



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting:	Tweedmouth Middle School – Staff Meeting
Location:	Tweedmouth Middle School, Billendean Terrace, Spittal, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 2DJ

Date & Time:	Monday 15 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>	Steve Bird (NASUWT) Phil Rowett (NEU) Dave Smith
<u>School</u>	Headteacher 27 Members of Teaching and Non-teaching Staff
<u>Also in Attendance</u>	Cllr. Georgina Hill Headteacher (Berwick Middle School) 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 Tweedmouth 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. <p>Governors advised that this is the same presentation that was shared with staff prior to this meeting.</p>
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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 these 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 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. The other school has only recently been judged as 'Requires Improvement'. • The last validated data we have 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 Tweedmouth Middle School are:</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 Tweedmouth Middle School remaining open, but there could possibly be a change to the Planned Admission Number.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In September 2025 Tweedmouth Middle would not receive a Year 5 intake. ○ On 31 August 2026 Tweedmouth 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 Tweedmouth Middle is showing a general downward trend for the foreseeable future. • December 2021 data shows that 67% of pupils living in the catchment area attend Tweedmouth Middle with 31% choosing other schools. • Of the pupils on roll 9% reside in other schools' catchment areas. • Lowick First School has 22% 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: <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.

	<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. ● 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. Questions

Q – Has the reasons why so many pupils leave the partnership been adequately looked into?

Other than trying to engage with everyone through the consultation we can't specifically target an individual cohort of parents. The choice of school is parental choice and can be influenced by many factors – eg. childcare, employment etc.

Q – Why haven't this year's results been published in the consultation documentation?

This year's results haven't been validated so we don't have consistent national data. Once validated they will be included in the report to Cabinet.

Q – Why not publish the result but state that they will be validated in due course?

As a local authority we don't use unvalidated data. Once the data has been validated it will be made available.

Q – Our parents aren't sufficiently educated to understand the questions so are unable to complete the survey.

If the Headteacher could provide some specific examples of the issue(s) we can review the documentation. Advised that further information is available on the Padlet which can be accessed on the Northumberland County Council website.

Q – Why are there only two options, Model A and Model B, for consideration?

Several other options were considered during workshop sessions with headteachers, but they were discounted as not being viable which left the two models we are currently consulting on. However, it doesn't mean that an option can't come back onto the table for consideration if you believe it is a viable option for sustainable education in Berwick. We are also asking for alternative suggestions.

Q – Key is the community engagement but have heard "it isn't a referendum", this conflicts with engagement.

It is about the quality and rationale of the response, not about the number received for one model. The views of staff and governors, as educational professionals, are held in high regard.

Q – Does every response get read?

Yes.

Q – Who decides what is a quality response?

Whether the response addresses the issues.

Q – If it goes two-tier what happens to specialist subjects?

These will be delivered as part of the primary curriculum as they are in the rest of the country.

Q – Would money be ring-fenced to provide training?

There could be opportunities to bid for national funding for CPD and there could be training opportunities within the partnership. This will be covered within the staffing protocol.

Q – In respect of the consultation response, do they all get equal recognition?

The responses from those most impacted by any changes (eg. parents, staff and governors), would have stronger weight.

Q – Some Councillors are saying things which are detrimental to a fair consultation.

Unfortunately, we can't control what individual Councillors say or what the Press reports. We will be giving consistent messages via communications and the FAQs section on the Padlet will be kept up to date.

Q – Why are the venues for the public events all schools who support two-tier?

Venues were chosen because of suitability (eg. size, accessibility and car parking), availability, cost and location.

SA finished the meeting by thanking staff for attending and the meeting closed at 5.15 pm.