



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting: Berwick Middle School – Staff Meeting
Location: Berwick Middle School, Lovaine Terrace, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 1LA

Date & Time: Monday 14th November 2023 at 3.30 pm

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)

Union

Andrew Gibson (GMB)
Steve Bird (NASUWT)
Phil Rowett (NEU)
Jessica Jackson (UNISON) (*online*)

School

Headteacher
30 Members of Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

Also in

Headteacher (Berwick Middle School)

Attendance

Governor (Tweedmouth Middle School)

1.	<u>Welcome and Purpose of Meeting</u>
	<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">• Explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically for Berwick Middle School.• Provide the opportunity for staff ask any 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>
	<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 Headteachers agreed a Vision for Change for the Berwick partnership and this was approved by governing bodies. 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 which impacts on the viability of schools. • The need to tackle surplus places. In January 2022 there were 1074 surplus places in the partnership. DfE holds local authorities to account over surplus places. • The number of pupils attending schools outside the Berwick partnership. Currently 352 pupils attend schools outside of the partnership which equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million from the partnership. This has an impact on curriculum and teachers. • Financial challenges facing schools due to falling rolls and surplus places. Schools' budgets are based on per pupil funding. Previously a premises factor helped those schools with surplus places but now budgets are set using a national funding formula. • 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 in terms of educational performance. Fourteen out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. • Two of the 'Requires Improvement' schools are taking effective action according to Ofsted with the other school only recently been judged as 'Requires Improvement'. • The last validated data is from 2019. Data for 2022 will be available shortly 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 and students' experiences were very different.

6.	<u>Proposals for the Schools</u>
	<p>Proposals for Berwick Middle School is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Under Model A (revised three-tier structure)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No change with Berwick Middle School remaining open, but there could possibly be a change to it Planned Admission Number. • <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In September 2025 Berwick Middle would not receive a Year 5 intake. ○ On 31 August 2026 Berwick Middle would close and the students on roll (eg. Years 7, 8 and 9) would transfer to Berwick Academy or another school depending on parental choice.
7.	<u>Rationale for the Proposals</u>
	<p>The rationale for proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driven by the number of pupils in the catchment area. GP data for Berwick Middle School is showing a general downward trend for the foreseeable future. • December 2021 data shows that 68% of pupils living in the catchment area attend Berwick Middle with 30% choosing to attend other schools. • Of the pupils on roll 40% reside in other schools' catchment areas. • Lowick First School has 26% surplus places. • The distance to the next nearest school is 1.6 miles.
8.	<u>Implications of the Proposals for Staff in the Berwick Partnership</u>
	<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 academies 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 via resignations/retirements. • Headteachers would be asked to consider those staff at risk in the first instance for any vacant posts.
9.	<u>Special Educational Needs in Berwick Partnership</u>
	<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 needing specialist SEND provision 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:

	<p><u>Model A</u></p> <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. <p><u>Model B</u></p> <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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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 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 these 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 was 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. ● Staff encouraged to submit a collective response but can also respond as an individual. ● It is not a referendum. Decisions and recommendations will be 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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.	<p><u>Questions</u></p>
	<p><i>Q - If a two-tier system is implemented and staff are redeployed to other schools, is the redeployment restricted to the Berwick area or does it include other schools in other areas?</i></p> <p>Usually, the staffing protocol is ring-fenced within the partnership. However, if an individual was unsuccessful and they wanted to look at posts in other areas we do have contact officers who could support them to look at schools outside of the Berwick partnership.</p> <p><i>Q – If the partnership remains three-tier does that mean that the Academy can't offer places for Years 7 and 8?</i></p> <p>The local authority can't speak on their behalf. Academies have a different decision-making process so we can't say that couldn't happen. The Headteacher and Trustees would have to submit a full business case for significant change. It would be up to the RSC and Headteacher's Board to approve and decline the application. However, the Academy has engaged with the process and is keen to come to a collective solution for the partnership.</p> <p><i>Q – A lot of the data is not up to date or hasn't been released yet. Do we have a date when updated data will be available?</i></p> <p>Validated data should be available late January/early February 2023 and will be included in the report to Cabinet.</p> <p><i>Q – In relation to implementation date is the date set in stone?</i></p> <p>That date is what is being proposed, but it could change due to feedback from the consultation.</p> <p><i>Q – A councillor has been quoted as saying "... it is not about imposing change if the community doesn't want it" but it has also said that the consultation isn't a referendum. This is confusing and doesn't add up.</i></p> <p>Unfortunately, can't control what is reported in the press. The consultation is not a referendum, and any recommendation(s) will not be based solely on the number of responses received but on the quality of the response. The decision is not just about the here and now but regarding a sustainable model of education which will last for generations to come.</p> <p><i>Q – Will you listen to the reasons why parents are moving Year 7 and 8 pupils?</i></p> <p>The reasons why parents move is often based on individual circumstances and preferences.</p>

Q – Shocked at the number of pupils not educated in Berwick. Have the parents specifically been asked why they choose to educate their children outside the partnership?

Choice of schooling is an individual's choice often based on personal/family circumstances and the authority can't be seen to be targeting a specifically a group as part of the consultation process.

Q – Will the investment be available regardless of which model (eg. two-tier or three-tier) is chosen?

Elected Members have earmarked £40m for education in the Berwick partnership and we have been asked to consult on a sustainable education system.

Q – A Councillor has been telling the community that the funding will only be available if the partnership goes two-tier.

Unfortunately, can't comment on what someone has reportedly said but reiterated that the investment is not dependant on a specific model being implemented.

Q – Have first school sites been looked at and surveys carried out to see how much it will cost?

No, not yet. That will be carried out and will feed into the next stage report.

Have visited schools to check whether the plans and data the authority holds are still correct. These plans will be used to undertake a desk-top exercise to provide an estimated budget for the report. The authority will not be employing technical advisers and incurring costs until there is a clear direction of travel.

Q – In relation to staff re-deployment, do first schools keep their staff and middle school staff just plug gaps?

That will depend on the staffing protocol. Usually there is an expectation that any newly created posts in primary schools or posts available through natural wastage (eg. resignation or retirement), are ring-fenced to staff at risk during the agreed timeframe.

Q - If two-tier implemented will salaries be protected?

Yes, salaries would be protected for three years.

Q – Is the pay protection applicable for all staff – teaching and non-teaching?

Yes.

Q – Regarding staff applying for other posts in schools, does this apply to the Academy?

The authority is hopeful that the whole partnership, including academies, comes together to adopt the staffing protocol.

Q – <i>Can there be a hybrid model of schools?</i>
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The view of headteachers, and supported by governors, was that a mixed economy of schools leads to confusion and instability within the system.

SA finished the meeting by thanking staff for attending and the meeting closed at 5.10 pm.