



# Northumberland County Council

## Phase 2 Consultation – Education in the Berwick Partnership

### Notes of Meeting

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<b>Meeting:</b>	Spittal First School – Governors’ Meeting
<b>Location:</b>	Spittal First School, Main Street, Spittal, Berwick, TD15 1RD

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<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>	Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup> February 2023 at 4.45 pm
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<b>Present:</b>	
<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)
<u>School</u>	Headteacher 5 Members of the Governing Body

<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 Spittal First School.</li><li>• To provide an opportunity for governors 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> <p>This is the same presentation that was shared with staff prior to this meeting.</p>
<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 in the Berwick partnership. The vision was summarised as follows:</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>Factors facing the Berwick Partnership include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Falling pupil numbers across the partnership.</li> <li>• The need to tackle surplus places. In January 2022 there were 1074 surplus places across the partnership. DfE holds local authorities to account over these surplus places.</li> <li>• The number of pupils attending schools outside the Berwick partnership. 352 pupils are educated in schools outside the partnership which equates to a loss of approximately £1.5 million from the partnership.</li> <li>• Financial challenges facing schools. School budgets are based on per pupil funding and the falling birth rate and surplus places has an impact on this budget.</li> <li>• By 2025/2026 over half of the local authority-maintained schools in Berwick (excluding academies) will be in deficit. This doesn't take into account 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 closer 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 in terms of its education outcomes. 14 out of 17 schools are rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.</li> <li>• Two of the schools rated as 'Requiring Improvement' are taking effective action according to Ofsted and the other school has only recently been inspected.</li> <li>• The last validated data we have is from 2019. Expecting 2022 data shortly and this will be included in the report to Cabinet. However, there are caveats by DfE regarding drawing comparisons with previous years' data as pupils' experiences were very different.</li> </ul>
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>Proposals for this School</u></b>
	<p>Proposals for Spittal 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>○ Spittal First School would remain a first school on its current site.</li> <li>○ To reflect falling pupil numbers the current PAN of 40 would be reduced to 30.</li> <li>○ There would be a small adjustment to the school's catchment area in relation to the proposed closure of Scremerston First School.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Under Model B (primary/secondary) structure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Spittal First School would become a primary school (4 to 11 years) on its current site.</li> <li>○ To reflect falling pupil number the PAN would be reduced to 30.</li> <li>○ There would be a small adjustment to the school's catchment area in relation to the proposed closure of Scremerston First School.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>7.</b>	<b><u>Rationale for the Proposals</u></b>
	<p>The rationale for proposals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of pupils being born in the catchment area is well below the school's current PAN.</li> <li>• December 2021 data states that 53% of pupils living in the catchment attend Spittal First with 43% choosing other schools.</li> <li>• Of the pupils on roll 27% reside in other schools' catchment areas.</li> <li>• The school has 23% surplus places.</li> <li>• The distance to the next nearest school is 1.3 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.</li> <li>• Local authority will be asking, whatever model is decided, that all governing bodies sign up to the 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> <li>• Governing bodies would be asked to delegate responsibility for the appointment process to headteachers.</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>• Put forward two proposed models for additional SEND provision. 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 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>• Note 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 we 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>• Governors are encouraged to submit a response and can respond as individuals as well as having a collective governing body view.</li> <li>• It is not a referendum, any decisions/recommendations would be made on the quality/rationale of the response. 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><u>Questions</u></b>
	<p><i>Q – Governors expressed shock and surprise at the number of pupils attending Duchess and Eyemouth High Schools and asked was the reasons just because they were better than Berwick Academy?</i></p> <p>A number of factors could influence parental choice (eg. personal circumstances, childcare) but reputation could also be a factor. It is harder to lose a bad reputation. Would advise that individuals go on a visit and come to their own conclusion rather than listen to rumours. Noted that Berwick Academy's Ofsted judgement is the same as Duchess's judgement.</p>

*Q – Of the 158 pupils going to Alnwick do the pupils live on the outer catchment areas of Berwick – eg. Wooler/Glendale?*

That is not necessarily the case and in recent years pupils from Wooler and Glendale have been going north to Berwick Academy.

*Q - Under the SEN Model B proposal would the Tweedmouth Middle school be pulled down?*

Potentially, but there would need to be an outline business case put forward and within that site option appraisals would be undertaken to identify the most appropriate/suitable site for the provision.

SA finished the meeting by thanking the governors for attending. The meeting closed at 5.50 pm.