



# Northumberland County Council

## Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

### Notes of Meeting

---

**Meeting:** Norham St Ceolwulfs CE First School – Staff Meeting  
**Location:** Norham St Ceolwulfs CE First School, West Street, Norham-on-Tweed, TD15 2JZ

---

**Date & Time:** Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2022 at 3.30 pm

---

**Present:**  
NCC Sue Aviston (SA) (Head of School Organisation and Resources)  
Deborah Anderson (DA) (Project Support Officer)  
Annie Leaver (AL) (Lead HR – Education Special Projects)

Diocese Paul Rickeard (Diocesan Director of Education, Durham and Newcastle)

Union Steve Bird (NASUWT)  
Phil Rowett (NEU)  
Hannah Brown (UNISON) (*online*)

School Headteacher  
4 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. The purpose of the meeting was outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically for Norham CE First School.</li><li>• To provide an opportunity for staff to ask questions.</li><li>• Brief, but not verbatim, notes would be published as part of the report to the Council's Cabinet Committee.</li></ul>
<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, headteachers and governing bodies agreed a Vision for Change for the Berwick partnership. The vision covered the following:</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>There are several factors facing the Berwick Partnership including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Falling pupil numbers.</li> <li>• The need to tackle surplus places. In January 2022 there were 1074 surplus places in the partnership. The DfE holds local authorities to account over these surplus places.</li> <li>• The number of pupils attending schools outside the Berwick partnership. Equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million from the partnership.</li> <li>• The 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 14 out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.</li> <li>• Two of the Requires Improvement schools are taking effective action according to Ofsted and the other school has only recently been judged as Requires Improvement.</li> <li>• The last validated data we have is from 2019. 2022 data will be available soon and this will be included in the report to Cabinet. However, caveats by DfE is not to draw comparisons with previous years as educational experiences have been very different.</li> </ul>
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Proposals for this School</u></b>
	<p>The proposals for Norham CE First School include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Under Model A (revised 3-tier structure)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Norham would close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025.</li> <li>○ Norham's catchment area would be split between the amalgamated Tweedmouth West/Prior Park First Schools and Hugh Joicey CE First School.</li> <li>○ Pupils on roll, reception to Year 3, at Norham on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025 would transfer to the amalgamated Tweedmouth West/Tweedmouth Prior Park or Hugh Joicey First Schools, or any other school according to parental preference on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Norham becomes a 0.3 FE primary school with a PAN of 10 on its current site on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025.</li> <li>○ Pupils on roll in Year 4 at Norham on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025 would remain in the school on 1 September 2025 and become the new Year 5.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pupils on roll in Year 5 at Norham on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2026 would remain in the school on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026 and become the new Year 6.</li> <li>○ Pupils on roll in Year 6 at Norham on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2027 would transfer to Berwick Academy on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2027 as part of their new Year 7 intake, or transfer to any other school according to parental preference.</li> </ul>
<b>7.</b>	<b><u>Rationale for the Proposals</u></b>
	<p>The rationale for proposals are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Driven by the number of pupils in the catchment area. GP data shows pupils born in its catchment is relatively stable but last year's data showed dip.</li> <li>● December 2021 data states that 52% of pupils living in the catchment attend Norham CE First with 45% choosing other schools</li> <li>● Of the pupils on roll 32% reside in other schools' catchment areas.</li> <li>● The school has 34% surplus places.</li> <li>● Distance to the next nearest school is 7.5 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 and ASD. Diagnosis of pupils with SEMH and ASD is increasing significantly.</li> <li>● 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.</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 and 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 West 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 there 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>
	No questions were received from staff.

SA finished the meeting by thanking the staff for attending. The meeting closed at 4.30 pm.