



Northumberland County Council

Notes of Meeting

Meeting Name: Atkinson House Consultation Governor's Meeting
Meeting Location: Online Teams meeting

Date & Time: 4 November 2021 at 4:00 – 5:45 p.m. **Notes By: Jacqui Pearson**

Present:	Initials	Role
<u>NCC</u>		
Sue Aviston	SA	Head of School Organisation and Resources
Lorraine Fife	LF	School Place Planning and Organisation Manager
Andy Parmley	AP	Project Manager
Jacqui Pearson	JP	Project Support Officer
<u>Atkinson House</u>		
<u>Special School</u>		
Gillian Arnott (also NCC Officer)	GA	Local Authority Governor and liaison for staff Health and Wellbeing
Linda Marsden	LM	Co-opted Governor with responsibility for English Reading and Literature
Ian Herron	IH	Co-opted Governor with responsibility for Curriculum and Teaching and Learning
Elizabeth Broderick	EB	Staff Shadow Governor
Paul Sampson	PS	Headteacher
David Harrison	DH	Chair of Governors
Helen Geraghty	HG	Co-opted Governor with responsibility for English
Ben Dale	BD	Co-opted Governor with responsibility for finance and resources committee and maths
Rebecca Caldow	RC	Staff Governor

Apologies: Jill Atkinson (JA), Debbie Trinder (DT), Lynsey Hutcheson (LH)

No.	Matter
1	<p>Apologies and introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As noted above ● NCC Officers expanded on their roles for the benefit of the audience as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LF – School Place Planning and Organisation Manager, which involves managing the consultation process, gathering feedback, analyses and presenting to cabinet for a decision. - AP – Capital Project Manager so deals with the buildings. - SA – Head of School Organisation and Resources for the LA (Local Authority), which is really everything except School Improvement and is also GA's line manager in her School Meals Manager role.
2	Structure of meeting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SA explained that the presentation would be done as a debate style, one slide at a time and answering any questions. ● It was requested that online etiquette was used by raising a hand or using the chat bar to ask a question. ● It was confirmed that a joint response from the Governing Body would be expected, and staff can also do an individual or joint staff body response. It is noted that staff can have more than one role in school and may also be a parent of a child in the school and may wish to submit a parental response too.
3	<p>Purpose of the meeting slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SA talked about the slide and took questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Governor raised that reference had been made to Cabinet report on 12 October 2021, would it be possible to have a copy of the report to understand the context and see the proposal. Post meeting note: JP circulated to all Governor’s and NCC Officers in attendance.
4	<p>Reasons for the proposals for Atkinson House slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This slide describes the rationale for the proposals. ● SA explained that the LA is unable to open a new school anymore and all schools which open are Free School (e.g. Gilbert Ward Academy) or Academies. ● If approved, this should cement the proposals around Atkinson House Special School and help to re-market, grow capacity and have a new name. ● SA addressed the challenge of increasing the capacity and the nature of a physical build on the current site. As the site is situated between two mine shafts this becomes near impossible to achieve and therefore relocation to a vacant middle school building is a safer option. ● The Headteacher raised that Governors have concerns around the clarity of numbers – how many students need places? There is a percentage of children (about two-thirds come from Southeast Northumberland), a new school (Gilbert Ward) will have a shiny new building in the Southeast of the County, and we will be relocating to the West of the County, so how do we retain our current pupils? Basically, are there enough pupils to go around and how will they be allocated? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SA answered this in a future slide on additional places with commentary here of the year-on-year growth, which will provide this and legally, the LA is not allowed to have a waiting list. There is an increase in children needing places. ● A Governor asked if the location was an opportunity to take the existing Atkinson House Special School to rebrand it and expand it or is in Ponteland part of the rationale? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SA confirmed both as there is no equivalent provision in the West of the County, this meets a strategic need. The nearest Special School is Hexham Priory but that is more focussed on physical needs. If the catchment was further West, there would be little demand. There are good transport links in Ponteland. - There is a new free school, a joint commissioning venture in Gilbert Ward Academy with 50 places for Northumberland and 30 other places commissioned by Other LA’s. There will be future opportunities for Atkinson House Special School, and these will be future conversations.
5	<p>What are the proposals slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SA raised that there is little awareness that Atkinson House is a Special School so reference needs to be about <u>Atkinson House Special School</u>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SA confirmed to the Governor's that the Headteacher's time will be needed to develop the Education Brief for the school. ● The Headteacher asked about the building and works completion – can Governors have some clarity in terms of how much of the school will be complete phase 1, 2 and 3? By working with the LA there needs to be a clear plan of the transition and knowledge of girls coming into the school. Over the summer we need to prepare a transition programme and make it work with clear communication. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SA confirmed that the LA will work with the Headteacher, Governors and the school staff and take their guidance as they are Education Specialists, and we can help support that. ● A Governor raised that the timescale feels tight – why is there an ambition for September 2022? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SA confirmed that the children are already in the system. Demand at Gilbert Ward Academy is not being met in September 2022. The feeder school Hillcrest as a primary SEMH cannot expand any further than the 2 mobiles currently added to site. - This will give more opportunity for co-location of specialist services in school as an office base and transfer of information into school. - Phase 1 will be the relocation and then look to wider vision and opportunities. It is a journey. It will be a challenge for September 2022. There are lots of things being done at risk in the background by an experienced capital delivery team.
6	<p>Additional places slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SA confirmed since September 2021 commissioning of Special School places and place planning now sits within her team. This has given an increased knowledge of data and support ● There will be fair and transparent allocation of places moving forward. ● In addition, Nunnykirk School which provides for dyslexic pupils and vulnerable SEMH has announced it is closing and this is a niche market. Nunnykirk School requested that the LA guaranteed to commission 50 places and when the LA cannot do this, the Board of Trustees of the School decided to close. ● There are 100 mainstream pupils awaiting a panel decision in addition to Nunnykirk School pupils. ● Currently at Atkinson House Special School there are 71 pupils in attendance with up to 100 students a possibility. These will be managed individually with a transition plan. ● Richard Coates building is in two halves which enables the management of challenging behaviour, separation, and the flexibility for co-location of spaces.
7	<p>Implications for staff slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SA mentioned that there is a separate meeting next week for staff and unions have been invited. ● This is not seen as a negative impact ● The Headteacher and the LA have further work to do with support staff and anyone who currently walks to school for example with the requirement of additional travel. ● The Headteacher highlighted for the Governors that there are two consultations – this one with relocating and coeducation and the second being the staffing structure. Staff travel will be considered for colleagues who rely on the bus and there is no route to Ponteland. There is a policy within the LA if staff are inconvenienced. Staff who drive from the coast will have further to travel to Ponteland. There needs to be some safeguarding on staff mileage and if this will come from the school budget or the relocation package.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SA confirmed that mileage protection is for 3 years, and the two consultations will need to run in tandem for the timescale. • The Headteacher highlighted the likelihood of increasing staff numbers and this needs to be before 31 May 2022 to recruit skilled staff.
8	<p>Admission slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Headteacher confirmed that the admission is for pupils with an EHCP (Education Health Care Plan)
9	<p>Implications for buildings slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SA confirmed Governors could have a site visit if they wish • LA Officers spent half a day last week with the Headteacher to understand the workings of Atkinson House Special School and this informed the Schedule of Accommodation being developed. This will be replicated and enhanced for the new building. • SA has sent questions to the Headteacher for the education vision and ethos of the school. This will need to be achieved before Christmas 2021. • There will be a high-level budget set for the committee meeting. We have £865k from the DfE (Department of Education) for capacity in SEN (Special Educational Needs) Schools and £17m of LAs own funding for capacity development across the county. We will draw down the required funds. • AP discussed there will be a control option costed to demonstrate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) It can work b) The building can re-adapt, be remodelled, and refurbished with adjacencies and these will be confirmed with the Headteacher c) The detail behind it – we are working with an architect to make sure it can work. • A Governor asked about phases and the report to Cabinet. What are the costs to implement the change? - SA agrees it will be a phased way and we will look to achieve classes and staff rooms being ready September 2022 on the ground floor. Later there will be further development of practical construction areas where the current changing rooms are. Upstairs there will be co-location of other specialist offices. - The site will be safeguarded, with the right parking, a secure taxi drop-off and pick up and then look at the preparation to Adulthood of the pupils. • The Headteacher reiterated the phases and asked if there is a true vision of what the building will look like in 3-4 years' time (and with the phased budget in place). The Headteacher raised the requirement of being at least equal to the free school, not a poor relation. - SA discussed the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Strategy which is in place but there is not a strategy on capacity growth yet and we are looking at pupil numbers and capacity. There are three large capital development pots for partnerships – Berwick (and addressing need); James Calvert Spence College and Astley (providing opportunities and looking for example at ARPs (Additional Resource Provisions)). - There is an immediate demand, and this is the first step on the journey. We need to include in the wider strategy for the County overall. - The focus is to make the move a success and move on time. - We cannot commit a budget to future phases as we are looking county wide. • The Headteacher raised that Newcastle LA have clear specific schools for needs. Northumberland meets all needs; it is too broad. There needs to be a clear vision of what the whole building will be, it is a challenge. - SA ensured that this will be the case with 15 years of experience of adaptability and flexibility of buildings

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Governor added the strategic vision and what the future looks like. There are practical issues of supply chain problems and a tight deadline, whilst managing students' anxieties. Is there a backup plan? - AP confirmed therefore we are doing a lot of work at risk (in the background). We are seeking more market assurance that we can deliver. - SA confirmed that we pride ourselves on delivery to timescales. - We are working with Technical Advisers to mitigate the risks and see what areas we can enhance. - This is a refurbishment project and not a new build out of the ground. There will be less impact on steel for example. There is 3% inflation from the Government, but this is double in the building trade, and this is what we are working to. - We have skilled labour and resources to fall back on for example our highways team with tarmac being diverted into a school car park project rather than a pothole repair programme. - We do need a plan B and it needs managing and organising.
10	<p>Transport slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We know the costs will increase due to the current location in the Southeast of the county. • In time this will shift to a more central / west location of pupils and the costs will decrease. • We are addressing in the FAQs (Frequently asked questions) with regards to the number of cars and the misconception of 80+ parents dropping off.
11	<p>Students current residing slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The map demonstrated there is a concentration of pupils in the Southeast corner of the County.
12	<p>Consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SA discussed that we were looking to run a public meeting. Considering Covid numbers increasing this is proving exceedingly difficult and we will need to do something different to normal. • We sourced a venue in Ponteland which appeared suitable and when risk assessed it was deemed too risky to guarantee everyone's safety. We will have different arrangement such as video clips which we will put on the website and have this as an opportunity to provide information. • When you are having your direct phone calls with parents, we need to have them filling in the response form or have their views written down and included in the feedback. • We want to hear the child's voice too from teachers working with the students. • LF raised if they could fill in the response form too or someone note their views, this is useful for cabinet members to assess the feeling of the proposal. • The Headteacher confirmed that next Friday, Atkinson House Special School has a mental health drop down day. The Headteacher is running a workshop on student voice to coordinate the views to forward to the LA. • The Headteacher is aware that this is the LA consultation not the schools. The Headteacher offered to meet members of the community in a large venue for example, but LA Officers feel that this is unsafe in the current Covid climate. • The Headteacher discussed the students transport and how there appears to be a monopoly now.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SA confirmed alternative providers were given the opportunity to collect their own students, but this sits within Highways, not Education. We need to look to build in flexibility though. • JP confirmed there were 195 responses to the consultation with an even split between parents in another school and residents in the community.
13	<p>Next steps slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FACS members will make recommendations to the Cabinet members for a decision to approve or not. The cabinet decision is whether to move forward to statutory consultation. If it is approved, there will be no formal meetings, responses will be received to the online consultation form. • Responses will be analysed and then a final report submitted to cabinet for a decision. • A Governor raised that there are concerns of the ability of Atkinson House Special School in the new environment to balance the books with 20 additional places. Is there a business case prepared to look at the funding to make a Governor assessment and identify implications? • SA asked confirmation that the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors are doing a piece of detailed work, and this can be developed further to model the former Richard Coates Middle School building cost, but this is underpinned by the work of the Headteacher and Chair of Governors of analysing the budget and this is needed first to further develop the model work. • The Headteacher confirmed he had a positive meeting on Tuesday evening and meeting with LA Officer tomorrow to go through the budget. • There is a concern that the school was built for 518 pupils, but we would be using the same electric and heating for the building with lower pupil numbers and associated pupil funding. How is the funding transitioned? There will be mileage protection for 3 years, can the budget be protected in transition? • SA confirmed that there will be areas / services switched off and opportunities to look at the heating controls for areas where you are not using. The LA will pick this up in the scope of works in the building. • The in-year budget needs looking at for the in-year balanced budget from next year. NCC Finance team and SA's team can support with this, and the number of commissioned places will be 100, although this will not be 100 on day 1 of opening the new building. • The Headteacher mentioned that the Headteacher of Richard Coates Primary School raised the sports / recreational facilities when they met and the area separation. How is the outside area shared in equal fashion? The Headteacher is interested in establishing the conversation of Atkinson House Special school having their own area and maintaining themselves. • SA raised the issue may come with Sport England and how the area is fenced across pitches. • The Headteacher raised that he is hearing a lot of muted conversations accusing him of knowing about changes with the PRU and not sharing that the PRU is going to close. • SA reiterated that this consultation is about Atkinson House Special School not the PRU and the focus is on Atkinson House Special School. The response to this consultation is about Atkinson House Special School only.