



Northumberland County Council

Notes of Meeting

Meeting Name: Atkinson House Consultation Staff Meeting

Meeting Location: Online Teams meeting

Date & Time: 11 November 2021 at 3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Notes By: Jacqui Pearson

Present:

NCC

Sue Aviston

Lorraine Fife

Jacqui Pearson

Initials

SA

LF

JP

Role

Head of School Organisation and Resources

School Place Planning and Organisation Manager

Project Support Officer

Joanne Blackhall

JB

HR Business Partner – Schools HR

Atkinson House

Special School

Staff online and in school

Union representatives

Steve Bird (NASUWT)

Hannah Gregory

Maggie Coombe

SB

HG

MC

Apologies: None

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.€ SA – Head of School Organisation and Resources for the LA (Local Authority)€ JB – Schools HR and your support throughout the process
2	<p>Structure of meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">€ The Headteacher explained that there was a body of staff present in school, in the main room with him and other colleagues were joining online.€ The Headteacher ran a staff workshop last night to introduce this presentation and has noted some staff questions as well as staff asking their own questions tonight.

	<p>€ SA explained that questions will be taken at the end of the presentation with it being a larger audience for continuity and some questions may be answered in the presentation.</p>
3	<p>Purpose of the meeting slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SA talked about the slide and asked JP to add a link to the Cabinet report into the chat for colleagues to pick up – post meeting note, completed during meeting
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.
5	<p>What are the proposals slide</p> <p>€ SA confirmed that the Headteacher will be looking at the curriculum and the environment to deliver the required level of education to students.</p>
6	<p>Additional places slide</p> <p>€ SA discussed there are 80 commissioned places at Atkinson House with currently 71 pupils on roll.</p> <p>€ SA discussed the school place planning process and how it is not an exact science, but the LA anticipate a maximum if an additional 20 students in 2022, to total 100 students in the school.</p> <p>€ The building is much larger than the necessary accommodation for 100 students, and this will allow for future development and the co-location of other services.</p>
7	<p>Implications for staff slide</p> <p>€ SA mentioned there is an increase in mileage policy, which colleagues will be able to access. This is appropriate for members of staff who will be required to travel an increased distance to the new site, in comparison to the current site.</p> <p>€ For staff members who have an issue in getting to the new site, for example walking or using public transport and a lack of connecting links, you can have individual conversations to work through your personal circumstances rather than an open forum like this.</p>
8	<p>Admission slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition, Nunnykirk School which provides for dyslexic pupils and vulnerable SEMH (Social Emotional and Mental Health) has announced it is closing. • SA discussed there were challenges with the number of required places for September 2022 across the county - there are 100 mainstream pupils awaiting a panel decision in addition to Nunnykirk School pupils • SA highlighted that there is an increase in pressure for placing pupils for September 2022 and a greater demand than when we started this consultation process with the announced closure of Nunnykirk School.

9	<p>Implications for buildings slide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SA identified that the former Richard Coates Middle School is in good condition but will need adaptations to meet the needs of Atkinson House Special School. • A feasibility study is being undertaken. • We have £865k from the DfE (Department of Education) for capacity in SEN (Special Educational Needs) Schools and £17m of the LA's own funding for capacity development across the county. We will draw down the required funds.
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>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.
12	<p>Questions</p> <p>SB announced to colleagues that he will arrange a meeting with members at a mutually convenient time.</p> <p>MC asked about the new school for September 2023 – Gilbert Ward Academy. How will this school opening affect the numbers for Atkinson House? Will Atkinson House numbers decrease?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LF confirmed that historically the required numbers have been sufficient to support both schools and this is expected going forward. • It is the only specialist provision in the south-east of the county. • Ideally there will be a geographical split, but this will mix over time and move to be more predominantly in the west for Atkinson House Special School due to its location. <p>A member of staff at Atkinson House Special School asked: A final decision is not expected until March 2022, and you mention Cabinet members may decide to request another informal consultation for 6 weeks, which of course will add a further delay. You expect an increase in staff numbers to accommodate the additional students. Teachers will have to give notice by May 2022, so what are your thoughts on managing this delay (if it should happen) as staff will not be in place in time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SA confirmed there will be an alternative plan if the deadline is pushed back at the end of this informal consultation stage.

A member of staff asked about the level of funding. You mention £17m and £865k, will this be ring-fenced for years 2 and 3 (phases 2 and 3) for the future developments?

- SA confirmed that the overall funding is connected to a SEND county wide strategy and a SEND place planning capacity strategy is being developed.
- We are looking at Phase 1 and the relocation costs. Future growth will be available and co-location of other services is possible. If the co-location of services occurs, funding from their budget will be incorporated and used rather than capital funding.

A member of staff asked if the school is not open in September 2022, when will we find out? Where will we go? What will be the transition plan then?

- SA confirmed that it does depend on the decision being made.
- If we are no further forward for approvals in January and March as expected, then we will need to plan for a) the approvals coming and b) what happens if it is not approved. We still have the option of out of county placements, which is not the LA ideology but is an option.
- Strategic planning will help identify the requirements to meet future demand.

The Headteacher asked a question on behalf of staff about phases 1, 2 and 3 and the associated funding attached to each stage. What is the LAs ultimate phase 3 vision? Can you guarantee the safeguarding of pupils during phase 2 and 3 works?

- SA confirmed with regards to future developments, LA Officers are well practiced in safeguarding all the school community and contractors are well practiced too. Safeguarding is of paramount importance. We are all well versed at working in live schools.

The Headteacher raised that there are some students who have sensory needs and the work being done may affect them with regards to the noise levels.

An additional 20 students, a big building, what does 5 years' time look like?

- SA confirmed that as previously mentioned, this forms part of the wider county strategy and workstreams.
- LA Officers are working up options and will consult on SEN challenges (e.g. looking to educate students closer to home)
- There are competing demands on the funding
- The future capacity of Atkinson House Special School in a new site (should it be approved) and value for money will be looked at in the wider strategy.

Another question was asked about funding and support from the LA in a transition programme.

- SA confirmed the transition of pupils will be supported and this is paramount.
- There is an area of the building for transition if this is needed at a slower pace
- LA Officers will be guided by school staff as the professionals, but LA Officers will support the process.

A member of staff asked if this is part of a wider vision, is it possible for Atkinson House Special school to be an all-through school and where does post-16 fit?

- SA is aware that 4 or 5 years ago Atkinson House Special School consulted on that strategy.
- During the consultation responses, if this idea comes forward, we can seek views on it.
- SA asked the member of staff and the wider staff audience; do you think this would be beneficial?
- The Headteacher expressed that this is a consideration as most other special schools are all through.

- Since the Headteacher's appointment, the school has had a positive step forward with a clear designation of what they are. This will be considered for the school's response.
- SA also reiterated that the LA is trying to support students remaining in mainstream schools and where required a graduated approach. There is demand on Special School places and this needs to be effectively planned and backed by data.

Another question was asked about the current Atkinson House Special School building and what will happen to that? Do we reciprocate what we have or plan for something different and do we have partners involved in these plans?

Will the current building form part of dual use with the new site, will it create more facilities in Northumberland?

- SA confirmed no decisions have been made on the current building should it become vacant.
- If the relocation of Atkinson House Special School is approved, it could be used for other purposes.
- This process will be challenging for Atkinson House Special School, and we are concentrating on supporting you now.
- The future use of the building will be considered in the coming weeks, but we need to concentrate on opening for September 2022.

A member of staff at Atkinson House Special School asked for reassurance. The timeline is short. The staff and leadership team are planning for the future and a relocation if approved. Will the construction (curriculum) stay at the current site or move with us to the new site? It all feels quick for the build, transition and physically for staff moving.

- SA confirmed that LA Officers will continue the discussions with the Headteacher on the curriculum and if necessary, look to transport pupils back in the short-term to the existing facilities.
- For your reassurance, we are doing work at risk, drawing plans up, assessing costs for the budget, working with procurement colleagues and if approval comes in March, we will be ready to start the following day with the building work.
- We understand the education vision so required facilities will be there for day 1.

A member of staff asked if the consultation was about the move of the build (i.e. relocation) or coeducation of students. Is this also about a consultation on a staff structure.

- It was confirmed that this consultation is not about the staff structure. The staff structure consultation will be run in parallel to this by the school, not the LA.

The questions were concluded by the Headteacher stating that the staff are ready, and a staff body response will be submitted to the consultation survey. Individuals are also encouraged to respond if they wish.

SA finished the meeting by thanking the staff for the pre-work they had undertaken to the meeting and the time they have invested so far.