



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting:	Belford Primary School – Staff Meeting
Location:	Belford Primary School, West Street, Belford, NE70 7QD

Date & Time:	Wednesday 18 th January 2023 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) (<i>online</i>) Deborah Anderson (Project Support Officer)
<u>Union</u>	Steve Bird (NASUWT) Joyce Guthrie (GMB) Liz Sturgeon (Unison) (<i>online</i>)
<u>School</u>	Headteacher 4 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 Belford Primary School.• Provide an 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">• There have been discussions for several years about school structures within the partnership.• Council has allocated funding for investment towards school buildings within the partnership.• Any investment needs to be in a school system that will be viable, sustainable for future generations and deliver improved outcomes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community in Berwick needs to support whichever school system is in place to ensure schools thrive. • Consulting on two models, but there could be an alternative and we are interested to hear your views.
3.	<u>Vision for Change</u>
	<p>During preliminary work, headteachers and governing bodies agreed a Vision for Change in the Berwick partnership which 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. This has been a declining trend for a number of years. • Surplus places – falling pupils number lead to surplus places. LA held to account by the DfE for surplus places. In January 2022 there were 1074 surplus places in the partnership. • Number of pupils attending schools outside the partnership. (184 high school students and 98 middle school students not attending the high/middle schools in the partnership.) Equates to £1.5 million. • Financial Challenges. School budgets mainly based on the number of pupils on roll. Forecasts indicated that by 2025/26 eight schools within the partnership will have a deficit budget. This doesn't include academies or The Grove as they are funded differently and doesn't take account of recent pay rises or the current cost of living difficulties. • The growing number of children and young people with special educational needs and the need to provide appropriate educational provision closer to home.
5.	<u>Education Outcomes</u>
	<p>SA advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards in Berwick are very good with 14 out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. • Two out of the three schools rated as 'Requires Improvement' are taking effective action according to Ofsted. The other school has only recently been judged as needing improvement. • The last validated data we have for KS2, KS4 and KS5 is from 2019. Validated data for 2022 is expected late January but comes with a caution from the DfE not to compare with previous years due to recent circumstances.
6.	<u>Proposals for this School</u>
	<p>Proposals for Belford Primary School are the same under either Model A (revised three-tier) or Model B (primary/secondary) as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belford Primary School becomes part of the Alnwick Partnership with a reduced catchment area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If approved, pupils living in Belford Primary's catchment area would become eligible, subject to meeting the Home to School Transport policy's criteria, for transport to Duchess High.
7.	<u>Rationale for the Proposals</u>
	<p>Data shows that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of children born in the Belford catchment year on year is not consistent. 68% of children living in the catchment attend Belford Primary, with 32% choosing other schools. Belford Primary currently has 58% surplus places. Distance to nearest school is 8.5 miles away. Encouraging attendance at local schools reduces unnecessary car journeys therefore supporting the Council's Climate Action Plan.
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. Ambition is to retain as many staff as possible within the Berwick partnership of schools. Officers will work with schools, academies and trade unions to develop a Staffing Protocol. It is hoped that all governing bodies will sign up to the protocol. Aim of the protocol is to ensure any appointment process is fair for all staff and that they know at the earliest opportunity.
9.	<u>Special Educational Needs in Berwick Partnership</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The investment presents opportunity to look at SEND capacity. SEN workshops held 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 with SEN living in Berwick have to travel outside of the partnership to access education on a daily basis. There are two proposed models for additional SEND provision. Either model can be established under a two or three-tier system: <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 on the current site. Specialist SEMH and ASD provisions are created at St Mary's CE First, Berwick Middle and Berwick Academy. Opportunity created to access peripatetic provision for all schools in the partnership. <u>Model B</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Grove relocates to the site of Tweedmouth Middle (or another identified site in Berwick). It increases its planned pupil number and extends its designation to include SEMH/ASD pupils either in a separate wing or building but with shared leadership and backroom functions. The shared site with Berwick Academy would allow pupils, where relevant, to access mainstream lessons/study for qualifications. The 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. • Officers will be undertaking background work to establish what the potential budgets could be for carrying out any potential building works under either model. • 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"> • Proposing no changes to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. • If Belford Primary moves to the Alnwick partnership pupils would be entitled to transport under the Home to School Transport Policy. • Pupils living in the far north of Belford's catchment area could potentially be entitled to transport if they choose to attend Berwick Academy as it could be deemed to be their nearest school.
11.	<u>Other Factors to consider</u>
	<p><u>Post-16/Post-18</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The investment presents an opportunity to extend and improve the Post-16/Post-18 offer for pupils and the wider community therefore we are seeking your views and ideas. <p><u>Early Years</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback in the previous consultation indicated that there is sufficient early years provision in the partnership and that provision is deemed good. • Concerns regarding the viability of provisions due to the falling birth rate.
12.	<u>Next Steps</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advised that the consultation runs until midnight on 3rd March 2023. • Staff were encouraged to submit a response. They can respond individually or collectively. • Not a referendum in respect. Decisions and recommendations made on the quality/rational of the response, not the numbers received for one particular model. Staff views, as educational professionals, held in high regard by Elected Members. • Outcomes 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 too either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cease 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 hoped to be made in the late summer term or early autumn term 2023.
13.	<u>Questions</u>
	<p><i>The staff didn't have any questions about the proposals but did state that being part of the Alnwick partnership made more sense as a number of parents choose to send their children to Duchess.</i></p> <p><i>Q – In relation to free transport to Alnwick when would it come into effect?</i></p> <p>At the point of implementation and any change. It would not apply retrospectively.</p>

SA finished the meeting by thanking the staff for attend the meeting. The meeting closed at 4.25 pm.