



# Northumberland County Council

## **CABINET**

**Date: 12 October 2021**

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### **Proposals for Atkinson House**

Report of the Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services - Cath McEvoy-Carr  
Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson  
Report prepared by Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources

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### **Purpose of Report**

This report sets out proposals for Atkinson House Special School in Seghill, a secondary provision for boys with Social, Emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs in Northumberland which are to relocate the school to a new site at the former Richard Coates CE Primary School building in Ponteland and at the same time to change the designation of the school from single sex provision to co-educational provision in light of the growing number of girls who are being assessed as having SEMH needs in Northumberland. The proposals would be with effect from 1 September 2022.

The nature of these proposals require that a statutory process would need to be undertaken prior to any final decision being made by Cabinet. Cabinet is therefore also asked to permit the initiation of the statutory process, beginning with approval for a six week informal public consultation process. Cabinet may be requested to permit the publication of a Statutory Proposal in relation to these proposals at a future date following the outcome of consultation.

### **Recommendations**

#### **It is recommended that Cabinet:**

- 1) Note the proposals outlined in Key Issues
- 2) Approve consultation on;
  - a. The relocation of Atkinson House School to the former site of Richard Coates CE Primary School with effect from 1 September 2022;
  - b. The change of designation of Atkinson House School from a single sex provision to a co-educational provision with effect from 1 September 2022.

- 3) Agree to delegate if necessary the power to extend the consultation period to the Member for Children's Services and the Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services, as outlined in para. 10.
- 4) Note that a further report following consultation (if approved) would be submitted to a meeting of Cabinet, at which a decision on whether or not to publish a statutory proposal in relation to the proposals set out in this report would be made.

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

These proposals are most closely linked to the Council's priority for Learning (achieving and realising potential, but it is also strongly linked with the priority for Connecting (having access to the things you need).

### **Key Issues**

1. In Northumberland, the number of children and young people who have been diagnosed as having Autism, Social Emotional and Mental Health needs has been increasing, with significant additional capacity in the county's 9 special schools being required year on year for the past 10 years. Overall, this steady upward trend in demand for special school places equates to an average increase over this period to date of 7% each year (actual variation from year to year has been between 2% and 12%). There continues to be an increasing demand from parents for their children to be educated within special school provision both in and out of the county. It is also widely acknowledged nationally that there are significant financial pressures on mainstream schools in supporting SEND provision, not least due to school budget pressures and expectations on schools to fund the first £6k of support for each SEND learner with an EHCP.
2. Within these numbers, there has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people who have been identified with a primary special need of autism and/or social emotional and mental health needs. Northumberland has been successful in bidding for a special free school, the Gilbert Ward academy constructed through the DfE's free school programme for secondary age young people who have autism and social, emotional and mental health needs but this will not be completed until early 2023. The Dales School in Blyth and Hillcrest School in Cramlington have also both had their provision increased recently. The next available school to expand to meet demand would be Atkinson House. However, there is also a growing demand for SEMH provision for girls in Northumberland from Year 7 onwards.
3. The Governing Body of Atkinson House has expressed its support for the proposal and will continue to work with officers throughout the informal consultation to develop the education vision for the school, which will enable a scope of works for investment to be drawn up.
4. Given the delay in the opening of the Gilbert Ward Academy and rather than spending additional funding on temporary arrangements to meet demand in the interim, it is proposed that Atkinson House relocates to the vacant former Richard Coates CE Primary School building in Ponteland. The additional capacity at the site will enable the school to expand its provision by moving from a single sex provision to co-educational. It is expected that on relocation that the Governing Body of the school would want to change the name of the school to reflect its new status as co-educational.

5. The former site of Richard Coates Primary School on Thornhill Road in Ponteland has become vacant following the school's relocation to the former Ponteland Primary building adjacent to it as part of an agreement between the CE diocese and the Council. The former site of Richard Coates is in the process of transferring back to the County Council and able to be considered for other uses. Any costs of the transfer of Atkinson house to the proposed site in Ponteland would therefore be limited to removal costs and to making the building suitable for the needs of the school's pupils. A budget for carrying out these works would be worked up during the informal consultation and would be funded from existing grants and council funding already within the council's medium term financial plans for capital improvements to support Special Educational needs.
6. Transport of the current pupils on roll at Atkinson House School is provided by the County Council and the current arrangements for the transport of current and future pupils would continue under these proposals should the decision be approved to relocate the school to the former Richard Coates site. It is expected that transport costs would be likely to increase due to the relocation and the additional pupils accessing provision at the new site. However, some costs would be offset by some pupils not having to undertake as long journeys to school as currently, while different arrangements for more effective transport of pupils to the new site would be explored. Should Cabinet approve consultation, work to identify detailed costs would be carried out and reported to Cabinet with the outcomes of the consultation.
7. If Cabinet approves informal consultation, a consultation document will be prepared that sets out the detail and rationale for the proposals, including timescales for implementation. This document would be published on the Council's website to which all interested parties would have access and the relevant link would be circulated to all relevant stakeholders, including parents via schools, staff of the affected school and neighbouring schools to the former Richard Coates CE Primary School. The informal consultation would begin on 13 October and close on 1 December 2021 during school term-time as recommended in DfE guidance.

## **Background Information**

8. Meetings would also be held for staff and Governors of Atkinson House School and a public drop-in event for parents and the general public would also be organised during the informal consultation period. The format, nature and timeframe for these events will be driven by the need to ensure consultee health and safety in the light of COVID and therefore some events may need to take place virtually. In any event, all efforts would be made to ensure that all interested parties are able to access the relevant information and provide responses to the consultation should they wish to do so. Atkinson House School is an age 11 to 16 special school designated secondary provision for pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental health (SEMH) needs; it is currently the only dedicated SEMH provision in Northumberland. The school is designated to provide education for boys who travel into school from all over the county.
9. It is expected that should Cabinet approve the relocation of Atkinson House at a future date, its former site is likely to be able to continue to be used for education purposes. Again, Cabinet would be informed of any such proposals as they emerge.

10. Permission is now sought from Cabinet to carry out informal consultation on the proposals to relocate Atkinson House School to the former site of Richard Coates CE Primary School in Ponteland and change its designation to a co-educational provision with effect from 1 September 2022. Should approval be given, a six week consultation would begin on 13 October to 1 December 2021. If as a result of consultation it is decided to consult on any modifications to the proposals, permission would be sought to extend the consultation period. Cabinet is asked to delegate any such decision and the form of the further consultation to the Member for Children’s Services and the Executive Director of Adults and Children’s Services.

### IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

<b>Policy:</b>	These proposals are consistent with the Council’s corporate priority that all residents should achieve and realise their potential
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	<p>A budget for carrying out capital works will be worked up during the informal consultation and would be funded from existing grants and council funding already within the council's medium term financial plans for capital improvements to support Special Educational needs.</p> <p>It is expected that transport costs would be likely to increase due to the relocation and the additional pupils accessing provision at the new site. However, some costs would be offset by some pupils not having to undertake as long journeys to school as currently, while different arrangements for more effective transport of pupils to the new site would be explored. Should Cabinet approve consultation, work to identify detailed costs would be carried out and reported to Cabinet with the outcomes of the consultation</p>
<b>Legal</b>	N/A
<b>Procurement</b>	N/A
<b>Human Resources:</b>	Should approval for Atkinson House to change its designation to co-educational, there may be a need to employ additional staff to meet the needs of the expanded service and the girls who attend.
<b>Property</b>	The former Richard Coates site is in the ownership of the Council.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Should Cabinet approve informal consultation, and Equalities Impact Assessment would be initiated in conjunction with the consultation process and updated following the outcomes of such consultation.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	A Risk Assessment would be carried out should Cabinet approve this proposal to go ahead.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	This report has considered Section 1 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.

<b>Customer Considerations:</b>	The proposal set out in this report is based upon a desire to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families in Northumberland.
<b>Carbon Reduction</b>	It is not envisaged that the processes set out within this report will have any impact on positive or negative on carbon reduction.
<b>Consultation</b>	This report has been considered by the Executive Director for Adults and Children's Services and the Member for Children's Services.
<b>Wards</b>	Seghill with Seaton Delaval Ponteland North

### Background Papers

None

### Report Sign Off

Interim Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Neil Masson
Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson

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Report Author: Sue Aviston, Head of School Organisation and Resources  
[Sue.Aviston@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Sue.Aviston@northumberland.gov.uk)  
01670 622281