



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting:	Wooler First School – Staff Meeting
Location:	Wooler First School, 15 Brewery Lane, Wooler, NE71 6QF

Date & Time:	Thursday 12 th January 2023 at 3.45 pm
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Present:	
<u>NCC</u>	Sue Aviston (SA) (Head of School Organisation and Resources) Lorraine Fife (LF) (School Place Planning and Organisation Manager) (<i>online</i>) Deborah Anderson (DA) (Project Support Officer) Annie Leaver (AL) (HR Lead – Education Special Projects)
<u>Union</u>	Joyce Guthrie (GMB) Steve Bird (NASUWT) Hannah Brown (UNISON) (<i>online</i>)
<u>School</u>	Headteacher 17 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 Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools.• 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 Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Under Model A (revised three-tier structure)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wooler First would change its age range and become a one form entry primary school in a phased way on its current site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ September 2024 – retain Year 4 to become Year 5 ▪ September 2025 – retain Year 5 to become Year 6 ○ Glendale Middle would not receive a Year 5 intake in September 2024 and would operate with Years 6, 7 and 8. ○ On 31st August 2025 Glendale Middle would close and pupils on roll would transfer to Duchess High School or another school of parental choice.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wooler and Glendale catchments would move to become part of the Alnwick partnership, with pupils feeding into Duchess High School at Year 7 from September 2025. ● <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wooler would remain in the Berwick catchment. ○ Wooler First would change its age range and become a one form entry primary school in a phased way on its current site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ September 2025 – retain Year 4 to become Year 5 ▪ September 2026 – retain Year 5 to become Year 6 ○ Glendale Middle would not receive a Year 5 intake in September 2025 and would operate with Years 6, 7 and 8. ○ On 31st August 2026 Glendale Middle would close and pupils on roll would transfer to Duchess High School or another school of 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 shows that a PAN of 30 would be appropriate for Wooler as a first or primary school. ● December 2021 data shows that 74% of pupils living in the catchment area attend Wooler First with 24% choosing other schools. ● Of the pupils on roll 8% reside in other schools' catchment areas. ● Wooler First School has 31% surplus places. ● The distance to the next nearest school is 8.7 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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 there is 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 – In either option Wooler becomes a primary school. Therefore why, would our jobs be at risk?

It would depend on the staffing protocol adopted by the partnership and the staff structure developed by the headteacher and governing body. In previous school re-organisations, it hasn't been the case that everyone had to apply for their posts. The Trade Unions present stated that they would object and would not agree to any staffing protocol which resulted in all staff having to apply for their posts.

Q – Is this building fit for purpose to become a primary school?

Under the proposals it is the intention that the school remains in this building.

Q – Will there always be a school in Wooler?

Yes, that is the proposal.

Q – In relation to the proposed new build for the high school in Berwick, will it result in the school becoming the responsibility of the local authority?

No, there will be no change to the way the Academy is ran.

Q – Why is the local authority spending money on building a new school for an Academy?

Because they are all Northumberland children.

Q – How long after the consultation will work be done to look at building suitability?

It would commence immediately once any decision is made. There is some desk-top background work being undertaken in respect of both options to provide high level costs for report to members.

Q – What is the timeframe for staffing decisions?

Hope to commence work on the staffing protocol soon so that at the point of the final decision being made the protocol is ready to come into force. The aim is for staff to know where they will be in two years' time, so it gives stability to the staff and the pupils and helps retain staff in the partnership.

Q – How soon after the consultation closes is the Cabinet meeting?

Hoping to present the report to the April/May Cabinet meeting. Due to the additional Bank Holiday the date has yet to be confirmed.

Q – Is the former first school building, up the road, a feasible option?

It would be something that would need to be investigated.

Q – Does the Staffing Protocol include opportunities in Alnwick schools as well as Berwick schools?

That will be something that we discuss with the governors at Duchess High School.

Staff would also have access to Contact Officers, who will have knowledge to vacancies in schools across Northumberland.

Q – If Wooler moves into Alnwick partnership, what will happen to those pupils who currently attend Berwick Academy?

Transport would be honoured until they leave.

Q – What happens if schools object to the decision made by Cabinet?

It is not a referendum. It is up to the local authority to implement any decision. In Alnwick when two schools didn't want to become primary schools there was no alternative but to propose closure.

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