



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting:	Berwick Academy – Staff Meeting
Location:	Berwick Academy, Adams Drive, Spittal, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 2JF

Date & Time:	Monday 12 th December 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) (<i>online</i>) Deborah Anderson (DA) (Project Support Officer)
<u>Union</u>	Phil Rowett (NEU) Alison Martin (UNISON) (<i>online</i>)
<u>School</u>	Headteacher 35 Members of Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

1.	<u>Welcome and Purpose of Meeting</u>
	SA welcomed everyone to the meeting and those in attendance were noted above. The purpose of the meeting was outlined as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically for Berwick Academy.• 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>
	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 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 Berwick Academy are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Under Model A (revised 3-tier structure)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Berwick Academy remains as a 13 to 18 'high' school. ○ Proposed reduced PAN to 180 in light of falling pupil numbers. • <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Berwick Academy increases its age range to become an 11 to 18 secondary school. ○ Proposed reduced PAN to 180 in light of falling pupil numbers.

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 the number of pupils living in the greater catchment area continues to fall for the foreseeable future. • December 2021 data shows that 65% of pupils living in the catchment attend Berwick Academy with 33% attending other schools. • Of the pupils on roll 2.5% attend from other Northumberland school or from out of county. • Berwick Academy has 43% surplus places. • The distance to the next nearest provision is 10 miles (Eyemouth High School).
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. <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 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 deemed 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 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.	<u>Questions</u>
	<p><i>Q – Is the process a democratic or autocratic processes?</i></p> <p>It is not a referendum but a consultation processing seeking views, specifically for those individuals impacted by the proposals eg. parents, staff and governors. The decision will be made by the Councils' Elected Members or in the case of the Academy the Regional Schools Commissioner's Headteacher Board.</p> <p>Within other consultations if there wasn't the support, particularly from the educational professionals, changes haven't been implemented (eg. Hexham).</p>

Q – In relation to the 185 students educated outside the partnership, there is “noise” in the community that it is the fault of the Academy that students are leaving.

As an authority we are aware that some individuals are making inappropriate and unfounded comments and we are trying to manage and correct any inaccuracies but can't always control what is being said or what is printed in the press. You need to make sure that the Academy's voice and views are heard.

Q – Will the partnership still get the money to improve schools?

If agreement on an education model can't be reached, then the decision by Elected Members might be to do nothing in Berwick. If so, the money could go elsewhere so it is imperative that a decision is reached.

Q – Following implementation of whatever model is agreed, what happens if in future years things change?

We will work to ensure that whatever investment or design is implemented that there will be some degree of flexibility built in to allow for changes in the future.

Q – If decision is to go two-tier, will there be investment in the curriculum?

No, any investment will be capital funding. Investment in the curriculum will be up to governing bodies. The Academy will receive more funding because it will have more children.

Q – What are the ideas around Post-16?

We are asking you to consider what else this investment can present to the community and what a post 16/18 curriculum could look like.

Q – In relation to SEND, does the data show an increase in numbers?

Forecasted data does show increases, particularly around SEMH and ASD. We have just launched our SEND strategy and agreed to send a copy to Headteacher.

SA finished the meeting by thanking staff for attending and the meeting closed at 4.40 pm.