organisations were shared with the staff as examples – eg. bringing together both governing bodies to form a new governing body. The newly formed governing body developing a staffing structure with an agreed appointment process. The specific details of any staffing protocol would be discussed and agreed between the headteachers and governing bodies.

Within the two-tier proposal Tweedmouth Prior Park would become a primary school and would have to restructure its staffing structure. A primary school is not just a first school with two additional years added on, it is very different. The first school would need to restructure and there could be opportunities to increase leadership structures (eg. create deputy posts etc.).

*Q – Would Northumberland County Council support a mixed model with a mixture of three and two-tier schools?*

The Council doesn’t want a mixed economy and neither does the headteachers. A mixed model was looked at during preliminary work with headteachers and governors but was dismissed. The mixed model was felt to be confusing, creates competition between schools and doesn’t give a clear pathway for parents.

*Q – If the decision was to remain three-tier would there be potential for further cuts down the line because it was found to be unsustainable to remain three-tier?*

Yes, there is the potential for that to happen. It might even be something that comes out of this consultation if people believe the local authority hasn’t gone far enough to make schools viable. It could be suggested that more schools close. This is why Elected Members need to be aware that any decision they make now needs to last for the next fifty years not just for the next three to five.

*Q – If stay within the three-tier system there is the potential for some children to go through three transitions rather than two or one. Is mental welfare, change and unnecessary disruption being taken into consideration?*

This is where the staffing protocol is important. It ensures that there is the right staff in the right places and by making early decisions, if there are to be changes, it ensures that resources are in place to support the children to have the best possible education they can. This is down to the individual schools.

*Q – Why not have a new DfE Number?*

The only way we could do that would be to close both schools and open an Academy or Free School. Local Authorities are unable to open new schools. Therefore, under this proposal one DfE number needs to remain.

*Q – If decision is to stay three-tier what would happen if the Academy decided to go two-tier? We would end up with a mixed economy.*

It would not be a Trust Board decision. It would need to go to the Regional Schools Commissioner and Headteacher Board for approval. The Regional Schools Commissioner would consult with the local authority. The Regional Schools Commissioner has been part of this process since it began and would be hoped that any decision would be for the benefit of the partnership not just an individual school. However, can't say that it couldn't happen.

*Q – If schools remain three-tier we know there isn't the number of pupils in the partnership. Within two, three or four years it is likely that one of the middle schools wouldn't survive. It is worrying that across the community they are not looking at the numbers and considering the impact on children.*

Potentially this could happen as the falling birth rate impacts the middle school phase.

*Q – If school buildings are sold would the money go back into education for the children in this area?*

No that isn't how it works. The sale of any buildings wouldn't impact the funding.

*Q – Is anyone addressing the issue of why pupils aren't attending the academy?*

This is the purpose of the consultation.

*Q - If you think about the wider picture the children leaving the partnership are entering a two-tier system. Parents are actually choosing a two-tier system for pupils of that age. It was also commented that the Academy is a very different school from when it went into special measures. There have been massive improvements. Need to change people's mindsets.*

This is the reason why we have undertaken four rounds of consultation, so we can understand the reasons. As stated in the vision for Berwick we need the community's engagement. Investment in either school system needs to get the backing of the community.

Since we have this opportunity for investment, we are also asking what other provision or community benefit can be drawn from it.

*Q - Not convinced that by changing it would result in more pupils at the Academy.*

That is the Academy's responsibility. It is up to the headteacher and Trustees to be visible and to promote their achievements. The Academy has the same Ofsted grade as the Duchess in Alnwick. As a parent you need to visit the school and make a decision based on your individual child's needs and not rely on rumours or the previous reputation of the school.

*Q – Under a two-tier model there is still a requirement for a staffing restructure as we would effectively still be merging?*

No, the school wouldn't be merging but there would still be a staff restructure as you would be adding two additional year groups. Staff structure would be different as a primary school compared to a first school.

*Q – What constitutes our catchment?*

The catchment is an area the local authority determines for admissions and home to school transport. It is an area used to plan the number of children potentially attending a school to ensure we have the right number of places in the right areas.

*Q – What would happen with the nursery?*

It would remain if the nursery was a sustainable model and the demand requested it.

SA finished the meeting by thanking the staff for attending and the meeting closed at 5.05 pm.