

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

At a meeting of the Cabinet held at County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday 20 July 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillor G. Sanderson
(Leader of the Council, in the Chair)

CABINET MEMBERS

Horncastle, C.
Pattison, W.
Ploszaj, W.

Riddle, J.
Stewart, G.
Watson, J.
Wearmouth, R.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Aviston, A.
Bradley, N.

Gerrard, S.
Hadfield, K.

Hunter, P.
Kingham, A.

Neilson, S.

O'Neill, G

Paterson, Dr H.
Street, D.

Willis, J.

Head of School Organisation
Executive Director for Adults, Aging & Wellbeing
Director of Law and Governance
Democratic and Electoral Services Manager
Director of Strategy and Communications
Executive Director for Children, Young People & Education
Executive Director for Place and Regeneration
Executive Director for Public Health (DPH), Inequalities & Stronger Communities
Chief Executive
Director of Education, SEND and Skills
Executive Director for Resources & Transformation (S151)

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jones.

25. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE

Outcomes of Statutory Consultation on Proposals for the Berwick Partnership

The report set out an analysis of the representations and responses received from interested parties and stakeholders during the four-week statutory consultation, which commenced on 11 May and closed on 8 June 2023, in relation to proposals for schools in the Berwick Partnership.

Cabinet was asked to make a final decision on whether or not to approve the proposals, including school closures, set out in the statutory proposal. At the same time, Cabinet was requested to make a final decision on whether or not to approve the non-statutory proposals relating to the voluntary schools within the Berwick Partnership as set out in the Report of the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Education, Berwick Partnership Organisation, 9th May 2023.

In making its final decision, Cabinet was asked to note the decision of the DfE's Advisory Board acting on behalf of the Regional DfE Director North East arising from its meeting of 13 July 2023 with respect to the proposed changes to St Cuthbert's Catholic First School and Berwick Academy which form an integral part of the overall proposed reorganisation of the Berwick Partnership. A copy of the FACS OSC had been circulated (copy attached to the signed minutes, along with the report).

The report was introduced by Councillor Renner Thompson. He detailed the key points for members and moved the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Sanderson.

Councillor Watson commented on the number of schools involved and asked when all the parts of the proposals would be complete. Councillor Renner Thompson advised that much would depend on planning permission being secured by 2025. Work would begin on this as soon as Cabinet made its decision with the aim of the schools which were planned for closure closing in 2026, assuming planning permission was granted.

The Leader commented on the provision for skills training and SEND provision which was an important element of the proposals. Councillor Renner Thompson agreed that there was no point in implementing a modern industrial strategy to bring new jobs for the future if these jobs were not being filled by the young people of the County. The development of adult education skills in this area were a priority and the Academy was on board with this.

The Leader noted the report from FACS OSC and their agreement with the proposals. He thanked them for their debate on this matter and asked the Director of Law and Governance to advise members on the legal position.

The Director advised that all the information members needed was contained in the report and confirmed that the consultation process and the report had been carried out in compliance with the school organisation guidance and regulations. The report and supporting documents and written representations contained all of the relevant considerations members needed to make their decision. The proposal was set out in the recommendations.

The Leader drew members attention to the recommendations detailed in the report which would commit the Authority to taking the action it wished to take for the benefit of the whole of the north of the County.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) In the light of the prescribed changes set out in the statutory proposal published on 11 May 2023 for schools in the Berwick Partnership and all the information provided in the report (taking into account the Statutory Guidance from the Department for Education's (DfE) 'Opening and closing maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers January 2023' attached at Appendix 2 and 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers January 2023' attached at Appendix 3, Cabinet agree to:
- Approve for implementation the Council's statutory proposal to close
 - Berwick Middle School with effect from 31 August 2026;
 - Glendale Middle School with effect from 31 August 2026, noting that the school is classed as a rural secondary and in light of the presumption against the closure of rural schools set out in the DfE guidance 'Opening and closing maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers January 2023' at page 24 of the guidance, consider and take into account the factors set out in the guidance as referenced at para. 43 of this report;
 - Tweedmouth Community Middle School with effect from 31 August 2026.
 - Approve for implementation the Council's statutory proposal to extend the age ranges of the following schools;
 - Scremerston First School from an age 4 to 9 first school to an age 4 to 11 primary school in a phased way with effect from 1 September 2025.
 - Spittal First School from an age 4 to 9 first school to an age 4 to 11 primary school in a phased way with effect from 1 September 2025.
 - Tweedmouth Prior Park First School from an age 3 to 9 first school to an age 3 to 11 primary school in a phased way with effect from 1 September 2025.
 - Tweedmouth West First School from an age 4 to 9 first school to an age 4 to 11 primary school in a phased way with effect from 1 September 2025.
 - Wooler First School from an age 2 to 9 first school to an age 2 to 11 primary school in a phased way with effect from 1 September 2025.

- Approve for implementation the Council's statutory proposal to establish a SEN Unit at the site of Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School with 30 places for children diagnosed with special educational needs, primarily those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), Speech Language and Communication (SLCN) and Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) with effect from 1 September 2025.

All of the above approvals conditional upon the granting of planning permission under Part 3 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 by 31 August 2025 in relation to the proposed building works at the above First Schools, as detailed in para 42. Table 2.

- Linked to the above statutory proposals for Scremerston and Spittal, approve the reduction of the planned admission numbers (PAN) of those schools as follows;
 - Scremerston First School to reduce its PAN from 18 to 10 with effect from 1 September 2025.
 - Spittal Community First School to reduce its PAN from 40 to 30 with effect from 1 September 2025.

(b) In the light of the non-statutory changes consulted on at Phase 2 pre-statutory consultation and referenced in the above statutory proposal for information, approve for implementation the Council's non-statutory proposals to extend the age ranges of the following schools;

- Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School from an age 3 to 9 first school to an age 3 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025.
- Holy Trinity Church of England First School from an age 3 to 9 first school to an age 3 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025.
- Holy Island Church of England First School from an age 3 to 9 first school to an age 3-11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025.
- Hugh Joicey Church of England First School from an age 4 to 9 first school to an age 4 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025.
- Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School from an age 2 to 9 first school to an age 2 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025.
- Norham St Ceolwulf's C of E Controlled First School from an age 3 to 9 first school to an age 3 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2025.

(c) In formulating its decision, Cabinet has taken into account:

- In relation to Glendale Middle School, the guidance in relation to the presumption against the closure of a rural school as set out at Recommendation 1 above and referenced at para. 43.
 - The responses received to the Statutory Proposal and the commentary contained within the report at paras. 26-35.
 - The implications of the proposals on schools and the local community as set out in the Statutory Proposals contained within Appendix 1.
 - The implications for Home to School Transport of the statutory proposals as set out in the report.
 - The decision of the DfE's North East Advisory Board on 13 July 2023 to approve the change of age range of St Cuthbert's Catholic First School from an age 3-9 to an age 3-11 primary academy with effect from 1 September 2025 and to approve the change of age range of Berwick Academy from an age 13 to 18 to an age 11 to 18 secondary academy and to establish an SEN unit for students with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, SLCN and MLD both with effect from 1 September 2026. Cabinet also note that these approvals are conditional upon Cabinet's approval for implementation of Recommendations 1 and 2.
- (d) Approve the allocation of £41.177m from the funding sources set out at para. 42, Table 2 towards the capital costs required to support the implementation of the prescribed changes set out in Recommendation 1 and 2 above. Full details of the capital costs required for implementation are set out at para. 42.
- (e) Cabinet authorise the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Education to approve the award of contract to the preferred contractor following the procurement process for the works required to support the changes for the first schools to become primary currently estimated to be £5.777m capital expenditure from the overall project budget of £41.177m.
- (f) Cabinet approve the allocation of £250k in order to develop an Outline Business Case for investment in Berwick Academy noting that the outcomes will be reported back to cabinet at a later date. Cabinet also note that the decision to invest in the refurbishment/rebuilding of Berwick Academy is not predicated on these reorganisation proposals. Cabinet also note that officers are in discussions with DfE with regard to a contribution from the department towards the capital costs of refurbishment/rebuilding of Berwick Academy; and
- (g) the report of the FACS OSC be noted.

Having considered all of the responses to the statutory consultation Cabinet agreed that the above proposals should be adopted and implemented without modification for the following reasons:

- 1) In relation to the proposal to establish a 2-tier(primary/secondary) organisation of schools within the Berwick Partnership, the Governing Bodies of 11 of the schools and academies in the partnership gave their full support to the statutory and non-statutory proposals for the community and voluntary schools, with only the 2 middle schools in Berwick overtly opposing the proposal. 4 other schools remained neutral (albeit 2 of these stated they would implement the approved system while 1 is already a primary), and 1 school did not respond to the statutory proposal.
- 2) The Trustees of Berwick Academy have gained the approval of the DfE Regional Director of the North East to extend the academy's age range from 11 to 18 with effect from 1 September 2026, while the Trustees of Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust (in relation to St Cuthbert's Catholic First School) have gained the Director's approval to extend the age range of the academy to an age 3 to 11 primary with effect from 1 September 2025. This will enable whole partnership reorganisation.
- 3) The CE and RC Dioceses continue to support the proposal to reorganise to a 2-tier(primary/secondary) structure in the Berwick Partnership.
- 4) As part of reorganisation, an additional 70 places would be provided within the partnership for students with primary needs in SEMH, ASD, SLCN and MLD through the creation of SEN units at St Mary's CE First School and Berwick Academy, enabling them to be educated within or closer to their home communities, reducing the need for long journeys to school and supporting their ability to make local friendships.
- 5) Cabinet continues to support the educational rationale put forward by the educationalists in support of reorganisation to a 2-tier(primary/secondary) structure at Phase 2 consultation as follows:
 - There would be only one transition point between primary and secondary education at the end of Key Stage 2 for pupils to cope with and schools to manage. Furthermore, having just one transition would be of particular benefit to pupils with special educational needs and this was supported by the North Northumberland Autistic Society in Phase 2 consultation;
 - Schools would have responsibility for whole key stages (primary schools for EYFS, KS1 and KS2 and Berwick Academy for KS3, KS4 and KS5) allowing for consistency of curriculum and planning and this matches the National Curriculum and is the predominant structure across the country;
 - Teachers are trained in either the primary or secondary system; there is no longer specific middle school teacher training;
 - First school teachers are primary trained, with many having worked in primary schools, and already teach the first half of KS2. Therefore, the expertise and knowledge to deliver good outcomes at KS2 already exists in these schools (noting that currently in the 3-tier system when pupils are assessed at KS2 at the end of Year 6, they have been educated in first schools for five of their seven years in statutory education at that point);

- Schools would have longer to develop relationships with pupils and their families;
 - Students joining Berwick Academy in Year 7 would have two years to settle and become familiar with specialist subjects while teachers would have the opportunity to learn about their students in order to advise them before making critical subject choices for GCSE in Year 9. It is expected that this will be a key factor in delivering steady and significant improvement in outcomes at KS4 over time;
 - It is expected that a 2-tier organisation of schools would support recruitment and retention of teaching staff, with wider opportunities for within individual schools;
 - Pupils on roll in first schools becoming primary, especially the rural village schools would be able to be educated within their local communities for an additional two years; this will be of particular benefit to those pupils with SEN.
 - Education in Years 5 and 6 would continue to be provided in the North of Berwick.
- 6) £41.177m will be invested into the buildings of Berwick Partnership to support the reorganisation and to provide new/refurbished buildings for Berwick Academy which would also include an enhanced post 16 and post 18 offer.
 - 7) Parents will retain the ability to express a preference for a place for their child in any school in Northumberland or another local authority.
 - 8) The consultation on this proposal has been very extensive, reasonable and robust.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....