



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting:	Tweedmouth West First – Staff Meeting
Location:	Tweedmouth West First School, Osbourne Road, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 2HS

Date & Time:	Monday 5 th December 2022 at 3.30 pm.
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Present:	
<u>NCC</u>	Sue Aviston (Head of School Organisation and Resources) Audrey Kingham (Joint Interim Director of Children’s Services/Director of Education and Skills) Lorraine Fife (School Place Planning and Organisation Manager) Deborah Anderson (Project Support Officer) Annie Leaver (Lead HR Adviser – Education Special Projects)
<u>Union</u>	Andrew Gibson (GMB) Alison Martin (UNISON)
<u>School</u>	Headteacher 12 Members of Teaching and Non-teaching Staff 2 Members of The Red Balloon Pre-School Group

1.	<u>Welcome and Purpose of Meeting</u>
	SA welcomed everyone to the meeting and those in attendance were noted above. Purpose of the meeting outlined as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically Tweedmouth Prior Park First School.• 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 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 14 out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. • Two of the RI schools are taking effective action according to Ofsted. The other school has only recently been judged as RI. • 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 West 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 West First and Tweedmouth Prior Park Schools would amalgamate to become a two-form entry school on the Tweedmouth Prior Park side on 1st September 2025. ○ Tweedmouth West's DfE number would continue. ○ 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 and remain on its current site.

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 shows pupils born in its catchment is relatively stable compared to other first schools. • December 2021 data states that 42% of pupils living in the catchment attend Tweedmouth West First with 57% choosing other schools • Of the pupils on roll 39% reside in other schools' catchment areas. • The school has 21% surplus places. • Distance to the next nearest school is 1.2 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 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.	<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/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/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 West 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 was there 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 response. Can respond as an individual but also as a staff group. • 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 – Are the two options in the consultation document the only options available?</i></p> <p>Northumberland County Council have put forward two proposals for consideration. However, this is a consultation, and we are seeking your views and any alternative suggestions or options.</p> <p><i>Q – If you submit a response, but later change your view is there an opportunity to re-submit a response?</i></p> <p>Yes.</p>
	<p><i>Q – In previous discussions amalgamation wasn’t one of the options – where did it come from?</i></p>

As part of the process, we like to consult on as many options as possible. As two stand-alone schools there could be difficulties in terms of financial viability therefore by looking at an amalgamation it would be better for the communities than closing one or both schools. However, parents, staff and the communities may have a different viewpoint.

Q – How is it decided which school DfE number remains?

The decision about which number remains is based on several factors – eg. birth data, viable pupil numbers, budgets and sustainable cohorts. It is not based on Ofsted judgements. Due to legislation, a local authority can't open a new school unless it is an academy or free school, therefore one of the amalgamated school's DfE numbers must remain.

Q – The opening of a 'new' school is not an option?

It is an option, but it would have to be an academy or free school and would result in the closure of both Tweedmouth West and Tweedmouth Prior Park First Schools. This is the reason why we are proposing an amalgamation.

Q – What happens to The Red Balloon Pre-School Group?

The Red Balloon Pre-School Group is a privately run group and is not part of the school therefore does not form part of the proposals. However, the local authority would welcome their views on the proposals. It would be up to the group's committee to respond to the consultation.

Q – If this school is moved to the Tweedmouth Prior Park site but keeps Tweedmouth West's DfE number do the staff at Tweedmouth West keep their jobs or would they have to re-apply?

Those discussions would form part of the staffing protocol. In previous school re-organisations when two schools have merged a shadow governing body is created from the members of the affected schools' governing bodies. The newly formed shadow governing body would be tasked to devise the staffing structure of the merged school and how appointments would be made to that structure. For example, some posts may have competitive interviews others could be a slot-in.

Q - Would the staffing protocol be across the whole partnership?

Yes, that would be the aim.

Q – If school goes two-tier, where would the extra two classes go?

Work would need to be undertaken to determine if any building adaptation were necessary.

Q – Is the £40m guaranteed that it will be there at the end of this consultation?

As guaranteed as it can be but certainly until the end of this Administration. A detailed business case to support the changes in Berwick would need to be made and approved by Elected Members. Funding is in the medium-term plan however, there is always the possibility that following this consultation if there is no clear direction that politicians decide not to spend the money in Berwick.

Q – Is most of the funding going to the Academy?

Not necessarily. The £40m is for investment in the education system within the Berwick partnership.

Q – If this school amalgamates with Tweedmouth Prior Park First how would it work? Would it be a phased transfer or by a set date?

It could be either and this might be something that is determined as part of the consultation.

Q – Would the staff protocol be decided before the end of this consultation?

It would be decided during the consultation. We have committed to meeting with the headteachers at the beginning of the New Year and we will be asking governing bodies to sign up to the principles of the protocol, although not necessarily the detail.

Q – Is the staffing protocol something that already exists?

Yes, there is a template that we use as a basis, but every protocol is be-spoke to a partnership.

Q – Under either proposal there is a risk that Berwick loses pupils to the Scottish System or Alnwick because parents don't like the model being proposed?

Within any reorganisation or change people would make that decision based on what is best for their child(ren).

Q – If our school ends up going two-tier would a staff protocol still be needed or are our jobs safe?

A staff protocol would still be required because a primary school is not just a first school with two additional years. Becoming a primary school gives opportunities to look at staffing structures and perhaps create additional leadership posts (eg. deputy or key stage leads). Any newly created vacancies would be ring-fenced to those staff deemed at risk. However, under either model there would be school closures.

Q – Don't like either model for SEN. The Grove needs to grow, and I would be happy for all the money to be spent on that as it has a knock-on effect to the rest of the partnership. If we don't have that as a facility in Berwick it has catastrophic implications for those children who need it as they are not receiving the right provision in Berwick or have to travel. The other model of putting PMLD and SEMH together in one place wouldn't work.

The Grove currently isn't meeting the needs of all SEND pupils in Berwick, hence why so many have to travel down the A1 to access education. Under one model it is proposed that PMLD and SEMH children would be based and educated within their own "wing" of a building or a separate building on the site but under one organisation with shared back-office functions eg. kitchens, headteacher etc.

Q – Under Model A would the provision at St Mary's be long-term?

Yes, under the proposal St Mary's would reduce its planned admission number to become a half form entry school and have provision of children with SEMH/ASD.

SA finished the meeting by thanking the staff for attending and the meeting closed at 5.00 pm.