



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting:	The Grove School – Staff Meeting
Location:	The Grove School, Grove Gardens, Tweedmouth, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 2EN

Date & Time:	Monday 16 th January 2023 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) Annie Leaver (AL) (HR Lead – Education Special Projects)
<u>Union</u>	Steve Bird (NASUWT) Phil Rowett (NEU)
<u>School</u>	24 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 The Grove 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.
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>SEND Data and Information</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's investment presents an opportunity to join up with SEND capacity needs in the area. • Shared information on the numbers, primary need and schools attended in relation to pupils with SEND living in the Berwick partnership. • Shared forecasted pupils' numbers for SEMH and ASD pupils up to September 2026. Predictions indicate steady increase of pupils diagnosed with SEMH/ASD. • Shared forecasted pupils' numbers for pupils with PMLD and SLD diagnosis up to September 2026. Current data does not indicate growth. • The Grove is the only specialist provision in the Berwick area but is not designated for pupils with SEMH as a primary need.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Grove has capacity for 48 students and according to 2021/22 data currently has 36 pupils attending The Grove reside in the Berwick area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to 2021/22 data, 22 students with SEND have to travel daily to access suitable education.
7.	<u>Proposals for the Special Educational Needs in Berwick partnerships</u>
	<p>Proposals for special education needs in the Berwick partnership are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Proposal for additional SEND provision under Model A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Grove continues with its existing provision and specialism in Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Profound Learning Difficulties (PMLD) on its current site. Specialist SEMH and ASD provisions are created at First, Middle and High School phase (eg. St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy). Option to identify and run peripatetic provision which all schools in the partnership can access. <u>Proposal for additional SEND provision under Model A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Grove relocates to the Tweedmouth Middle School site, increases its planned admission number and extends its designation to include SEMH and ASD pupils. The shared site with Berwick Academy allows opportunities for students to access mainstream lessons/study where relevant. Primary Support Base at St Mary's CE First School would continue to operate as it is now. <p>Other potential ideas for increasing SEND capacity within the Berwick area is welcomed.</p>
8.	<u>Implications of the Proposals for Staff in the Berwick Partnership</u>
	<p><u>Staff at The Grove:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There would be no implications for staff under Model A. Under Model B additional staff would be required as the school expands its provision to include students with SEND and ASD. <p><u>Staff in First, Middle and High Schools:</u></p> <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>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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be some impact for pupils living in Belford and Wooler under these proposals.
10.	<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 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.
11.	<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 – Alarmed that one of the proposals is to add SEMH pupils in with the current cohort of children. It would not be right for our current children and for SEMH/ASD children.</i></p> <p>Pupils would not mix; they would have their own separate building/area. The proposal is to harness and access the excellent leadership and management at The Grove.</p> <p><i>Q – The Grove and the designation of pupils who attend the school is well established. Concern that pupils with SEMH will be reluctant and not want to be associated with and attend The Grove.</i></p> <p>Extended provision might not be called The Grove. It is the leadership/management that would be shared.</p> <p><i>Q – Is there a way that Model A, with the specialist provisions, could be part of Model B's proposal?</i></p> <p>The proposals are suggestions and are open to change, we are asking for your thoughts and ideas.</p>

Q – The Grove doesn't have enough places for children who need to attend, what happens to those children?

The data suggested there is sufficient capacity based on predicted numbers and forecasting. Need to ensure we are meeting the needs of Northumberland children in the first instance.

Q – Where does the data for the forecasts come from?

The data comes from several sources (eg. NHS and is triangulated to inform predictions. Our predictions for PLD/SLD is static compared to SEMH.

Q – Under Model B, is the site definitively the Tweedmouth Middle School site?

No, it could be the Tweedmouth Middle school site, or an alternative could be identified if this site was deemed unsuitable.

Q – Once the site has been decided would The Grove get a new build or refurbishment?

It could be either and would depend on the outcomes of the site option appraisals. Conversions often offer better facilities eg. Ashdale was a former miner's welfare. A new build often results in smaller classrooms and facilities.

Q – If move to new site would there be a hydrotherapy pool etc.?

It would depend on the needs of the students/cohort. The authority would adhere to DfE building guidelines.

Q – How long would the process be?

Potentially two to three years from designing school to opening.

Q – What happens if the new build on the new site is the preferred model and other schools need new roofs etc.?

As part of the consultation officers report back what was said, what would be needed and what the estimated costs would be. This is then presented to the Council's Cabinet for them to decide.

Can't do too much work prior to a decision as it could be seen as pre-determining the outcome. The investment is not about upgrades but about funding changes within the education system. The £39m is to replace or remodel buildings and is not about addressing maintenance issues, that comes from a different funding stream.

As part of remodelling work there could be an opportunity to address issues to give value for money.

Q – If go two-tier, are there first schools that could become primary schools immediately, without any building work?

Yes.

Q – What is the catchment area now that Barndale has changed its designation?

Special schools don't have an official catchment area. Barndale hasn't changed its designation as there hasn't been any formal consultation. This will be looked at as part of the SEND Strategy.

	<p><i>Comment – The Grove is currently outstanding. If we generalise, we will dilute the expertise we have and not be outstanding.</i></p>
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	<p><i>Comment – If Model A is decided and The Grove remains in its current building, we will not be giving the best opportunity to current children.</i></p>
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SA finished the meeting by thanking staff for attending and the meeting closed at 4.40 pm.