



Northumberland County Council

Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

Notes of Meeting

Meeting: Hugh Joicey CE First School – Staff Meeting
Location: Hugh Joicey CE First School, Ford, TD15 2QA

Date & Time: Tuesday 24th January 2023 at 3.30 pm

Present:
NCC Sue Aviston (Head of School Organisation and Resources)
Lorraine Fife (School Place Planning and Organisation Manager) (*online*)
Deborah Anderson (Project Support Officer)
Annie Leaver (HR Lead, Special Education Projects)

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

Unions Steve Bird (NASUWT)

School Headteacher
5 Members of Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

1.	<u>Welcome and Purpose of Meeting</u>
	<p>SA welcomed everyone to the meeting and those in attendance were noted above. Purpose of the meeting outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain the proposals for the Berwick Partnership and specifically for Hugh Joicey CE First School.• Provide the 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>
	<p>SA set out the context and rationale for the proposals:</p> <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, school leaders agreed a Vision for Change in the Berwick partnership. 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. • Need to tackle surplus places. • Pupils attending schools outside the Berwick partnership. Equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million from the partnership. • Financial challenges facing schools as budgets are based on per pupil funding. • 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 with 14 out of 17 schools rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. • Two of the schools rated as 'Requiring Improvement' are taking effective action according to Ofsted. The other requires improvement school has only recently been inspected. • The last validated data we have is from 2019. More recent data will be available late January, 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 to what they are now.
6.	<u>Proposals for this School</u>
	<p>Proposals for Hugh Joicey CE First School:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Under Model A (revised 3-tier structure)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Remain a 0.5 form entry (PAN 15) first school. ○ Catchment area would expand slightly due to the proposed closure of Norham CE First School. • <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Re-organise to become a 0.5 form entry primary school. ○ PAN would remain at 15 but capacity expanded to 105 places. ○ Catchment would remain the same under this model as Norham is proposed to remain open.

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. • According to December 2021 data 93% of pupils living in the catchment attend Hugh Joicey. • Of the pupils on roll 54% reside in other schools' catchment areas which means the school is popular within and outside its catchment area. • The school has 19% surplus places. • Distance to the next nearest school is 4.8 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 academy 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 through 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/ASD. Diagnosis of pupils with SEMH and ASD is increasing significantly. • 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. • 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/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 proposals for Hugh Joicey will not have any impact on school transport. • Noted that the Council is not proposing any changes to the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy. • There may be some impact for pupils in Belford and Wooler under the 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 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 response. Can respond as an individual but also as a staff group. • 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. • 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 - Why now, why not wait until numbers were lower in first schools to start the process?</i></p> <p>There is the opportunity to invest funding now within the partnership. Potentially a risk that the funding may not be available under a new administration. The subject has been talked about for a long time that the decision by headteachers and governors 18 months ago was that the conversation just needed to take place. You don’t wait until schools are really struggling particularly when it can have an impact on the quality of education provided.</p>

Q – Will money be given to schools and the Academy if they remain three-tier?

Yes, the decision was to invest in the partnership. However, it is better to have strategic decisions regarding structures etc before we commence and commit funding.

Q – What happens if the birth rate increases?

Not proposing schools are built to only accommodate children in their cohort. There is always flexibility built in for increases, but any significant increases would be addressed by adding extra classrooms if needed. Catchment pupils would also take priority over non-catchment pupils.

Q – Had this issue in Belford. Some Belford pupils didn't get a place at Duchess as the school was full.

This was a result of parental choice and not a school organisation decision. The pupils weren't attending their catchment school.

Q – What would attract parents back to Berwick?

This is what the three rounds of consultation have been about, finding out what would attract parents back.

Q – Is getting rid of the Academy not an option?

No, the Academy can't revert back to local authority control. The Academy is an improving school.

Q- Is the funding the same for both models? Would it not be more expensive to change to a two-tier system than remaining with the three-tier system and investing the money into the system?

Yes, potential it could cost more in terms of the capital investment. However, the decision is for the next 50 years and not just for the next five. Decisions need to be based on having a viable school system that ensures improved education outcomes.

The figure of £39.9 million has been quoted, but it could be more or less depending on the model of education. It is up to Elected Members to agree.

Q - The Belford situation wasn't smooth.

Agree, what happened in Belford, wasn't what we as a local authority wanted to happen.

Q – What happens if there is a 50/50 split for either model?

It is not a referendum. Outcomes are not based on the number of responses received for either model, but on the quality or rationale. Higher emphasis is given to those who are impacted by the proposal.

The meeting finished at 4.30 pm and SA thanked the staff for attending.